

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

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is the name of a sinful critter so visibly guilty of that sin that the subject of whether it's guilty of any other sin never arises. Of course the accusation is an anthropopathism, a projected imputation of what every tribe, nation, & tongue condemns in human beings, viz moving too slowly (whatever the particular culture's normal-average speed), from being **under-motivated**. No society applies the criticism to the debilitated, those understood to be enfeebled by disease or advanced age. No, we're talking lazy, indolent, sluggish (yes, like another slow-movin' critter), idle by choice, drifting, shiftless, do-nothing....Same root as "slow."

This Thinksheet is about the "**habitual disinclination to exertion**" (RHD²), as a personal-moral but especially as an ecopolitical factor.

1 This morning, on one of our grapevines, I saw, a few feet above me, a winter wren--not yet gone south!--alternately singing & bugging. Bugging all day long is its alternative to death. But contrary to nature, some humans survive in spite of sloth. In the earliest surviving layer of early Christian literature, Paul's Thessalonian letters, we encounter this tough word (2.3.10 NRSV): "Anyone unwilling to work should not eat." Says Ab. Kuyper (TO BE NEAR UNTO GOD [Eerd./25], p.479), "The lark which meets the sun with a song, not the snail which marks its slimy track on the hard clay, is the image of the redeemed."

Personal food-deprivation (ie, fasting) can benefit the individual & even, as witness, society: social (ie, coerced) food-deprivation--which can be negative (ie, no food) or positive (ie, no food unless...)--can also benefit both. Against idlers, Paul here recommends positive social food-deprivation. The early churches were, because of their heightened sense of compassion, easy marks for internal loafers & (as the Ep. of Diognetus shows) external, nonChristian leeches. End-of-the-world speculation was only one of the excuses for quitting work & freeloading....Well, didn't the early churches practice food-distribution to the needy? Yes, but not to the willfully needy, the unemployed-by-choice:

EEK AND MEEK



In the same chapter, same section (vv.6-15, on idlers), Paul thrice (vv.6,7,11) uses the stem $\alpha\tau\alpha\kappa\tau$ - *atakt*-, whose literal meaning is military: getting "out of line" or "out of rank," thus (as KJV) "disorderly," but then broadly (as NRSV, here) "idle" (which means not working; I'd prefer "lazy," which puts the emphasis on the indolent spirit behind willful inactivity, the attitude of those who choose to avoid productive work). ("Lazy" does not occur in the KJV Bible; & in RSV once--Tit.1.12--& with a different Gk. wd. behind it.) (In the NT, our stem occurs only in Paul's Thes. correspondence; 1.5.14, where [NRSV] "the idlers" are to be "admonished," completes the NT references.)

Paul himself models the contrast: far from idle, he supports himself, working "night and day" (1.2.9). No lazybones, he! Besides the Christian inherent incentives to diligence, the social context--persecution (1.3.1-10)--demanded an inner & outer strength antithetical to sloth, a rugged character sloth would erode.

tation (unemployment), lies in its being habit-forming, custom-making, & culture-determining (eg, the British UUs panned by Wodehouse, &--at the social bottom-- "the culture of poverty")....Greek $\eta\theta\omicron\varsigma$ *ethos*, which gets transliterated into Eng. as "ethic(s)," means in the singular "habit," in the plural "character" (a constellation of habits); & societally it means "custom(s)" (Lat. *mores*, from which of course our "moral(s)"; as usual, the Gk. wd. for us is theory, viz "ethics," & the Lat. practice, behavior, viz. "morals"--ethics being the normative science of morals).

