

This Stop is Over

Guest post by Roger Tipping II (einsteinway).

Perhaps my experiences are colored by my voluntarist worldview but every day I see myriad examples of spontaneous order and mutual interaction all around me. It amazes me that people can stand in line at the grocery store, at the gas pump, or even drive on the highway at breakneck speed surrounded by other motorists and never recognize the relatively spontaneous order.

I was at the YMCA today with my wife and daughter and as I headed for the pool an employee there said, “we ask that you don’t chew gum while using the pool”. My cheerful (I was quite looking forward to the swim) response was “no problem”. I was, as it turned out, breaking a rule I had no idea even existed. Now it may have been included in the wall of small print I signed my name to when I joined the “Y”, though I doubt it, but regardless it was a reasonable request which I was happy to comply with.

Now allow me to contrast this experience with that I had on the fourth with a public “servant”. I had offered to drive a friend’s car home (we were headed there anyways) because the vehicle lacked a working air conditioner and, mine being the less fair sex, chivalry dictated my transit be the sweatier of the two.

As it turned out, my friend’s vehicle was not in compliance with a law that requires most vehicles to display a front license plate (a law which numerous vehicles have no easy way of complying with due to the lack of a front mounting surface). As luck would have it, a police officer caught the scent of my (unknowing) failure to comply with said law and pulled me over. As a general rule I wear my seatbelt and, out of interest for their well-being, suggest others should do likewise. It affords a modicum of safety to the generally dangerous activity of driving and is typically of little inconvenience. On this particular occasion, however, I was altogether too hot to be forced into the usual back-to-seat position and, since I was going a short distance at a slow speed, decided not to fasten my seatbelt (a situation I quickly remedied when I saw the officer).

As I passed him I noted two things: first, he was waiting to turn in an area where you cannot legally stop (as a bonus, half of his vehicle was also in traffic, forcing cars to dip into the next lane to get past him) and, secondly, he did not properly signal when he decided to get back into traffic.

To make a long story short, the officer “let me off” of the license plate charge (which is why he pulled me over) but cited me for not wearing my seat belt (which I was wearing even before he pulled me over). After he handed me the ticket book to sign (only to indicate

receipt and not guilt, as I made certain), I asked him if he would mind answering a couple of questions. He said that would be fine. I then informed him that I would be videotaping the exchange with my cell phone.

His demeanor changed.

“Why do you need to film me and what are your questions?”, he said with the hint of a snarl. “The questions are short and simple and the video is for your protection as well as mine”, I replied.

“This stop is over”, he said as he quickly retreated to his patrol car.

If you ever begin to put stock in the “they work for us” twaddle bandied about by Average Joe Citizen, remember these three simple words: No. They. Don’t.

Did the officer have a right to walk away from me when I asked to question him? Of course. Every individual has the right of self determination. But WHY did he walk away (and at such a hurried pace to boot)? The answer, of course, is that our exchange was far from voluntary and mutual. At no time did I threaten him with force or use any other method of coercion. On the reverse however, had I decided to simply drive away when he wanted to question me, he would have given chase, pursued me till I had no other choice but to stop, perhaps even used physical means to subdue me.

All this because I decided that, in this particular scenario, not wearing a seatbelt was the most sensible choice.

Allow me to share with you the questions I would have asked the officer, had he turned out to be a “public servant” or perhaps anything other than a coward. First, since the only legitimate role of law is to protect the inalienable rights of individuals, in what way was I infringing on said rights by not wearing my seatbelt? Secondly, by what authority do you detain and serve me with a penalty for not wearing said seatbelt?

I can imagine he would have pointed to the law as his source of authority. But where does the law get its authority? Perhaps “government” would have been his response. And from where does the government gain authority to draft such laws? Why the people, of course. So then my ultimate question: which person, specifically, individually has the authority to force me under penalty of fine and/or arrest to wear a seatbelt?

As I make no claims as a wizard or seer I can only guess what his response would be. However, it would not surprise me in the least if my hypothetical conversation were to end in a way which coincided with that of reality:

“This stop is over.”