

Perverse Incentives: When Uncle Sam Becomes Dr. Ruth

Richard Panzer
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Every area of life involves choices that have a moral dimension. Whether we enter careers in business, education, government, science, health, art, or religious ministry, each one of us needs to be aware of incentives that could bring us closer to or further away from the original purpose that motivated us to begin with. After all, each system has its own openly stated, or sometimes hidden, incentives.

In this context, the recent article by Scott Simonds provides a valuable

discussion about the role of government and its benefits to society. He makes compelling arguments, and certainly there are many dedicated people doing important work in government service, but if one looks closely, it also becomes apparent that governmental incentives can lead to the opposite of what any fair-minded person would want.

The federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF, or welfare) program, where substantial benefits are offered to mothers with dependent children based on one main condition — that the mothers not be married — is just a small part of a larger, disturbing pattern.



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Simonds expresses doubt that religious agencies would be able to take on the burden of caring for the needy in this country. Maybe so, but when Uncle Sam gets involved there are often strings attached. Consider government actions that force religious organizations that do help those in need to choose between following government regulations and the dictates of their faith. Catholic adoption agencies in Massachusetts, Illinois, and Washington, DC, have been forced to shut down because they believe that, all else being equal, it is best for orphans to be placed with an adopting mother and father who are married. Isn't that what most Americans believe? Isn't that what you and I believe?

Churches have historically provided social welfare. In countries where governments have taken over more and more of such charitable activities, the level of religious participation, such as church attendance, inevitably has declined.

Those who care about creating a God-centered culture should think carefully about how an expanding secular government can stifle other parts of the civic culture, including the religious sphere.

Last year's Supreme Court decision overturning the Defense of Marriage Act took the position that there was no legitimate reason for our elected representatives to pass a law stating that, at the federal level, marriage would be defined as the legal union of one man and one woman. What followed has been a succession of court decisions ruling that state laws and constitutional amendments with the same view are "unconstitutional."

With these judicial decisions, which overturned democratically-enacted laws and amendments, those of us who believe in the ideal of the Four Position Foundation have now essentially all been placed in the same position as racists and bigots. The incentive now will be to remain silent. After all, who wants to be labeled a bigot?

Already in several states, it no longer indicates "Father" and "Mother" on birth certificates, but rather "Parent 1" and "Parent 2." The government has chosen sides, and now the power of government is being mobilized in support of its secularist beliefs that there are no significant differences between what a mother and a father can offer their child.

If there is no difference, why would there be a preference for both parents to be involved? Since it is the woman who gives birth to the child, the message to young fathers often is: you are not really needed. The message to young men is: we don't expect you to be responsible.



Let me share some of what I have researched regarding government-sponsored sex education. In California, speakers who express views that sex is best reserved for marriage have been kicked out of schools because of a state law essentially banning such views. In several states, nonprofit organizations receiving government funding for youth health education have been instructed to remove all references to, you guessed it, marriage.

Those who saw the Santa Barbara mass murderer Elliot Rodger's "manifesto" will know he was obsessed with his virgin status and failure to have sex with attractive girls. He believed this was an essential proof of manhood. Where did he get

such views? His manifesto makes it clear that pornography and popular R-rated movies had a devastating impact and fed his feelings of desire and resentment towards women for not fulfilling those desires.

One would hope that public and private schools could have provided an alternative vision for healthy man-woman relationships to impressionable teens and young men like Rodger, but the sad truth is many government-approved sex education curricula promote the use of pornography and the rights of teens and young adults to have sex as long as they do so "safely." Teens and twenty-somethings who are waiting are left with little or no encouragement for their good choices, and without an alternative framework to reject the shallow values promoted by a sex-saturated media industry.

That is unfortunate since we now have ample scientific research showing the benefits of teens delaying sex, ideally until they are married. Teens, especially girls, who abstain are much less likely to be depressed or suicidal. Since the vast majority of youth express an interest to get married someday, wouldn't it be helpful for them to hear that men and women who do reserve sexual intimacy for marriage have lower divorce rates? Or that those who do choose faithful marriage are healthier, happier and more sexually fulfilled than unmarried singles?