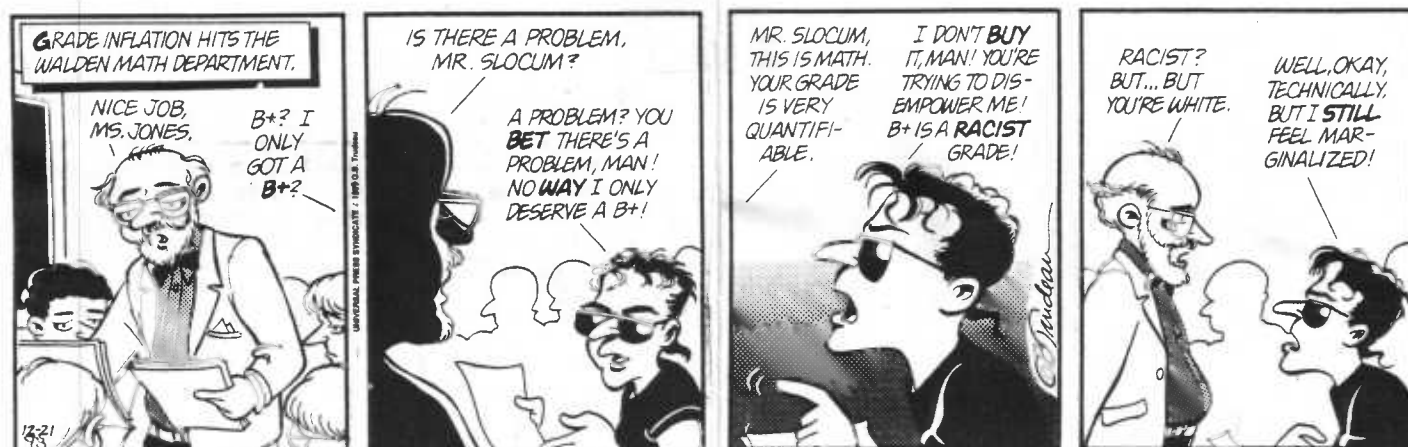
3 Why such precision about words? Because they are the tools of analysis (& thus must be sharp) & of decision-making (& thus must be pellucid, lest the deciders fall into fruitless logomachies). So we say we must "come to terms" lest we "come to blows," in situation definition & all the way through to evaluation of the action post facto. Problems: (1) Precise words seldom carry the freight of feeling, so feelings fight against them; (2) Even when participants have come to terms, if the planning-&-acting process is long, & especially if it's heated, participants tend to forget the agreed-on terms & definitions & to revert to imprecise words & rejected connotations of accepted words. (Even when a Thinksheet is word-precise, some will misunderstand it by importing meanings [ideas & feelings] the Thinksheet specifically rules out, at least for the duration of the Thinksheet's thinking.)

4 While I am by nature, nurture, & commitment disinclined to sloth of mind & spirit, not so in body: I am one of those who, lest we fall into sloth of body, must all our lives struggle for physical energy. From this condition of body I can imagine the struggles of those tempted to intellectual or spiritual sloth, or both. The prescription: good food-exercise-rest for what's weak in you--body, mind, or spirit....But sometimes a person flags all over, falls into **under-motivation** (clinically called "depression" or, earlier, "acedia/accidie" [lit., in Gk., "not-care," indifference, don'tgiveadamnness]). How this condition is diagnosed says as much about the diagnostician as about the afflicted. The materialist will be confident that chemistry can relieve the condition. Existential anxiety will be the decision of many postFreudian analysts. Humanists may call it a vice, as it violates the human-potential standard. Criminologists will see it as crime-in-the-birth-stage. And Christian ethicists see it as sin, as it frustrates faith & praise (eg, Ro.14.23 NRSV: "Anything that is not based on faith is sin.").

4 **Social caring** (in some churches called "social action"), fearing "blame the victim," is hushhush about sloth as an ecopolitical factor even though sloth as a personal-moral factor is severely disapproved by the traditional Protestant work-ethic. The result of this self-imposed scruple is a distorted situation-definition, making honest-informed dealing with social problems impossible & empowering slothfuls to steal a ride on the rhetoric of "justice." Rationalizing sloth is not racial in the sense of race-specific, & here Doonesbury cleverly shafts it by putting it in a whiteboy's mouth:

DOONESBURY

By Garry Trudeau



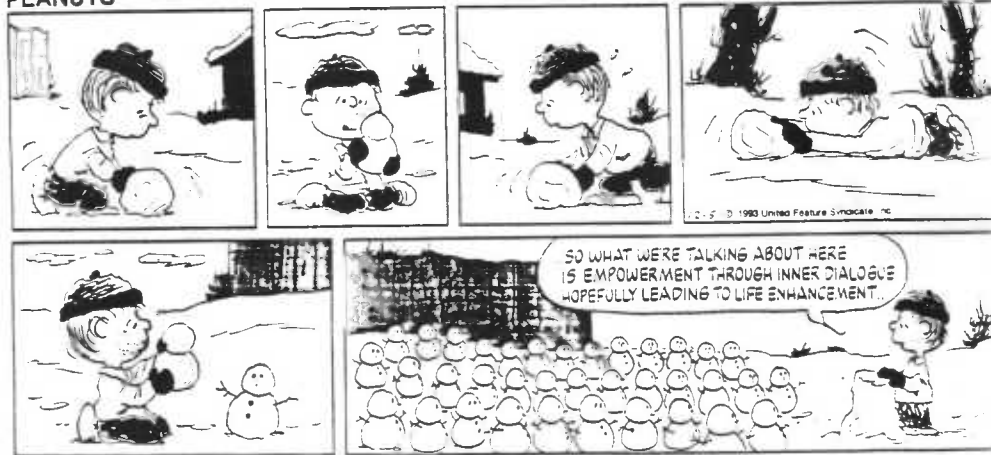
As an old teacher, I conclude that the fact that this student could be so aggressive in seeking grade-elevation proves he had the energy to do better work but was slothful. But admitting sloth is possible only if one has repented of sloth. Since only repentance could authentically rid him of his vice-crime-sin, & he's impenitent, he gets rid of it inauthentically by projecting the blame onto the system in the person of the teacher, who thus is accused of depriving him of power, dis-em-powering him.

