

CALCULATING THE CONSEQUENCES OF

WHAT WE DECIDE TO DO ABOUT

UNCHOSEN CONSEQUENCES

2271 28 Oct 88

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The cynic says that results are what you want but consequences are what you get. Truth is that God has given us the power to anticipate most consequences and so foreknow most results--though we're impressed with the exceptions and have, for them, many appropriate old saws, eg, "Many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip." The incalculables + calculation errors incline me to **moderation*** (yes, another old saw: "Veritas in medio stat," Truth stands in the middle), 1 foot in & 1 out--which makes positioning oneself in circle-center impossible except in the case of very small circles.

1. Beyond this Thinksheet's territory, I honor the heroic choice of ultimates-absolutes, ie, what does **not** enter one's calculus (ie, is unthought of) or does so only to be rejected. Supremely, for me, Jesus, who went to the cross "despising the shame" (Hebrews 12²) and the pain. In peace, the Cape Cod Coast Guard with the motto (before it became part of the U.S. Coast Guard) "You must go out, but you don't have to come back." [During the first two years of this century, many lost their lives to save the lives and cargos on sixteen shipwrecks.] In war, "Damn the torpedoes!"

2. At the other extreme are those who damn the consequences not in the interest of others but of **themselves** and/or not in the interest of ultimates-absolutes but of some lust-greed-desire for some proximate-relative value. Last evening I was at a meeting on the homeless: 96% of "homeless families" on Cape Cod are woman + child(ren). Any of us can ask a hundred questions! From the male side, from the female side, from the child(ren)'s side, from society's side, from God's side. At the first of the three meetings, five of these women told their stories, which resulted in a passionately split audience, which became even more passionately split during the middle meeting. In this Thinksheet I'm looking at this mess from the angle of the Thinksheet's title: we, all of us in families & society (church & other voluntary institutions, and government) must decide what to do about (1) homelessness & (2) loose [ie, irresponsible] male/females genitals; this decision-making process must calculate, as far as possible, the set of consequences of the various scenarios; and throughout we should sustain a moral-ethical-spiritual critical consciousness, including sorting out the un/chosen consequences by individuals, groups, society.

3. The third dimension I've just mentioned is seldom in play when sociocrats & bureaucrats sit down to decide what to do about housing & homelessness. Paternalistic government, esp. since WWII, has thrown billions of \$ at it, with horrendous "welfare" & architectural consequences. Observe the turgidity of today's CAPE COD TIMES lead editorial, first sentence: "Considering that the rate of pregnancy on Cape Cod is increasing--as it is nationally--its a shame that there is opposition to expanding, however modestly, a successful program created to house and care for these children-mothers." Irony: a current negative connotation of "paternalism" is insensitive authoritarianism; but in this quotation we behold oversensitive, **sentimental paternalism**. We all recognize the self-destruct in the humorous "Don't vote, it only encourages them." But the modicum of truth in the saying, viz, that voting empowers the unworthy along with the worthy, obtains also in the present case: making it too soft for pregnant teens encourages teens to think of pregnancy as (1) OK & (2) entitling one to public emotional & financial support (a fact unwittingly displayed in a full-p. article in yesterday's CCT). In the editorial's sentence, note: (1) "Shame" is used not against "children-mothers" and/or those in danger of so becoming but against those expressing social concern, concern for society, however imperfect the concern; (2) Nothing is said in the sentence, or the rest of the article, to decry the increasing rate of teen pregnancies, nor is any reference made to solving the problem by intersticing abortion between "pregnancy" & "children-mothers." Hester Prynne's victory is here total: the social sanctions are working to erode responsible, moral, living.

* I go with great Am.RC scholar Jn. Courtney Murray: "I'm a member of the extreme center."

