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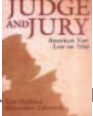
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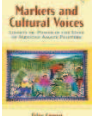
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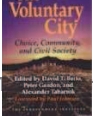
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How bad is it to be uninsured today?

Ezra Klein raised a big stir by suggesting that the possible failure of the health care bill will cost a large number of lives; [he cited a figure of 20,000 per year](#). (You'll find [pushback from Michael Cannon](#) on the number.)

Rather than disputing the number, my question is a simpler one. Let's say the figure were a correct one. How would you fill in the following blank?:

"Being uninsured in 2009 is, in terms of life expectancy, as bad as being insured in the earlier year ????"

What is the correct year for this comparison to hold?

Simply knowing the correct year is my main concern in this post, but there is an additional angle. Twenty years from now there will also be some uninsured Americans, even if the current bill passes. There will be pleas to help them. If you wish to help them, does that mean that the insured today also deserve additional health care subsidies? Or is the whole comparison just about equality? How about caring about inequality across time? If you favor additional subsidies for the uninsured today, are you also committed to wishing there had been additional subsidies for the insured back in year ????

I thank Bryan Caplan for a useful conversation related to this blog post.

Posted by Tyler Cowen on December 17, 2009 at 04:14 AM in [History](#), [Medicine](#) | [Permalink](#)

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Given that a significant degree of the problems regarding unequal/sub-par healthcare relate to it