Now see how, 16 days later, PEANUTS spoofs the psychosociojargon of liberationism. Charlie Brown creates his own minisociety in the interest of liberating the powerless. But note the twist from ecopolitical em-powerment, the freedom-movements' meaning, to inner change in the interest of personal, not societal, life enhancement! "Power" is the word common to both cartoons; the first uses it with socio-babble, the second with psycho-babble. Both babbles **conceal** sloth: honest language, plain & complex, can **reveal** it, as I'm now trying to do in this Thinksheet.

The cartoon-strip medium mirrors society's current fears & hopes. The 11Nov93 HAGAR THE HORRIBLE speaks to both hope (the father's hope his son will go straight, be self-disciplined to goodness) & the fear that the present moral quality, character, of the U.S.

PEANUTS®

BY CHARLES SCHULZ



populace may not be high enough to sustain a free society. HH himself is the very image of the undisciplined, atactic (to take off from our Gk. Wd. in §1) personality! Here, in the first three boxes, are HH's advice to his son: "When you reach the fork in the road, take the road on the right--the high road....When you reach the cross-roads, go towards **goodness**....When the sign says city of worldliness, you stay on course for city of your soul." But in the last box, HH points to a signpost & says, "Now this is where it gets tricky!" I leave you to see how sloth enters into these signs. Two of them, the bottom ("NO LOITERING") & the top ("NOW ENTERING INERTIA"), point nowhere. The four pointers say "MORAL AMBIGUITY," "RATIONALIZATION," "DEEP DENIAL," & "SELF-DELUSION."

5 **Inertia**, a sloth metaphor from physics. The lit. Lat. means "unskilled," but then the indisposition to learn a skill & be faced with pressures to exercise it. Since change involves learning new skills, the slothful are a drag on progress: nothing, they say, should be done for the first time. Those of us who are concerned to see movement toward a more just society must confront & outwit, where we cannot rationally convince, the stand-patters. Too, tabus & prejudice are friends of sloth. They block the tough thinking-deciding necessary when "new occasions teach new duties"--eg, on social disorder (crime) & environmental degradation (industrial policy, overpopulation). When I hear "I just don't want to think about it," I can be sure that intellectual sloth is one weasel at work. Since in both Testaments we are to love the Lord our God with all our minds as well as with everything else we've got, intellectual sloth is unacceptable behavior & should be preached against, along with other actions against it. Yes, it's hard for the preacher to call the congregation lazyheads, but preaching is not for sissies (oops, a sexist word?). First, of course, the preacher should shake off intellectual sloth, including those weasel words that conveniently obscure uncomfortable truths.

....Down with inertia!

6 Sloth is sloth no matter its etiology. Eg, as a way of **resistance** (eg, adolescent rebellion & "shufflin' nigger" impedence), it easily passes over to become a way of **existence** (eg, the adolescent become criminal, the slave become dependent). No society can get the skinny on sloth without courageously confronting both the social conditions fostering sloth (including family disintegration, racism, & sexism) & its self-victims.

NOTE: Conditions fostering sloth do not cause it: it is self-caused: it is something human beings do to themselves. The proof? Many living in sloth-fostering conditions are not slothful. And no good case can be made that sloth is genetic, though human beings differ radically in native energy-levels.

9 If not nature, then nurture? Yes, & the absence thereof: the 11-year-old murderer whose pro bono lawyer has programmed him to say, "Your honor, I have never been disciplined." There are many more who were disciplined but it didn't take: they were successfully **resistant** to personal change, as some others are to progress, to social change (undisciplined to receive the good, as some others are to achieve the good).