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4. All living things can be said, at least anthropopathically, to calculate immediate-concrete consequences, else they'd not be living, alive: we are the animal that can calculate **remote** consequences, both concrete & abstract. Because we can so, we're **responsible** to do so: responsible to (1) our species, which couldn't survive without it; (2) to each other, else lacking this the other, & therefore the self, could not survive; (3) responsible to the biosphere, which is increasingly dependent for its health & wealth on our stewardship of it; &, collectively, severally, personally, (4) responsible to God, Source & Sustainer of all. Since it's to some extent possible to **escape** these responsibilities, it's necessary that we be, by society & God, **held responsible**. This holding is **accountability**: because we are responsible, we must **account for** our com- & o-missions, give an accounting to the extent of our responsibility, **liability**. And all this not just in relation to what we do & don't do but also in relation to our **purposing** & both its motives &, somewhat less in some cases, its results....All ethical systems teach everything in this \$: nothing new here; I'm laying it out because moral laxity, such as that of our permissive society, slackens the force of it & dulls the public's awareness of it. When to a group of Scottish clergy recently Iron Lady Thatcher quoted the NT to the effect that "If any man will not work, let him not eat," the uproar was not entirely of the angels. She sees herself as having the courage ("iron") to defer voter-gratification in the interest of being remote "good news to the poor." As Jesus says, suffer now & rejoice later (another uproar?). The concept of delayed gratification is an aspect of personal moral maturity, but also public: heard about the coming "debit cards" to replace "credit cards"? Heard about Reagan's "annual 200 billion in hot checks" (Lloyd Bentsen)?

5. Who calculates our degree of responsibility for our calculating consequences & the degrees of virtue/vice in our behavior? On earth, I/we/they do, "under God," "the Judge of all the earth," who can be counted on to "do right" (*mishpat*--[AT] "act justly"; [TANAKH'85] "deal justly"--Gn.18²⁵; n. & v. are cognate, having the same root). Social ethics studies society's role in this responsibility complex; its criminal-ethics subdivision studies "the criminal mentality," the sociopath or anomic personality, the purposes/results of various in-being & proposed laws & law-enforcing procedures & institutions, & the valence of biological factors, both inherited & acquired. (On nature v. both nurture & personal choice, theodicy--the ultimate jurisprudential category--has had to accomodate the concept of "genetic error.")....Compassionate intelligence dictates a **sliding scale** of negative consequence, poorly termed (because emotion-loaded) "punishment." A murderer on furlough should face, when apprehended after murdering again, a stiffer punishment: the fear of it should be in his calculus. The fear may be of torture, solitary confinement being the only form permitted in the United States; or of execution, if the state has capital punishment. (Willie Horton could murder again with no fear other than spending some time in solitary if he got caught. States that do not have capital punishment should not furlough murderers....The most effective mud Bush is slinging at Dukakis is right here; the second most effective mud is the equally emotion-laded issue of the Pledge of Allegiance. Both nail the poor Duke as emotionally "out of the main-stream," ie, "liberal.")....The three stages in the history of American criminology are perspectival: seeing from the standpoint of (1) the **crime**, (2, presently) the **criminal**, and (3, increasingly) the **victim**, both direct & (including society at large) indirect. Let's call the stages traditional, liberal, & societal. Opposition to capital punishment will lessen as we modulate from the liberal to the societal stage.

6. As excessive births are now the greatest threat to the quality of human life both societally (as overburdening societies' ability to cope with the consequences) & biospherically (as threatening our lifesupport system & that of other living creatures), all unwanted pregnancies--a category of "unchosen consequences"--function as **crimes** against humanity & the biosphere, & almost all should terminate in abortion. Even some wanted pregnancies fall into this criminal category--in China, legal & not just ethical criminality. Making it easy for girls to become child-mothers is pre-coddling criminals. On this subject, I'm not the moderate I am (& so state in this Thinksheet's intro) on most subjects. I'm a pointyheaded intellectual & nattering nabob of negativism, against the weepy Nellies & mindless, uncalculating dogooders.