

RESPONSE TO **ROBERT HEMSTREET**

Robert Davis

I'm one of those people who is neither a liberal or a conservative. I don't believe with Gilbert that every child is born a little liberal or a conservative (with lower case) and I would say a pox on both their houses. To the extent that I accept the label, I use the word "Whig," unlike Yon Hyack, I'm not an old Whig, I have to confess to being sort of a low Whig.

By "Whig", I mean an individualist and for limited government. Do not get rid of the government - I don't want to sell the sidewalks - but I believe in a limited government.

And I'm also not a religious Humanist. I am one of the ones called secular and I do not consider myself in that category, and it sometimes drives me up the wall to be around them, so you will see this in my analysis, I think.

A couple parenthetical remarks. First of all, about the last, the request that not get rid of the ban on political affiliation that Bob finished with. I think this paper is an excellent example of why we should keep that rule. Because quite obviously very many of us could not go along with this program.

The program that he outlined would result, in my opinion, be so bad that I would call it wicked. I really couldn't associate with a program that seriously politically advocated that kind of welfare system that he was enumerating. I'd go through one or two of those things in a minute.

I rather agree about Rawls. I think you can find a higher and better use of your time if you're going to read philosophy, social philosophy, than Mr. Rawls. He bases a lot of the book on this sentence that Bob brought out and emphasized, that justice is fairness. All over my copy I've annotated, I don't know what that means. What does it mean to say "justice is fairness" - where have we gotten? I think we've used a synonym. And he doesn't come back - at least I didn't find him coming back and saying fairness is justice. As I read through, that seemed to be what he was saying. It was a circular definition as far as I was concerned. I really think the entire rest of the book is rather insecure because of the inadequacy of that kind of definition. He probably should refrain from publishing it on that ground alone.

To discuss a little bit on welfare, I will say first of all that I don't think Sherwin knew this when he called and asked me to respond. I do speak from a personal history - my father died when I was a year old and my mother was a polio cripple, and I grew up on ADC. My viewpoints on welfare are obviously in part affected by that experience.

My major complaint of this paper, which I hope I will bring out, is that I considered the program that he elaborates, which I'll go into, is the major flaw of most liberal schemes. It is that it's an irresponsible program. It

doesn't handle very crucial questions of responsibilities of individuals. That is why I think it would produce disaster.

For example - I'll take the extreme example to make my case - I'm not sure since reading through this that it would register with all of you, he lists what he thinks are the basic rights that everybody is entitled to, such as housing, if only with a clean dormitory bed. And then he lists who gets them — drunks and other addicts, incurably lazy, etc. To me, the logical extrapolation of that is we have to have a government program clean the homes of the lazy. I know these things come out of your statement and I couldn't possibly accept such a thing. I have lazy friends who live in sloth, and they're not particularly unhappy, and I don't see the reason to be doing this sort of thing. That is the extreme example, but it is part of this paper.

If an incurably lazy person doesn't want to work, and would rather sleep on a park bench, that's all right. The hobo tradition in this country is a long and honorable one. I don't know that we should necessarily interfere with it or take money from an unwilling person to give it to these people. We get into some similar considerations with addicts and drunks and those things.

I would say that we all agree that there should be some welfare system. I certainly do. But then I got into a cabal of libertarians in the back, and I don't know whether they do or not, but I know from experience that some libertarians don't believe in any welfare system at all. So I shall say most of us would support a welfare system. I think it's a question of degree, and of how you would administer it.

There are a number of questions. Who would get it? Should lazy people get it? How much do they get? What sort of services do you give? How much money do they get in certain circumstances? At what point are you encouraging the very evils that you're attempting to get rid of? What are the responsibilities of the recipients? And what are the rights of people who pay for the system? I think these tend to be neglected, and certainly were neglected in this paper. I will not spend as much time on these as I would have liked to, but I will spend a little more time in a minute.

