

My Intro to Capitalism

by Kalin - Friday, March 25, 2011

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It was a hot day as I sat by myself at my cousin's Little League game. I don't recall how old I was. Somewhere between five and ten. My aunt had brought some delicious oatmeal-raisin cookies, but no water. After eating a cookie, I quickly realized how thirsty I was and wandered off to find a drinking fountain. Unfortunately there was none, so I continued searching for some kind of water source. The only available water I could find was a big plastic dispenser sitting near the garbage can on the bottom of the other set of bleachers. However, I've always been shy and afraid to ask for help, particularly from strange adults, so I simply sat, visions of waterfalls and drinking fountains running through my head.

My aunt came back to check on me and I asked her if she had any water or if there was a drinking fountain or anything nearby. She said no, but pointed at the dispenser. "I think they've got some water or juice or something," she said. "I'm sure they'd give you some if you just ask."

But I was afraid of asking for help, of being reliant on someone else. What if they screamed at me for wanting to take something that wasn't mine? What if they laughed at me for being helpless and thirsty? So when my aunt left again and left me alone, I simply sat and stared at the water.

I don't know how other people experience dehydration, but it's only happened to me three times, and I remember the feeling being nothing like being hungry. Hunger you can physically feel in your stomach, an actual, measurable pain. Dehydration is just this subtle sense in your mind. You don't feel dry, you just somehow *know* that you need water, and as the dehydration gets worse, it becomes an obsession, to the point where you can't think of anything other than water.

Finally I couldn't take it anymore, so I decided to steal a drink. I waited, and watched the cooler. When no one was looking, I marched up, trying to act like I belonged, but looking over my shoulder suspiciously. I somehow had this sense that I was doing a horrible thing. I knew it was only water. The paper cup probably only cost them a few cents, and I was only doing it because I was horribly thirsty. But somehow, I still felt like a shameful, devious criminal. It doesn't matter how much someone needs something, or what kind of use they can put it to, it only matters who owns what, and I knew I didn't own that water.

I carefully took a paper cup from the stack and watched the spout intently as I filled it. I assume the sounds of the baseball game carried on behind me, but all I could hear was the dribble of the water into my cup. I tilted the cooler just enough to see how heavy it was, confirming that they had barely made a dent in their water supply. Finally the cup was full and I turned off the spout.

As I turned away, I heard an angry voice, and turned into a woman I had not noticed, now towering over me. "What are you doing?" she asked. "You're not in our group are you?"

"Um...." I started. "No." I raised the cup, but just before it touched my lips, her hand shot out and grasped the cup, smashing into my hand, the water running down my wrist. She pulled the cup away and threw it

with a tiny splash into the garbage. "What? You think you can just help yourself to anything you want?"

"Well, I was really thirsty, and I thought since it was just water--"

"No!" She shook her head. "It doesn't matter how much you want something, that never gives you the right to take it! Do I come into your house and just take whatever I want?"

"Well--"

"Huh? Do I? No, I don't! So why do you think it's okay to just take something of ours? We took the time to bring this for ourselves, for *our* enjoyment. Do you plan to go through the rest of your life just taking whatever you want from anyone you feel like? Do you think you can just ignore the rules of society? I've got news for you, nobody takes kindly to thieves. Do you understand that?"

"Yeah," I said, my lip quivering.

"You want to grow up to be a thief?"

"No." I struggled to hold back tears.

"Don't try that. I'm not going to feel sorry for you."

"Could I please just have a drink of water?" I asked.

"No!" she shouted. "If you had asked like that to begin with, then yes, we probably would have given you some, but not after you try to sneak behind our backs. So I think you need to leave."

So I backed off, turned away, and walked back to the other set of bleachers. I sat down and tried desperately to avoid looking at the cooler, but repeatedly found myself glancing toward it, only to see the same woman sitting right there, guarding it.

I waited and waited, obsessed with water, but finally, the game was over and my aunt and cousin returned to my spot in the bleachers. I, of course, mentioned nothing of what happened. As we were packing up, I watched a man cleaning up the area around the cooler. He grabbed the stack of paper cups and threw them in the garbage. He then unscrewed the top of the cooler, took a few steps away from the bleachers and flipped it over to dump the remainder of the water into the dirt.

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