10 Sloth is a condition without a **modern** name. Henry Cisneros, the HUD secretary, said (26Dec93) "Homelessness is not a condition, it is an outcome of mental illness, drug abuse, alcoholism, disability, chronic illness and just plain hard times." Consciously or not, he held the human dignity of the homeless low enough to elicit simple sympathy for them & to define them as objects of governmental, not just charitable, assistance. The poor things are victims, put upon by forces beyond them: somebody ought to do something for them. But I have two prior questions: (1) Did they fall into this condition (yes, though HC says it's "not a condition") because of something they did (eg, improvidence) or didn't do (eg, because of sloth)? Ie, are they to any extent self-victims? (2) What now ought they to do for themselves, as self-helpers (eg, repent of sloth)? My questions honor their dignity & freedom, HC's situation definition fails to honor their dignity & inclines toward deeper dependency....Yes, raising the question of the personal responsibility of the homeless for their present & future condition is dangerous. The question can degenerate into a mere accusation exculpating society from responsibility, cutting the nerve of necessary social action, eg to rehab vacant housing. But the greater danger is in exculpating the homeless & thereby misdiagnosing both them & their condition, the social problem of homelessness.....I boldfaced "modern" in this section's first sentence. The moral-spiritual condition does have a **traditional** name, viz sloth. It's in Aquinas' short list of source (capital, deadly) sins. Its regress is from the sinful & disordering disinclination to seek the good & avoid evil, to a general fear of work (including for one's own spiritual welfare, spiritual laziness making the pursuit of good seem too difficult). The resulting inaction produces first sorrow & then despair, then the conclusion that life is not good so God is not good. Faith & love are impossible, life is only a sadness between two silences. Thus self-imprisoned in hopelessness, the sloth-sinner's loves collapse into self-love, whose fruits are envy, greed-&-lust indulgence, hatred, strife (disagreeableness, violence, war--as the inflated ego can brook no opposition), perpetual defeat (as reality rejects its distortion). Inner peace is destroyed, & one becomes a disturber of the public peace. And the soul is static, without the sense of direction love for the other/Other gives.

11 I thought of Aquinas when I read this in a recent speech of Wm. Bennett, former U.S. Sect. of education, then federal "drug czar," now of the Heritage Foundation: "There is a coarseness, a callousness, a cynicism, a banality and a vulgarity to our time. There are too many signs of a civilization gone rotten. And the worst of it has to do with our children: We live in a culture that at times seems almost dedicated to the corruption of the young, to ensuring the loss of their innocence before their time." Then he resurrected the ancient term acedia: "It is spiritual torpor, absence of zeal for divine things. And it brings with it, according to the ancients, 'a sadness, a sorrow of the world.' The old theologians taught that acedia arises from a heart steeped in the worldly and carnal and from a low esteem of divine things." [And this leads eventually to] "a hatred

of good altogether. And with hatred comes more rejection, ill temper, sadness and sorrow." [So] "do not surrender; get mad--and get in the fight" at home, in your neighborhood, everywhere. The old morality may not be old morality; maybe it's morality itself, the way things work within & among us humans.

12 Our Gk. NT wd. in §1, as it's used in the papyri contexts, means (MM) "remissness in daily work and conduct" (AG: "insufficient inclination to disciplined work"). How **motivate** out of this condition? Tough love, property pride, & fear. Here I'll deal only with the bearing **socialism** has on sloth, unfortunately a negative bearing: socialism unwittingly promotes sloth.

Socialism seeks to **reduce** suffering, Christianity to **redeem** it. Why not combine them? I did, for decades. I called myself variously a Christian socialist, a democratic socialist, an economic democrat. Norman Gottwald continues in this tradition: "Economic democracy ["democratic socialism"] is central to human welfare" (365, THE HEBREW BIBLE: ITS SOCIAL WORLD AND OURS [Scholars Press/93]). But I have sadly concluded that any socialism *only in theory* can transcend the positive- & negative-sanctional liabilities every socialism *in practice* has foundered on.

To be fair to Gottwald, here are some statements worth pondering: (1) We need to investigate the "theopolitical analogies" between the biblical & the U.S. societies. (2) We can agree on "the manifest inability of bourgeois liberalism, Marxist socialism, and political romanticism [eg, Nazism] as they have been practiced to produce what they have aspired to," & that "no 'fourth way out'...present[s] itself to break the deadlock of the ideologies."....."The key pieces [needed]: 1. Genuine economic democracy (the strong card of Marxist ideology). 2. Genuine respect for the personhood of all citizens (the strong card of liberal ideology). 3. Genuine respect for the particularities of ethnicity, culture, and religion (the strong card of benign political romanticism)" (382)... "Our crucial role is to keep pointing and living toward the new polis that is biblical promise and present necessity," for which we need "a reborn church" (383).

