

Psalm 37*Isaac Watts (1674-1748)*

Why should I vex my soul, and fret
 To see the wicked rise?
 Or envy sinners waxing great,
 By violence and lies?

As flow'ry grass cut down at noon,
 Before the ev'ning fades,
 So shall their glories vanish soon,
 In everlasting shades.

Then let me make the Lord my trust,
 And practice all that's good;
 So shall I dwell among the just,
 And he'll provide me food.

The meek at last the earth possess,
 And are the heirs of heav'n;
 True riches, with abundant peace,
 To humble souls are giv'n.

Rest in the Lord, and keep his way,
 Nor let your anger rise,
 Though Providence should long delay,
 To punish haughty vice.

They have drawn out the threat'ning sword,
 Have bent the murd'rous bow,
 To slay the men that fear the Lord,
 And bring the righteous low.

My God shall break their bows, and burn
 Their persecuting darts,
 Shall their own swords against them turn,
 And pierce their stubborn hearts.



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ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Equality

Kevin T. Bauder

We often hear equality spoken of as if it were one of the greater goods. The assumption seems to be that any form of inequality is intrinsically unjust, and that inequalities only exist because one person or group of people is oppressing another. Inequalities that convey advantages are now called *privilege*, and privilege is regularly and roundly denounced. Justice (it is thought) requires the abolishment of privilege.

Perhaps it is worth asking what real equality would look like. For example, what would complete political equality involve? A truly egalitarian political system would be one in which offices were lifted out of the realm of favoritism. To do that, they would have to be filled by rota. Everyone would serve once in every office. Of course, to do that, terms of office would have to be shortened dramatically. Suppose we tried to give every citizen the chance to serve as President of the United States for exactly one hour. In that system, we would have approximately 8,766 presidents over the course of a single year.

While that number seems high, it would still not give everyone the opportunity to be president. For every resident of the United States to serve a single one-hour term would take just over 34,223 years, which is almost as long as we have to stand in line at the Department of Motor Vehicles. So what is the alternative? If everyone cannot serve, should we perhaps draw lots for each hour of office?

We could combine the methods of rota and lot, particularly if we take into account all of the public offices that exist in the United States. Besides the president and vice-president, we have about 500 people in Congress, fifty governors and lieutenant governors, around 7,000 state legislators, an army of local officials, plus the entire judiciary (in a truly egalitarian system, everybody would have a turn at being a judge). The total comes up to something like half-a-million offices.

Suppose each office were filled by a different person each day, and that each officeholder was chosen by lot. In this scheme, every American would serve in some office about one day every two years. The particular office—whether federal, state, or local—would be entirely up to chance. This system might

give us our best shot at genuine equality. It would also have other advantages, such as the complete elimination of election campaigns. Furthermore, the amount of damage that any one officeholder could do would be limited.

On the other hand, that kind of equality would create chaos. A significant number of officeholders would have little interest in serving their day. They would view a day in office as an unwelcome interruption, just as many now perceive a day of jury duty. Another number would see a day in office as little more than an excuse to party. Of those who really wanted to serve, only a fraction would bring the necessary skills and qualifications. Who really needs that kind of equality?

Political equality does not and cannot exist. In my community lives a woman named Ilhan Omar. She and I do not have an equal voice in the political process. She gets to act directly upon federal legislation, and I do not. Her level of power and privilege far exceeds, and in fact contradicts, mine. She rarely or never represents my interests, opinions, views, and perspectives.

How did she get to be so privileged? It happened through favoritism. She was elected to office by people who live near us both. The largest bloc of people who chose her share the religion and ethnicity into which she and they were born. In other words, her privilege is based in unearned features. She sometimes talks about equality, but I have never heard her advocate the kind of equality that would give me the same voice in Washington that she has.

The American founders were not ignorant of the difficulty in creating complete equality. When they declared that “all men are created equal,” they immediately qualified their statement with an appositional clause implying that all people are equally “endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights.” They never dreamed of creating a system of full political equality, partly because they knew that crude population was not the only interest that needed to be represented in a just system of government. Nevertheless, they did understand that under a just government people must stand as equals before the law. (I note in passing that this principle is violated every time Congress exempts itself from laws that it passes to govern the rest of the nation.)

These same founders also recognized that people must all equally answer to God. Answering to God is a far more serious matter than answering to civil authority. Consequently, the founders inferred that governments have no right to mandate how people must relate to God. Instead, just governments must refuse to establish religions and must also protect the free exercise of religion (as long as those exercises do not transgress in matters that governments do have a right to legislate). So long as we have not entered the Kingdom of God, civil authorities have no right to mandate the worship of the true and living God or to forbid the worship of false gods.

The point is that equality is not the greatest good. It is not always a good at all, particularly when understood as equality of condition. Political philosophies or movements that constantly appeal to equality should rouse our suspicions. At the end of the day, almost all egalitarians are faux-egalitarians. What they want is not true equality, but a way to promote privilege for their own crowd.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and 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.
