

The Lesson of Kos and the Smugness Born of Idiocy

Let us say you are on vacation in the Greek isle of Kos. You've been coming to Kos on your vacation with your family for over twenty years. You and your family look forward to the two week vacation and it has never failed you. The beaches, the Mediterranean, the pace, the little restaurants – a truly wonderful respite from the hectic pace of your career with an accounting firm in Paris. As you walk along the beach on your usual evening stroll after dinner, with the sun setting and casting shadows, you see what seems to be a human form slightly rocking back and forth huddled at the water's edge. You hesitate but then move on. As you approach you realize it is a woman holding a child. You hesitate again. But then sense that something is terribly wrong. You look about but there no one near by. You approach the woman and child sensing that she needs help.

The woman is a refugee from Syria who has been dumped on the beach by her transporters.

The issue? That was then. In the beginning such cases were treated with compassion and Greek social services did what they could to help. Here is an account of the present situation.

Kos refugees: 1,000 locked overnight in stadium with no food and 'sprayed with fire extinguishers' [[link](#)]

What if the original smattering group of refugees were patched up but sent back to Syria. Heartless cruel, unfeeling? True. But let us look at the misery index long range. If the original group were sent back then Kos would not gain the reputation of being a place where refugees could flee to safety and the start of a new life. As it is the reverse

happened. The result has been a flood of refugees. Over a thousand have died in transit – mostly women and children. They are now held in holding pens until disposition arrangements can be worked out under a general plan by the EU. They are living in worse conditions than in the lands they fled. Their futures are even less certain and they may just be shipped back under some sort of illusory arrangement with their country of origin. The original reactive compassion has multiplied misery a hundred fold.

The lesson here is that compassion is not, *eo ipso*, a problem solver. The compassionate response may, in the long run, do more harm than good and the smug sense of moral superiority evinced by those who think that immediate compassion is a basis for framing general social policy is a smugness born of idiocy.