

## Meet and Right It Is to Sing

*Charles Wesley (1707–1788)*

Meet and right it is to sing,  
In every time and place,  
Glory to our heavenly King,  
The God of truth and grace.  
Join we then with sweet accord,  
All in one thanksgiving join!  
Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
Eternal praise be thine!

Thee, the first-born sons of light,  
In choral symphonies,  
Praise by day, day without night,  
And never, never cease;  
Angels and archangels, all  
Praise the mystic Three in One;  
Sing, and stop, and gaze, and fall,  
O'erwhelmed before thy throne!

Father, God, thy love we praise,  
Which gave thy Son to die;  
Jesus, full of truth and grace,  
Alike we glorify;  
Spirit, Comforter divine.  
Praise by all to thee be given,  
Till we in full chorus join,  
And earth is turned to heaven.

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### **Weighing Goods and Making Prudential Decisions**

*Kevin T. Bauder*

To get to work I have to drive south about five miles and then west about four miles. I can take a variety of routes to cover that distance. I can drive south through city traffic on either Douglas or Winnetka Avenues. Alternatively, I can take County Road 100 or US 169, both of which are freeways. If I want to go west first, I can take either 63<sup>rd</sup> Avenue or Bass Lake Road; these are shorter routes, but they are city streets that have speed limits as low as 30 miles per hour. If I go south first, I can take State Highway 55 West (the Olson Highway), which is longer but has a 55 mile-per-hour speed limit. Or I can drive an additional half-mile south and take Interstate 394 west; this route avoids most stop lights, but it requires a bit of backtracking through a neighborhood. I could also travel west about halfway through my southern trip by taking 42<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, 36<sup>th</sup> Avenue, or Medicine Lake Road, though they have slower speed limits combined with multiple stops.

My best chance of avoiding a fatal crash is to take city streets as far as I can. Those routes, however, double my driving time, and they also increase the likelihood of a minor crash. By traveling the limited-access highways I can save time and lower the possibility of a minor crash, while increasing the likelihood of a fatal crash only incrementally.

Every time I drive to work, I must choose a route. In fact, I make this decision nearly every normal day, including Sundays (since my work is located in the building where I go to church). A variety of factors enter into the decision. Safety is one of those. So is time on the road. Other considerations such as road construction, weather, or the daily traffic report may also influence my choice. Under normal circumstances, however, none of these choices is morally wrong. Going to work is a good thing, and having multiple routes is also a good thing. My decision is a prudential decision, a decision between good things. I do not have to decide between a good and an evil.

We often encounter situations in which we must choose between good things. Sometimes we are also confronted with choices between bad things. As long as these bad things are natural evils rather than moral evils, our choice is still a prudential one. Shall I choose to avoid the traffic jam or shall I choose to avoid the road construction? The truth is that I do not have to choose either unless I embrace the good of going to work. I do not choose



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the (natural) evil for its own sake, but as a subsidiary effect of getting to work. In other words, when I choose to go to work, the delay over traffic or road construction is an unintended consequence.

This discussion is directly applicable to the way that we face an epidemic. To halt the spread of the disease or to “flatten the curve,” some people reasonably wish to invoke quarantine-like measures. It is not unreasonable to limit the size and frequency of gatherings temporarily, to restrict access to public places, and to require prophylactic measures like masks, gloves, and social distancing. Though these choices will probably not keep anybody from catching the disease, they may slow down the rate at which people catch it and thus save some lives by lowering the odds that the hospitals will become overloaded with patients. That is a good thing.

Nevertheless, these restrictions take a toll. For one thing, the forcible deprivation of civil rights is in some ways worse than the physical threat of the disease. For another, businesses have to be shuttered and people put out of work. Those who are not able to earn a livelihood and who have not prepared for hard times may have trouble acquiring the necessities of life. Furthermore, intrusive governmental overreach is difficult to repulse once it has begun (including the overreach involved in mass-distributing fiat money). Avoiding these calamities is also a good thing, and to choose liberty over some level of safety is not unreasonable, either.

How much liberty should people be expected to surrender in the interest of incrementally increasing the probability that a few more individuals will survive the disease? Some have argued in favor of greater restrictions; others are increasingly arguing in favor of greater liberty. My point is not to advocate either direction, though I will add that I am in an “at risk” category, and will probably have a rough time if I catch the disease. My point is that the choice between greater safety and greater liberty is a prudential one.

I am not suggesting that liberties must never yield to concerns over safety, nor do I believe that all intrusions upon liberty are warranted as long as they can be done in the name of safety. At the present time, however, none of the evidence points clearly in one direction or the other. Shutting down businesses and ordering people to stay at home may be doing some good, though nobody can really say how much. On the other hand, the intrusions upon liberty are probably not intractable, though nobody can really be quite sure.

What we can say is that the quarantine-like measures have probably done nearly all of the good that they are going to do. Here in Minnesota we’ve had nearly two months of “flattening the curve.” Just how flat is it supposed to be? Barring a cure or a vaccine, at some point we are going to have to let the disease run its course. Each passing day brings a lower return of safety and places a heavier burden upon liberty. At some point, the responsibility

must be shifted onto us who are at risk: if we wish, we can still shut ourselves up and let the rest of the world get on with living.

We take risks every day as part of our ordinary lives. I risk a crash by driving to work. I risk an incrementally greater chance of a fatal crash by driving to work on freeways. These choices are prudential; I have to weigh all considerations and make the choice that seems best under the circumstances. Safety is a concern, but it is only one of many.

The choice about whether to open businesses (and churches) or to shelter at home is also a prudential choice. To this point, state and local governments have been making that choice for all people. We are nearing the point, however, at which people must be permitted to make it for themselves.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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