13 Right after WWI, my father was hopeful for the new Russia; right after WWII, I was hopeful for the new East Germany. Both regimes foundered on personal sloth &, parallel curse, political apathy, as the world could see when the USSR collapsed & the Berlin wall was torn down....Consider how the motivators in §12 fared in those two communisms: (1) Private tough-love primarily in & through family was subverted to love of the ideology & the regime; (2) property pride became shame, the government forbidding private property (which has now ragingly revived under Chinese "capitalist communism"); & (3) fear was transmogified from personal fear of failure to social fear, the fear of the state. Now, the East Germans are struggling up out of their socialism-induced sloth, as are the workers in the former USSR.

14 In the USA, socialism is increasing, most notably with the imminence of socialized medicine, which I'm a little more than halfmindedly for, as its increase of sloth will not be, I think, too great a price to pay for the increase of benevolence. But the price should be looked at in light of the fact that every increase of government benevolence since FDR's "freedom from want" has deepened citizens' dependence on government. Ultimate dependence is slavery, & slaves have duties without rights: ultimate independence is anarchy, & anarchists have rights without duties: ideal democracy balances duties & rights without equality (as God makes humans unequal): ideal socialism achieves equality, but at the cost of liberty. To plagiarize a current ad against the Clinton health plan, "There must be a better way." But what is it short of the fullcome Kingdom of God? We can't name it but I believe we can describe it. It must promote "family values," especially tough love. It must not depress socially contributive personal ambition in property (land, patents, copyrights, liquid investments, inheritance rights) & power (elective & appointive offices in private & public institutions, including all levels of government): it must not unnecessarily intervene in the people's reward-systems. And while providing minimal safety nets, it must not overprotect the people from risk & its learnings, from failure & its pains. And for some failures--eg, the failure to be civil to neighbor & responsible to creditors--it must inflict pain (1) in hope of re-

storative-corrective results but, either way, (2) to assure public safety & maintain public tranquility.

15 Both **competition** & voluntary **cooperation** attack sloth. W. Edwards Deming rightly said that worker sloth, malingering, underproduction should be expected where the workers do not participate in management, eg in quality control, ie where the fundamental manager-worker relationship is adversarial--his remedy for the U.S./unions standoff being, however, rejected. But he sold the Japanese on cooperative goal-setting, quality control, & teamwork. Now Chrysler & some other corporations have imported "the Japanese model"! Not that the Japanese have become noncompetitive; rather, they have combined the two motivators. "We" cooperate among ourselves & compete with "them." Better would be "we" competing with where & what we were, but that would not be as powerful against sloth as is the present nationalistic arrangement....My point is to indicate how powerful, under any arrangement, is the sloth factor.

16 Sloth is both a sign & a cause of **social disintegration**. Both Martin King & Malcolm X decried it in black America, as more recently have Wm. Raspberry, Thos. Sowell, Walter Williams, & Louis Farrakhan. Not evil white devils but, along with sloth, licentiousness, criminality (esp. black-on-black violence), & drugs (including alcohol). When in a national convention of an African-American denomination Pres. Clinton, November 14, decried this sad picture, emphasizing the breakdown of family values in the black community, blacks did not jump all over him, as they would have before the polls began to show that violent crime has replaced the economy as our nation's No.1 worry: they said "We know it, & we're glad you said it. Now it's up to us to do something about it." Progress: we, black & white, need not any longer tiptoe around the realities of sub-middle-class black life, fearing to be accused of "blaming the victim." The responsibility of the self-victim is with the self....This new openness is shattering some remedy-impeding myths, such as that young black men are violent because they can't find jobs. Jobs are there but they're too slothful to take them or, when they do take them, too undisciplined (again, too slothful) to keep them. The proof: nonblacks coming into the community take & keep the entry-level, poor-paying, seemingly dead-end jobs. And there will be no good jobs for those whose character is too low to serve well in "poor" jobs. It hurts me to use such plain speech; but the time for perfumed speech, speech designed to avoid offending, is past.

17 Since pride is usually first in the lists of the Seven Deadly Sins, I noticed it was the first of the seven banners in Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center, where we heard Kurt Weill's music to Bertolt Brecht's "The SDS." But the text puts sloth first: Brecht was speaking to the condition of the German people just before Hitler took them over. Moral: sloth is politically dangerous, not just morally-spiritually-physically ruinous! And deliverance from sloth releases volcanoes of energy--in 1933 Germany, for both creation & destruction.