The graphic below is from a widely-used "comprehensive" sex education curriculum funded for use in many school districts nationwide in which students are asked to choose their own definition of "abstinence." The curriculum helpfully suggests "cuddling naked," "showering together," and "watching porn videos" as acceptable "abstinence" activities that would not lead to pregnancy or the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

Worksheet: So What's An Abstinence Anyway?

Step 1: Imagine someone has decided to be **abstinent**. According to your own definition of abstinence, circle the following behaviors you believe a person can engage in and *still be abstinent*.

Holding hands	Deep kissing	Anal intercourse
Dry kissing	Vaginal intercourse	Showering together
Mutual masturbation	Masturbation	Watching porn videos
Reading erotic literature	Oral intercourse	Massage
Cuddling naked	Talking sexy	Body painting

Source: "Making Sense of Abstinence" by Planned Parenthood of Central and Greater Northern New Jersey

Consider how confused teen students doing this exercise might be regarding the meaning of abstinence. A word which previously referred to "not doing it" now potentially includes a number of sexually arousing behaviors. Most parents have no idea that their children are being subjected to this re-engineering of words, language and values.

International institutions such as the United Nations are engaged in worthwhile global activities to promote health and well-being, but they often have another side, an aggressive "sexual rights" agenda that few Americans think about. Countries with more conservative values have been threatened with the loss of hundreds of millions of dollars if they don't go along with UN-approved "sexual rights" education, which teaches young people they have the right to have sex at any age as long as it is done "safely."

An organization that serves the physical needs of people, while not taking into account their longer-range well-being, can do a lot of damage. Both the UN and U.S. give billions of dollars to purchase life-saving medications to treat people with AIDS. At the same time, both promote sexual values that increase the

likelihood that people will become infected. Both promote education that it's okay to separate sex, love and commitment, repeating the same mistake of the Fall, with similar tragic consequences.

I believe Father Moon strove to develop an interreligious council at the UN not because he endorsed all of its programs, but because he wanted to influence the United Nations to take into account people's spiritual nature as well as the central role of families as the foundation for healthy communities and nations. I think he would have proposed something like the following amendment to the United Nations Charter to guide the actions, policies and programs of the UN in countries around the world:

All children, regardless of their background, deserve the protection, love and support of both their natural parents, each of whose DNA courses through every cell in their son's or daughter's body. This would constitute their first school of true love. United Nations and member states policies and programs must not hinder the strengthening of this first institution created by God.

Principled perspectives and practices are urgently needed, not just in personal life, but in every field of endeavor, including business, culture, education, and — government. Sometimes that could mean lawful opposition to unprincipled policies from the outside, but I would encourage those concerned about our country to think about changing things from the inside. This may require translating religiously-based concepts into language that has a broader reach by drawing on scientific perspectives.

Since God created the Archangel, he does have a legitimate role to play, but Adam and Eve were meant to exercise dominion over him by believing, living and practicing a truthful, God-centered way of life.

Governments have a legitimate role, but free citizens have the right and responsibility to question "experts" who may have agendas and ideologies antithetical to the fulfillment of the three blessings. If having a blessed marriage is truly the birthright of every human being, then should Unificationists be indifferent to government policies or cultural messages, whether intentional or inadvertent, that discourage people from doing so? My answer is: No.

The founders of our country were not perfect, but they did have a keen and accurate awareness of the need for limits on government power. Their awareness was deeply rooted in a religious perspective that our freedoms come from our relationship with God.

Fortunately, we live in a country where we are still largely free to speak, teach, and share about what we understand to be true, and there are a multitude of ways to do so. The more challenging and worrisome conditions in our nation and world become, the more what we have been given will be needed, and welcomed. My suggestion to those concerned about the future of our country and world: think seriously about "getting in the game."

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