

TRAGIC DEATHS IN THE TITAN SUBMERSIBLE

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Abstract

Five Americans died, tragically, in the Titan Submersible. They were mainly rich, white males. The attention of perhaps the entire world, not merely the entire country, was focused on their plight. At the same time, hundreds of darker pigmented people also faced death at sea, in the Mediterranean. Very little attention, relatively, was garnered for them. Was this due to racism? We argue to the contrary.

A second related issue probed in the present paper is a hypothetical. Those five folks in the submersible were running out of oxygen. Suppose they had all agreed to kill one of their own, every day, in order to preserve this precious element so as to save at least some of them, since the rescuers were having difficulty locating them. Would this have been a valid contract? Would the survivors have been considered murderers, if those who drew the short straw refused to commit suicide, and were killed instead, by the winners of the bet?

Keywords: Deaths; submersible; racism; contracts.

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Muertes trágicas en el sumergible Titán**Resumen**

Cinco estadounidenses murieron trágicamente en el submarino Titán. Eran principalmente hombres blancos y ricos. La atención de tal vez todo el mundo, no sólo de todo el país, se centró en su difícil situación. Al mismo tiempo, cientos de personas de pigmentación más oscura también se enfrentaron a la muerte en el mar, en el Mediterráneo. Se les prestó muy poca atención, relativamente. ¿Se debió esto al racismo? Nosotros sostenemos lo contrario.

Una segunda cuestión relacionada que se investiga en el presente artículo es hipotética. Esas cinco personas en el sumergible se estaban quedando sin oxígeno. Supongamos que todos hubieran acordado matar a uno de los suyos, cada día, para preservar este preciado elemento y salvar al menos a algunos de ellos, puesto que los rescatadores tenían dificultades para localizarlos. ¿Habría sido este un contrato válido? ¿Se habría considerado asesinos a los supervivientes si los que sacaron la pajita más corta se negaron a suicidarse y fueron asesinados en su lugar por los ganadores de la apuesta?

Palabras clave: Muertes; sumergible; racismo; contratos

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1. Introduction

In this paper I attempt to cover two aspects of the summer 2023 tragedy of the Titan Submersible. In section II I consider the charge of racism launched against the news media for supposedly giving disproportionate coverage to this disaster. The burden of section III is to discuss a wager that theoretically might have been made in order to save at least some of the occupants of this vessel. We conclude in section IV.

2. Deaths on the ocean floor

The entire country, no, probably, the whole world, was focused on the five endangered folk who were trapped at the bottom of the ocean floor a short while ago.¹ Our hearts went out to those folk, sitting in a vehicle no bigger than a medium sized automobile, as the oxygen remaining to them ran out. There was drama aplenty: would they be rescued before that time? Alas, not. The lives of these five people trapped at the bottom of the sea, were lost. They were running out of oxygen, and then were killed in an explosion.

At around the same time several hundred would be immigrants to Europe from Africa perished as their boat foundered, en route. According to Judith Sunderland, acting deputy director for Europe at the group Human Rights Watch, “We saw how some lives are valued and some are not.” She further maintained “We cannot avoid talking about racism and xenophobia”² since the immigrants were poor and non-white, while those in the submersible, were the very opposite. And according to former president Barack Obama: “... the fact that that’s gotten so much more attention than 700 people who sank, that’s an untenable situation.”³

But racism, surely, played a very insignificant role in this wildly disparate treatment, if you consider, only, the numbers of people involved. One bit of evidence for this claim is that immigrants dying in the passage to a better life is not at all, unfortunately, a unique experience. Dying in a submersible surely is. Second, in 2018 a teenaged Thai soccer team was trapped in the Tham Luang Cave. That episode, too, garnered world attention -- even though these youngsters were not rich, nor white.⁴ Rather, the uniqueness of the plight in both cases is more than a sufficient explanation of the attention each garnered. It is all too easy to cry “racism” at the drop of the hat. One is inclined, in this context, to think of the boy who cried “wolf.”

But, still, I acknowledge that Sutherland and Obama do indeed have something of a point. A certain amount of proportionality is indeed called for, even if the disproportion does not stem from the sources they mention. However, I’ll see them and raise them a bit. Some 40,000 people die every year from highway socialism in the US alone (Block, 2009), and hundreds

¹ Their demise took place in late June, 2023. See on this Mercogliano, 2023; Salkin, 2023; Perez, 2023; Ax and Gorman, 2023; Markham, 2023; Robinson, et. al, 2023.

