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Driving the Conversation:

Are we confronting in the healthcare and other major policy debates a kind of "culture war" reflecting a "fundamental difference in worldview?"

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Roger Pilon, Vice President for Legal Affairs, Cato Institute:

Bill Bishop is right, as far as he goes: the debates over health care and other public policy questions do reflect a kind of "culture war," a "fundamental difference in worldviews." And he's right too that the divide took root more than 100 years ago. But his template of Private and Public Protestantism, by glossing over a crucial point, is deeply misleading.

"Private Protestants" like Sen. Jim DeMint speak of freedom, Bishop says, whereas "Public Protestants" like President Obama say, "I am my brother's keeper." There's no inconsistency, however, between freedom and being one's brother's keeper. That's how brothers were kept for most of our history, through the voluntary, charitable acts of private Protestants. That's not how Obama wants to keep his brother, however. No, he wants to do it through the coercive actions of government.

Thus, Bishop's "Public Protestantism" isn't simply "getting to heaven by your good works, by what you do for your brothers and sisters on Earth" - private Protestants could do that. It's forcing others to join you in your pursuit of your vision of the good. And it's that moral superiority and the moral arrogance of forcing your moral vision on others that is so fundamentally un-American and so off-putting to those of us who value freedom - including the freedom to do good works.

The current health care debate is a perfect example of those principles. Obama knows full well that his "public option" will crowd out private plans, which offer a variety of choices and, more important, are voluntary. (The early twentieth century Progressives were at least honest in their heady desire to see public charity crowd out private charity.) But freedom, reflected by the choices that only a market can provide, is not Obama's concern. By his actions we must conclude that he would have us all increasingly dependent on government. It has never ceased to amaze me how modern liberals, who are so obsessed with private "monopolies" (witness the Justice Department's new antitrust policies), are blind to the only true monopoly there is - government.

A fundamental difference in worldviews? Yes, between those who see, and those who don't.

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