Sins lists beginning with pride consider that the root-sin. Well, what would happen if you were to consider sloth the root-sin? The German-English libretto answers: as fruits, all the other sins! Anna "was always quite a one for an arm-chair," & (a bromide I grew up on) "The devil finds work for idle hands to do." As the text (cotranslated by W.H.Auden) puts it 8 times in the 16 lines before the family's prayer for her in "1. Sloth," "Lazy Bones are for the Devil's stockpot": Anna, by her sloth, gets boiled up for sinful soup. The section concludes with her family's prayer, "O Lord,...show her the way that leads the Good to Thy reward,...incline her heart to observe all Thy commandments that her works on earth may prosper."....At the end of the seventh section, Anna says to herself "You know, when our life here is over, those who were good go to bliss..., those who are bad are rejected forever." And her family responds, "Who fights the good fight and all self subdues, wins the Palm, gains the Crown." The last advice she gives herself is this: "Don't let the flesh and its longings get you....Beauty will perish and youth pass away." Our antiheroine, upon returning home, has completed what historian Fred Siegel would call a journey of "moral deregulation." Hers has been a history of yielding to every temptation within range, beginning with slothful overuse of that arm-chair. Sloth, today the root-sin?

18 The moral sickness of 1918-32 (pre-Hitler) Germany could be expressed as *die Unabhdngikeit des NEIN!*--the inability to say NO! Brecht's Anna cannot manage it. She scolds herself, telling herself "You must learn to say No," but she believes & practices "anything we choose we are permitted to do." She preaches to herself, "Practice self-control, Anna," but "All the profits go for her pleasure," & a favorite scripture of hers is "Resist not evil."

That permissivistic mood pervaded American middle-&-upper-class American apolitical youth of the '60s: "To forbid is forbidden." That spirit continues to have pseudophilosophical support in the notion that there are no moral absolutes. And that false notion is a plank in the platform of multiculturalism.

The truth is that the NO from ethical absolutes is essential to the YES of freedom. If forbidding is indeed forbidden, a particular forbidden soon becomes apparent, viz freedom. In a matter of only a few months in 1933, German citizens lost their freedom. Political freedom is the outer expression of the inner freedom ethicists call character. What now is causing chaos in our country is that political freedom has not declined as fast as character has: we are living in moral & civil chaos because freedoms have not been taken away fast enough to maintain (hateful phrase in the '60s!) law & order. Since all publics consider chaos an excessive price to pay for freedom, government at all levels is now being pressured to "crack down on crime" of all kinds, & a blessed intolerance (NEIN-saying) is settling in upon us in spite of the cries of such groups as the NRA & the ACLU.

19 Ignorance of the moral classics has made America's cultural leaders, including the liberal clergy, vulnerable to situationism-contextualism ("it [how to behave] all depends on the situation"). The notion that adultery is not always wrong has torn up the Presbyterian Church even more than has abortion & homosexuality, & recently 600 of their clergy met to consider whether to pull out & form a new denomination.

Yes, I'm suggesting the reading of the moral classics as a cure for this (un)ethical nonsense. Eg, Edgar Sheffield Brightman's MORAL LAWS (Abingdom/33). Sample (p.22): "The refutation of ethical skepticism must lie in the appeal to experience and to reason. The appeal to experience will determine whether we do actually experience values: Do I evaluate, do I feel obligation, do I think in universals? If these facts are there, they are the materials of a science of ethics." "Love," as used by Fletcher & his successors, is too protean to serve as a moral absolute....

20but **antisloth** is a moral absolute, condemned by all moralities & by ethicists always & everywhere. This being so, sloth should be forbidden (yes, forbidding it should NOT be forbidden!). Eg, since education is a freedom factor & sloth is an antifreedom factor, forbidding youth to be slothful is action in favor of their freedom no matter their opinion at the moment. Accordingly, dropping out of school should be made more painful than staying in. Once this conclusion is reached, what remains is to decide upon, legislate, & enforce the most prohuman pain available under the circumstances. Ideas crowd in upon me, but also upon you, do they not? Of course any pain decided on will violate at least one of the presently socially sanctioned & legal freedoms. But those freedoms are not sacred (inviolable, absolute); they need reevaluating in light of the changed circumstances of our time ("new occasions teach new duties")....The churches are a diminishing moral force in America. That would cease to be so if we were to engage in vigorous dialog-teaching-preaching in the vein of this §.

We have some leaders who see the need for such deeper analysis of our life together & its possibilities. Last spring in Texas, Hillary Rodham Clinton put it straight: "We suffer from a sleeping sickness [sloth!] of the soul," the feeling "that we lack at some core level meaning in our individual lives, and meaning collectively, that sense that our lives are part of some greater effort, that we are connected to one another....Let us be willing to remold society by redefining what it means to be a human being." We need to find, & exploit, the moral absolutes & cultural commonalities. Saying the same, in great detail, are such recent books as Stephen Carter's THE CULTURE OF DISBELIEF & Amitai Etzioni's THE SPIRIT

OF COMMUNITY. The latter's "Communitarianism" movement says that morality & community are coeval: when one declines, so does the other. Our situation: "Destruction comes quickly. A vacuum prevails. Reconstruction is slow. This is where we are now: it is time to reconstruct." This includes putting "we" over "me," responsibilities over rights (despite the screaming civil libertarians).