² See Pérez-Peña, 2023; Darby, 2023

³ See Pérez-Peña, 2023; Darby, 2023

⁴ Cave Rescue (2019): bit.ly/3C7vrVj

of thousands more from socialized medicine.⁵ The blame for both may be squarely laid at government mismanagement. Hardly anyone focuses on these deaths either.

At least there were submarines racing to rescue the five people trapped in the Titan submersible, and the navies of several European countries were trying to save the beleaguered African immigrants (and succeeded in all too few cases). What are we doing as a society to rectify the needless deaths of motorists and sick people? Nothing at all.

No. That is not quite true. If anything, the opposite is the case. The fact of the matter is that we are actually engaged in worsening both situations.

Consider medical care. Medical schools are now actively engaging in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies.⁶ What will that portend? It will eventuate in the lessening of the skills of doctors, and, hence, their ability to promote health on the part of the public (including them and their loved ones). Under DEI, instead of selecting medical students on the basis of ability, we will soon be doing so predicated on pigment and plumbing⁷. They would eschew objective tests that could distinguish candidates based upon these criteria.⁸

Why are they doing this? They have become woke and do not much like the skin color of future doctors based upon skills and abilities alone.

What will be the result of this new system, if actually implemented? Still more patients will die unnecessary deaths, because their physicians will provide worse quality service. To the extent that doctors are involved in creating new techniques, there will be less life-saving innovation than would have otherwise occurred.

There will also be humiliation for physicians who have the racial and sexual characteristics selected for on this basis but not merit. Patients will tend to spurn them. What about black medicos who could have made it under their own steam? For example, older African-American doctors who did enter and graduate from medical school predicated on their skill not complexion? They, too, will tend to be avoided by patients, since it will be difficult to separate one category from the other.

Another problem concerns that what will be able to be taught at medical school to the brightest students will be diminished. For, remember, there will now be two types of pupils: those who can learn the most up to date and complex material and those who simply cannot (since they were not selected on that basis). To fail the latter group will be considered racist and/or sexist. A bi-modal distribution of grades will occur as a result. The wokists not only want to bring in medical students based on pigment, they want them to feel “included”; to feel as if they “belong” there in medical school even though their work will be below par.

⁵ For evidence of this claim, see Block, 2003; Boyce, 2019; Friedman, 1962; Goodman and Musgrave, 1992; Gratzner, 2005; Hamowy, 1984; Herbener, 1996; Holly, 2013; Hoppe, 1993; Johnson, et.al., 1998; Laydon and Block, 1996; Peltzman, 1973, 1974, 1987A, 1987B; Salerno, 2016; Terrell, 2003.

⁶ It remains to be seen whether and if so to what extent the recent Supreme Court decision regarding affirmative action at Harvard and the University of North Carolina will put paid to this pernicious policy

⁷ If a bias toward females is part of this system

⁸ DEI in medical schools: AAMC, 2023; Block, 2023; Sailor, 2022; Schor, 2022

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How, then, to decrease the ensuing “gap” between the talented and the properly complected? Well, if the lower accomplished group cannot be brought up to the level of the greater gifted then the only way to avoid the charge of “racism” and ameliorate the “gap” will be to bring the latter down to the level of the former. Thus, the skill of all doctors not only those brought in on the basis of affirmative action, will suffer, and with them, the health of the populace.

As a result, more people will die than on the submersible, and, presumably more, also, than on that boat.

A similar situation prevails on the nation’s highways and byways. Some 40,000 people are fatalities from this source. That is over 100 persons per day, 20 times the number who recently perished under the sea. What are we doing to prevent this scourge? Nothing, absolutely nothing. What could we do instead of standing pat, and leaving matters to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration⁹ which is responsible for the present debacle? Simple: privatize all such thorough-fares (Block, 2009).

Why should we engage in such an unlikely initiative? It is a basic aphorism of economics that competition brings about a better product, and in no sector of the economy is this more true than the one now under consideration. There are no potholes in (private) parking lots, even in the poorest of neighborhoods. Under private ownership, owners would compete with one another on, among other things, to see who could reduce the death rate to the greatest degree.

Let us consider just one example of how this might conceivably come about. At present, on the major highways, all vehicles must do at least 40 miles per hour, but not more than 70 mph. Would fewer motorists perish if, instead, an entrepreneur mandated exact speeds of 55, 65 and 75 in the right middle and left lanes, respectively? Perhaps 60, 70 and 80 would do even better in this regard? The point is, we just do not know, and we never will under present institutional arrangements. Diversity of this sort is simply not allowed. One rule for all expressways is the order of the day, emanating from the geniuses in Washington DC.

