

As a multiprivileged Christian, I have this perpetual problem of justifying or abandoning my privileges. As the former is far easier than the latter, I tilt strongly toward it, my conscience usually tilting only weakly against it. Being, however, of a healthy disposition, I avoid the self-abuse I observe in some of my fellow-privileged. I mean the self-flagellation of feeling simply awful *mea culpa* about (to use a figure from the Am. Socialist Eugene V. Debs) eating cake when others don't even have bread--a mental condition which, while doing nothing breadwise for the hungry, deprives the privileged of enjoying their cake....The problem's been with us Christians almost from the start. Christianity tends to make the married rich and ascetics fat. Occasional individual or even group revulsion, resulting in the choice of poverty and skinniness, is only the exception proving the rule. "Evangelical poverty," self-imposed rigorism, is an aspect of the Gospels' radicality, an interim witnessing condition for some while all actively await Shalom (the Kingdom of God, universal prosperity for the whole human being and the whole of humanity in response to God come-coming in Jesus)....This thinksheet is about being honest to privilege and its opposite, which is unprivilege (or unadvantage).

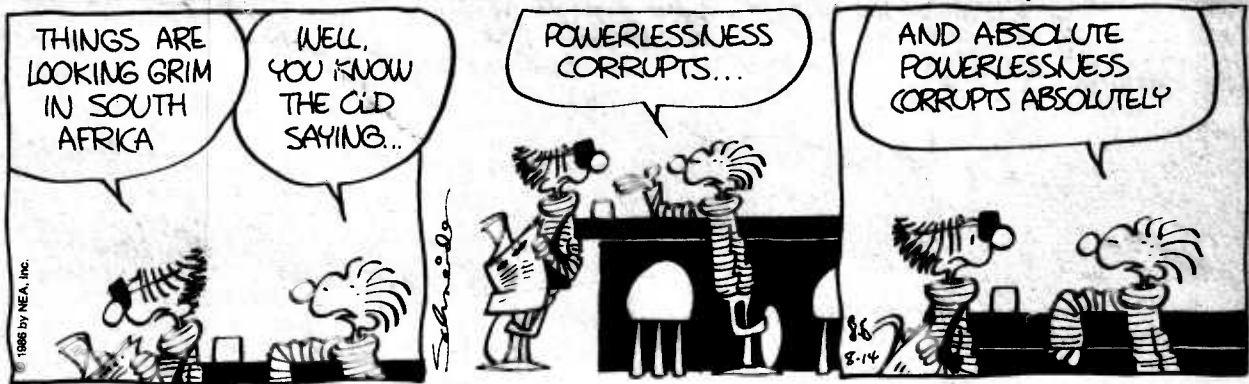
1. Observe first the lexical dishonesty in "disadvantage," "the disadvantaged." Note the range of possibilities: (1) The unprivileged may be so because the advantaged have somehow done them in & under, this being the form of unprivilegedness the Biblical prophets (including Jesus) rail against; (2) The unprivileged may be so because the advantaged have inadvertently disadvantaged the unprivileged in some or other zero-sum situation; (3) The unprivileged may be so because "the advantages of civilization" have not yet reached them; (4) The unprivileged may be so because, though the advantages of civilization have reached them, they have responded in ways failing to take advantage of their opportunities; (5) The unprivileged may be so because, though at one time they took advantage of their opportunities to become privileged, something internal/external in their lives has been inimical to their maintaining privilege (ie, their advantages), and that something (a) was / (b) was not within their control....Honesty demands nuanced consideration of all factors/persons/groups; the right/wrong rhetoric of good/bad guys is inherently dishonest and, in its effects, pernicious even though resulting in some temporary pseudoremedies such as the current "welfare system."...So what's the lexical dishonesty in this section's first sentence? It's the use of the accusative "fighting word" "DISadvantage" in place of the honest word "UNadvantage." "Dis-" implies (above) situations 1 & 2, viz, being in bad shape because somebody else did you in or at least over either deliberately or inadvertently. It does not apply to situations 3-5, and it's bad news for everybody when cases falling into 3-5 are treated as though in 1 or 2....Eg:

2. Yesterday (13Aug86) the US Census Bureau released a study showing positive correlation, all along the xy axes, of % of poverty with # of chn. per family. If you've got 5 or more kids, 52.7% chance you're living in poverty; if none, only 5.4% chance. The correlation holds in all studies I've seen anywhere in the world since WWII. So it can be roughly said that people choose their degree of poverty in deciding how many kids to have. You takes what you gets and you pays for it. But why should those who sacrifice the advantages of a large family feel guilty that their \$ situation is superior to that of those who do not make this sacrifice, and why should they feel obligated to help "poor families"? Yesyesyes, it's complicated, multifactoral. But one of the factors, and an honest one, is the resentment the kids-deprived \$-advantaged have when anybody, esp. government, tries to run a guilt trip on them vis-a-vis the kids-advantaged \$-deprived. I've never seen this factor honestly faced in a "Christian" discussion--and for even mentioning it I'll be accused of being insensitive, uncaring, ignorant.

What you leave out wrecks you or at least blocks your thinking and increases your sentimental selfrighteousness. Eg, S.African blacks will be dirtpoor for the foreseeable future no matter the political situation in their country: the child-per-family / degree-of-poverty correlation dooms them economically even though their "human dignity" situation improves in the form of participation in power--but note our Cape Cod cartoonist's commentary today:

EEK AND MEEK

by Howie Schneider



It's fatuous, dishonest, unrealistic, pie-on-the-ground to think that monkeying with the S.African government will considerably improve the \$ condition of blacks in the seven nations of southern Africa. But I've never seen this admitted in "Christian" print or groups. Overpromising is cruel, leading to overexpectation and the baleful entourage thereof (disappointment, disillusion, despair, rage, internal/external violence).

3. To stay with the case of S.Africa: How about an un/dis-advantaged analysis in parallel with an analysis of privilege (including the advantages accruing to the un/dis-advantaged from synergism with the privileged)? No, I'm not being a defender of privilege! I'm being a proponent of honesty, of intelligent compassion, of critical consciousness, of appropriate planning, of relevant action. And I'm being an attacker of attitudes/analyses/behavior I believe will increase rather than relieving misery and hopelessness and violence.

4. I adduce now a fact militating against false guilt and thereby protecting my privileges-enjoyment against erosion from an undeserved bad conscience: The population average age in all 127 "Third World" countries is declining, SO (another positive world-true correlation) their economic misery is inclining, increasing. Yes, there are correlations of my privileges with their miseries (in terms of sec.1, class 1 & class 2 correlations)--but this is not one of them except remotely and less pertinently than classes 3-5 are pertinent to their baby-boom present-&-future miseries. Contrast successful baby-control in the rising economies of the Far East: Japan, Korea, Taiwan, China--indeed, every nation crawling up out of Third-World status ("Third World" here as an economic reference rather than a political-alignment reference). If "the Church" is honest and realistic, it will (1) accept, for the foreseeable future, Third World economic misery (though applying palliatives publicly recognized as only palliatives), and (2) attack, rhetorically and actionally, baby-overproduction everywhere as antisocial and anti-environmental. PROBLEM: "The Church" is, vis-a-vis many methods of baby-control, part of the problem instead of part of the solution. Eg, a close friend of mine is absolutely antiabortion though conceding that without abortion, the quality of both human life and the environment is doomed to decline! Yet that Christian claims we should "worship the Lord our God with all our mind"!