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rewarding in my affiliation with those in this Association.

There is, for those of us who notice and savor such things, a fascinating counterpoint in Jennifer's next to last paragraph. She records that her Lord seduced her into following Him and then follows that statement with another in which she claims to have allowed it to happen. While I do not wish to fuel a debate on semi-Pelagian vs. Augustinian views, I do wish to thank Jennifer for reminding me of the joy of my salvation and the continuing delights of following Christ.

#### ENDNOTE

- 1 "Judgments Divine and Human," *Tabletalk*, July 1994, p. 26.

### ***P.J. Hill*** ***Comments on Morse***

Jennifer Morse's paper is a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate over the appropriate role of the Christian economist in the discipline of public choice. Is public choice so far removed from a Christian perspective on the world that believing economists cannot, in good conscience, use the tools of analysis? Or is it rather just a powerful tool that the Christian economist can use without reservation? Although not answering these questions explicitly, Morse does deal with them in her paper, and in a way that I find convincing.

Her analysis of the modern efforts at redistribution and her judgment that such efforts can be "an occasion of sin" is well-reasoned and convincing. However, her mode of analysis is as important as her conclusion. Morse, a prominent public choice economist, understands and uses well some of the basic tools of the field; moral hazard, rent-seeking, prisoner's dilemma problems, and voting theory. However, she goes beyond the standard public choice paradigm and introduces

into her analysis judgments about the moral end of humankind. Rather than just using public choice as a way of facilitating people achieving their own ends, whatever those might be, she explicitly evaluates those ends, and is willing to use the definitive term sin to describe certain behavior. It is at this point that I find myself, also a public choice Christian, in full accord with her form of analysis. She does not reject all of public choice because of its supposedly value-free assumptions about human choices, but rather uses the discipline's tools to further our understanding of institutional arrangements. However, she also goes on to evaluate those arrangements by biblical standards.

I now turn to Morse's specific arguments, namely that the state is an occasion of sin through its forced redistribution programs which can alter the character of the giver and the recipient in a pernicious way. I find her arguments to be convincing, and ones that I would hope other Christians will pay attention to. However, to identify one set of institutional structures as a source of sin does not solve the problem of appropriate policy prescription. Other institutional structures can also be occasions of sin. For instance, unbridled capitalism can produce hedonism, materialism, and other temptations that lead to the deformation of character. Morse's work is an important contribution, but what we really need to do is comparative sin analysis. All institutions must be evaluated in terms of their contribution to the character of those they influence.

I have two more specific comments on her paper. First, she notes that "There are some powerful reasons why the agents of the state should be required to remain morally neutral in the distribution of tax dollars to the indigent." However, I know of no way the distribution of tax dollars can be morally neutral. Any redistribution program is based upon a moral framework, and thus cannot represent neutrality. However, I do agree with the last statement of that paragraph that "the state cannot supervise the personal choices of thousands of people that qualify or might

qualify for income support." I find it more persuasive to argue that the state, although not morally neutral, isn't competent to enforce much more than general rules or what has been called the rule of law. It is impossible to construct an appropriate incentive framework or to generate adequate information so that bureaucrats will make appropriate decisions as to the moral worthiness of each potential recipient. Therefore, it is difficult for the state to be an active force in positive character formation. That does not mean, however, that it does not have an impact on character nor that it should strive for neutrality.

Second, there is no discussion of the free rider problem with private charitable efforts. Since the implication of the paper is that such efforts should replace government redistribution programs and, since the free rider problem is a major rationale for government involvement, it would be nice to have the author's thoughts on this

issue. Does the "occasion of sin" problem with government charity more than offset the free riding problem with private charity? Have the free rider aspects of private efforts been unduly magnified?

Finally, I close by commenting on Jennifer's conclusion. Economists have often been castigated for their attempts to remove the personal from their analysis; for their desire to treat people and their preferences simply as parameters. In one of the more moving testimonies that I have ever read by a professional economist, Jennifer moves from the realm of the abstract to the realm of the personal. It is very persuasive to have a well-reasoned and carefully articulated analysis, based upon a clear understanding of the notions of right and wrong, followed by a personal reflection such as hers. I can only conclude by saying that God is doing a mighty work in Jennifer Roback Morse. ■

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