Imagine if any other industry had to suffer under a one size fits all regime. The result, there too, would be needless stultification, economic inefficiency and, yes, where relevant, needless deaths.

So let us pray for the souls of the people who perished in the bathyscape, and also for the immigrants who perished in the Mediterranean. But let us not forget, either, about what wokeness will do in the medical fields, and the socialist insanity that prevails on the nation’s highways. People there die too, needlessly.

I cannot end this section of the paper without two more comments. Some claim that government regulations are needed for submarines in the aftermath of that disaster (Brooks and Trotta, 2023; Trotta and Brooks, 2023). All I can say to this is to challenge those who favor this course of action to mention even one government regulation that functioned in this manner, that would have not emerged from the private enterprise system. Yes, safety is of

⁹See: <https://www.nhtsa.gov/>

course important;¹⁰ but there is no evidence available to the effect that government intervention would have improved matters.

Second, others were appalled that it cost \$250,000 for a seat on that Trident submersible. No big deal, there. They correctly deduced that only rich people could afford to be tourists in this manner. However, such is their hatred for the wealthy that they opined that the five rich people deserved to die (Hamed, 2023). All I can say about this sentiment is that it is despicable.

3. A wager

About the plight of the occupants of the Titan, several considerations.

First, oxygen. There was only so much of it available to them. Of course, they were wondering whether or not they would have been rescued before the O₂ ran out. Let us be macabre about this, but human lives were potentially at stake, and the issue I am now about to raise has implications for future such events. Surely, they were all intelligent people, they must have realized that the fewer there were of them in this submersible, the longer those who remained would be able to stay alive, and hopefully be rescued.

Suppose the five of them had concocted the following scheme. They would draw straws, or engage in any other such fair practice, to determine which of them would be killed by the other four or compelled to commit suicide and thus stop using oxygen, so as to enable the remaining ones to continue to breathe. All five would agree to this deadly game, in order to, hopefully, preserve at least some of their lives should a rescue eventuate. They would do so since dead men consume none of this precious life-saving gas. With one or two of them gone, and eventually three or four of them, at least those remaining upon rescue could survive. Posit, at least arguendo that life expectancy would rise in this manner; certainly, that all five believed this to be true.

A question immediately arises. If those remaining actually killed the loser of the procedure, would they be guilty of murder? (If the loser had the decency to commit suicide, that issue would not arise.)

The answer forthcoming from the present quarter is that no, the killers would not be guilty of any crime at all, let alone murder. The “victim” was chosen through a fair process to which he agreed; he should be bound by it should he lose. Was this a mere promise, which, in the libertarian view, no one should be legally obligated to make good on?¹¹ No. Consideration was passed in the following format: the others also agreed to be put to death should they have

¹⁰ States Chung (2023): “The Titan submersible tragedy spotlights the issues around rescue operations and government oversight as an increasing number of wealthy thrill seekers undertake risky adventures and expeditions.” See, also, Oreskes, 2023.

¹¹ States Gordon (1999) “Rothbard draws the drastic, though strictly logical, consequence that no promise as such can be enforced. Every legally binding contract must involve a transfer of titles between the parties at the time the contract is made.” See on this also Rothbard, 1998.

lost. Were they to renege, this could be interpreted as a death threat. If this will not suffice, then each of them could have placed some money in the pot, losing it, along with their lives if they drew the short straw; this would convert a promise to a losing bet. From a pragmatic point of view, this system could possibly save the lives of at least some of them. Of course, it could also fail to attain this end, if the rescue had occurred before the oxygen was depleted. But, by stipulation, the five of them were willing to take this risk.

Why would the killers be innocent of murder? This follows directly from the premise that we are each self-owners and hence have the right to dispose of our lives exactly as we see fit. So suicide should not be a crime, nor assisting such an act. Neither should be betting our lives in an attempt to preserve them be ruled a crime, as in the present case.

4. Conclusion

Every human life is precious. Whenever any of our fellow creatures perishes, from whatever source, it is a great loss. In this paper we have perused deaths from a submersible, immigrants en route to Europe from Africa, and lives lost due to socialist and woke medicine and government ownership of the roadways. World's attention focused, mainly, on the first of these, and this had nothing to do with racism; rather, it was the uniqueness of this situation that called forth attention to it.

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