My metaphor: Morality is the skeleton, the bone-frame, of community, which without it is a blob of immobile, rotting flesh. "Rights" are negative: their statement is to oppose invasions of the person; "responsibilities" are positive: their statement is to direct persons to their tasks in community. Being negative, "rights" foster sloth: being positive, "responsibilities" foster diligence, the citizen's being industrious, energetic, active in line of duties for the common good, the commonwealth or commonweal ("welfare" in its pre-"rights" meaning). In one NT passage, Heb.6.10-12 NRSV, the antonyms appear together: "God...will not overlook your work....show the same diligence..., so that you may not become *sluggish*, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

20 Here's a fact suggesting how intensely concerned the NT is about this Thinksheet's subject: 18 Greek words in the "idle-delay" domain! Of these the six major (three on the same stem, discussed early in the Thinksheet) are displayed on pp.768-9 of vol.1 of Louw & Nida's GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON OF THE NT Based on Semantic Domains--on "Laziness, Idleness." Basic ideas are "to refuse being engaged in the efforts of work," "habitually refusing to work" ("lazy, good-for-nothing"), "sluggish or slow to become involved in some activity," "shrinking from or hesitating to engage in something worthwhile, possibly implying lack of ambition," "a person who habitually idles in the marketplace--'loafer, bum'" (therefore, good mob-or-riot-making material: Ac.17.5).

21 The seriousness of sloth is societal, not just personal & small-scale. Permit this dysfunctional behavior anywhere, & it will metastasize everywhere throughout the body politic. Thus the wry USSR saying "Everybody has a job but nobody works." And thus the present USA effort to move welfare, which has become illfare, to workfare. One welfare loophole now plugged in three states is teen pregnancy as a ticket to financial independence from the girl-woman's parents. Those who teach Skinnerian "positive [with no negative] reinforcement" imagine that programming girls to "self-esteem" will destroy the collusion of biology & bastardy, but that conspiracy against the quality of human life, private & public, can be broken only by the combined force of positive & negative sanctions.

Negative sanctions? An old corrective theme of mine. If the slothful feel neither *guilt* (psychospiritual pain vis-a-vis God or Life Itself) nor *shame* (... vis-a-vis other human beings personally & collectively), the pain level in most cases will be insufficient to overcome inertia. Thus also for bastardy & other crimes against societal health....Please note "sufficient": that is the corrective between the extremes, viz the punitive & the permissive. But this *via media* is the road least traveled. When I speak for correctives, the permissives accuse me of being punitive & the punitives accuse me of being permissive!

22 Many Christian ethicists say that what's distinctive about Christian ethics is that it's both kind & severe--as Ro.11.22 NRSV ("Note then the kindness and the severity of God"; Brightman *loc.cit.*: "Christian ethics is a synthesis of benevolence & severity;...of value with duty and law"). In actual practice, the correctional Christian will sometimes be found among the punishers, sometimes among the permitters. But sometimes the church can speak & act for afflicting offenders against public health & peace with just the right level of pain to do the trick, to accomplish pro-human change. But to be ready for in-this-sense corrective thought & action, the church can lean neither conservative (the needs & rights of society) nor liberal (the needs & rights of the individual).

Trouble: Particular hot-button issues (eg, abortion, bastardy, homosexuality, capital punishment) so blow most folks' minds that they can't think straight, not to say nuancedly. In the heat of debate, most folks slide down the sides of the bellcurve into the comfort of conservative or liberal extremism. But if the church, a church, can be persuaded of the soundness of the **principle of**

sufficient pain, reason will have more hope of winning one once in a while, or at least of being respected in play, each side making concessions as agreed-on facts & values indicate. Yesterday I came upon a humorous word for those, & those discussions & decisions, lacking respect, under the heat of passion, for reason: "reality-impaired." I suppose it got a bigger chuckle out of me because I am sight-impaired: I can't see so good. But it'd be worse if I were reality-impaired: I could not think so good, which would be awful! You, dear reader, sometimes think I don't think so good; but you credit me with trying to do hard & necessary thinking that aims not so much to persuade you as to incite you to think better, & act better for the glory of God & the good of humanity & the good earth.