Who pays for it? What are the rights of the people who pay for it? Who really benefits from the welfare system that we have now? He has several pages where he seems to criticize it, but then he seems to want to extend it and support it. Who really benefits? Do they benefit or do other people? And what is the best system to dispense it?

I want to go back to what are the responsibilities of the recipients? I think that's a major part of the problem. You give people money and certainly you reward certain behavior and it's going to be repeated. You give people a blank check and they're going to do things. That hardly seems the way to solve these problems. It's rather like throwing gasoline on a fire to put it out.

It's a real problem with the welfare system, and ignoring its existence, I don't think is going to solve anything. I think that there is a responsibility to pay for it - which falls on the taxpayers, after all, not just the middle class. As you say in your paper, it's often time poorer people are paying a greater rate of taxes than middle class people anyway.

One of the things in Rawls that I like is the reciprocity of rights and responsibilities between all individuals. So that means when you're talking about the system, and you're talking about the recipient, you also have to talk about their responsibilities to the people who are paying the bills. I don't think this is being handled, and I don't think it's handled in the welfare system today. It's something we need to work on.

Specifically, the example of a woman, (and I'd say race is immaterial in this myself), who is having children and a father, a male who is participating too - it's just harder to lay our hands on him - is having children they cannot take care of. I think that's a highly irresponsible act - one of the most irresponsible things a person can do. I don't think any system ought to reward that. It's the ultimate form of child abuse as far as I'm concerned.

So anything ought to, and it's ridiculous to go tell a person, "No, you can't have a Cadillac, or a Volkswagen for that matter, because these people are having children they can't take care of." There are a certain amount of people who do it specifically to get on welfare. There are fourth and fifth generations of this going on. Something should be done about this.

I saw Paul Kurtz before I came here. I got one of Paul Beattie's sermons, he was talking on eugenics. He didn't carry it this far - this is my carrying at - but I would say there is some sort of system if you're that kind of person and you're doing that. In order for you to qualify, you should consent to some kind of family control, including, if necessary, sterilization. He was telling me that Reese used to counsel people along these lines and give them the opportunity, and they don't even do that anymore.

I really don't believe that anybody has the inherent right to bring another person into the world that they can't take care of. And I don't think they have a claim to that right.

Who really benefits from the system? I think this is an old saw, mostly you realize it's the politicians and bureaucrats who benefit from the system, with jobs, power and money. Liberal politicians are very fond of creating large ghettos of the deprived that are a steady vote pool for them in the future. That's what happened in this city 30 years ago. I think any system has to tackle that question.

Who pays for it? I always had the question, after 20 years of arguing this, who pays for it? This is not in Bob Hemstreet's paper, but who pays for it? I notice the liberals always want these programs, and a whole bunch

of other programs, and then when we discuss tax policy they always have a tax scheme which means they don't have to pay for it. They call it progressive taxation, or make the corporations pay for it, forgetting that people own corporations or other such things. So, I'm always rather suspicious of them on that level.

Liberal religionists do similar things. In the paper that was not read tonight, there is the parable where Jesus talks to the rich man who's done all the ritual things and wants to know what else he can do to give his money away and follow Jesus. That's rather admirable, and a good individualistic response. I would safely point out that Jesus did not say, "Well go out and use the government to force other people to follow your private moral vision." As a rule I would rather go along with that.

A brief comment on what system is to dispense it. I always regretted that they didn't give the negative income tax at least a try, an experimental try. It always seemed to me the negative income tax where people below a certain level get a certain amount of money and as they enter the system and get jobs and make money, rather than if you get \$300 a month, you go out and make \$50 more than working to stay home because \$50 isn't worth it. It establishes a sliding scale to ease people into the system. Well, maybe it wouldn't work, but it always seemed to me it had a good shot and we should certainly have tried it. But the entrenched system of bureaucrats and politicians seems to have effectively prevented that a dozen years ago when they tried to bring it.

So, if I had two or three hours I'd probably present something a little more thorough and consistent, but I think that's ten minutes worth of time.