23 The obvious first question about the principle of sufficient pain is "pain": torture is inflicting pain: am I advocating torture? Torture (Lat., "twisting") inflicts pain to punish, as revenge, as cruelty, or to extract information or confession. None of these motives applies to correctional pain, which aims to increase rational reality-facing & therefore freedom. Eg, school dropouts & throwouts should be forced to "take pains" at something constructive outside of school, eg "on pain" of food-deprivation; & that something constructive should include the requirement of literacy. U.S. Sect. of Labor Reich predicted for '94 a 2 million increase of jobs, virtually none of them open to illiterates. In a technologically advanced society, as ours more & more is, illiteracy is parasitism. We have a growing parasitic underclass fed by the 40% school-dropout rate. Society need not tolerate this slothful, sluggish social bilge. But to prohibit it, to the benefit of all but especially of the underclass, would require **radical reform** of such traditional ideas as freedom & justice & responsibilities & rights. Liberal inertia resists the necessary rethinking; but the rising concern for public safety (the crime issue) & public financial soundness (the entitlements issue) is beginning to force the rethinking, against the objections of civil libertarians & the pronouncements of liberal churches. I? I am against liberty & for freedom.

24 Government should proscribe sloth & encourage incentives. Ironically, some "capitalist communist" countries are consciously doing both, while our own country slothfully, inertially, continues on the opposite course. Government subsidies, eg on tobacco, deepen the agricultural-health problem they are designed to alleviate (&, in this instance, sicken the populace with nicotine). Welfare as kindness without severity of regulation is another instance of government subsidies' deepening problems they are intended to alleviate. Why? Because welfare subverts the principle of just compensation, severing rewards from productive work & dubbing the rewards "rights." The consequent moral decline was predictable, for economic justice cannot operate where the interplay of compensation & created value is disturbed....For the good liberal reason of compassionate concern for the underdog, we have unwittingly drifted down into creating an underclass composed of habitual underdogs. If we confess that we have done this to ourselves, there is hope. There is no hope if we set our minds, vis-a-vis the underclass, only on improving riot control in our cities & prisons, or giving an underclass-blame-free account of our societal malaise....Prison note: Insanely, our prisons grant the prisoners the right to sloth! Most of them exercise this right, & carry the habit back into society when they are released. Back in society, they "work" various government programs, eg food stamps, which reinforce the right to sloth. Atop this insanity, our government condemns governments that do not grant their prisoners the right to sloth, ie that require prisoners to engage in productive labor, pejoratively called by the U.S. government "forced labor."

25 **Hope** is the essential antisloth ingredient: "in [mg by] hope we were saved" (Ro.8.24 NRSV). Roman Catholics who go pray to St.Jude, Patron of Lost (Hopeless) Causes, are, in going & praying, paradoxically expressing what they seem to have surrendered: people who have really given up hope wouldn't pray, certainly wouldn't go & pray. But mindless hope is a form of sloth: the triumph of hope over experience, doing the same things over & expecting different results. Mindless hope fattens bureaucracy: in '93, says a U.S. government report, the welfare population declined but welfare costs rose! Mindless hope tolerates faulty

memory, slipshod data-gathering, desultory analysis, & timid proposals.

26 A word about what let's call **dead-dream sloth**, the lethargy of the failed revolutionary whose hope has dried up like a raisin in the sun, the torpor of the daily drudge whose overexpectation as an institutional servant has led to paralyzing depression, the apathy of those overwhelmed by battle fatigue in the grinding ever-fight "against all the forces that work to flatten what could be into the single dimension of what is." (The quoted words are from Michael Albert's *STOP THE KILLING TRAIN: RADICAL VISIONS FOR RADICAL CHANGE* [South End Press/93]: "keep thinking and talking about more desirable visions....keep refining what we want....keep analyzing what will get it and what will not....Because if the dream dies, there is nothing.")

27 Then there's the **inverted intellectual sloth** of action without reflection adequate to critique the action; let's call it actionistic sloth. Robt. C. Linthicum confesses it in *CITY OF GOD, CITY OF SATAN: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF THE URBAN CHURCH* (Zondervan/91). Actionistic sloth erodes, too, the life of devotion: after three years of no daily devotion, Linthicum was "spiritually bankrupt" (235), & suggests that every urban minister needs a spiritual director to monitor the condition of heart & mind & relationships (248). In the UCC, the "Confessing Christ" movement is seeking to address the spiritual & intellectual costs of the drift into actionistic sloth. Without perpetual vigilance, spirit & mind--as also body physical & political--slump into sloth, then into aimlessness.

28 The Lord's Prayer is prophylactic against sloth, habituating us to the one dependence that frees us from delusions of self-importance & illusions about the consequences of our well-intentioned behavior. "Almost every choice, however good, has some undesirable consequences; and almost every choice, however bad, has some desirable consequences" (Brightman, *op.cit.*, 154). We need to think & act with courage, but also with a history-&-personal-experience-chastened humility.