the brunswickan

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OPINION...

REAPING WHAT WE SOW

Not often do we in the prosperous West learn one of life's most difficult lessons, namely, that actions have consequences. More willing are we to fool ourselves. We frequently turn our backs, close our eyes or arrest our cerebral functioning to the problems our actions may create. We then assume they will not develop, or that they will go away.

Today we are dearly paying for the tunnel vision of yesteryear. What were initially often minor difficulties or impingements seeking proper correctives have, due to our neglect, become major individual, national or international crises. And, what appeared at first to be liberating, has on many occasions slowly come to be a threat to our personal or global well-being. We in this "enlightened age" have frequently become little more than victims of our own self-interest, self-gratification, and self-aggrandizement?

Our self-induced tunnel vision has not really served in our best interest. Today it is becoming abundantly clear to most everyone that the environment has a tolerance level that has been frightfully surpassed. For years we thoughtlessly abused the recreational waters of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the Great Lakes. Now that abuse is washing back into our faces and curtailing our leisure, that very thing which was a direct indicator of prosperous and advanced nations. Furthermore, the burning of our life-sustaining forests, the rape and overcropping of precious agricultural land, and the chemical pollution of the very waters which we drink, all in the interest of economic advancement and material well-being, now haunt us on a daily basis. Our actions have consequences. We are reaping what we have sown, and the harvest is now a concern.

Who is to blame? Is it industry, some of which, it must be admitted, blatantly pollutes and wastes? Or is it also our individual selves, who adopt a lifestyle which advocates abuse of our bodies and the environment, and encourages wasteful consumption of scarce resources? You and I both know that we smoke too much and drink too much. We are also easily duped into believing that we need, for example, those sleek, new, fast cars to enhance our image. Fortunately, we have become aware that much of this is unhealthy for the body and wasteful for the environment. Unfortunately, their curtailment requires an adjustment in our lifestyles, and that is an infringement on our freedom which we do not easily accept.

The environment is not, of course, the only area of concern. The sexual revolution begun in the Sixties was hailed as putting the last nail in the Victorian coffin. It has spilled-over into the 80's. Unfettered by moral restrictions of an earlier age, it is prominently flaunted for all to see. However, these actions too have consequences. This lifestyle sends stong signals to the unsuspecting and vulnerable, and exerts tremendous pressure for social conformity.

The exclusive right to control and determine one's own body may indeed be a significant and liberating step for women. But that same right is not given to all. At serious risk, for one, is fetal life. Engaging in sexual intimacy may have consequences not initially anticipated. What then of the responsibility for creating new life? Is the personal convenience, comfort and pursuit of the powerful to determine again today, as in the past, the survival of the powerless?

If freer sexual attitudes are increasing, so are the occurrences of "date rape". This forceful behavior is the outcome of the belief that a sexual encounter is the expected ending to a meaningful evening. But such action is as unfulfilling as it is insensitive, and a clear violation of the other person. It's consequence is the growing lack of meaningful relationship building based on mutual trust and respect.

The reluctance of our nation's leaders to advocate or legislate morality has resulted in a form of pornography and prostitution which irrepairably scars for life its teenage and child victims. These participants are often innocent prey for those who insist that a modern society must not impede the freedom to exercise libidinal drives. The unsuspecting become subjected to a life of degradation, drugs and violence, and are frequently robbed of attaining or maintaining normal, healthy relationships.

Who is responsible: the perpetrators, the victims, or the general public? Do we not all bear a responsibility? Our actions, or lack thereof, have consequences. Every time we pick up that magazine, view that movie, encourage, condon or even neglect that activity, we create an effect. That effect entices those most vulnerable to adopt a lifestyle which will be anything by liberating, let alone fulfilling.

What we have achieved in our free world has given us a freedom never dreamed of by previous generations. No doubt we have advanced much in areas that gives us greater personal security, comfort, health and material wealth. Our endeavours in these areas have had positive outcomes.

But, all our actions have consequences. And, since we are reluctant to accept limitations or restrictions to free actions, since we are unwilling to fully consider the consequences of all we do, we are also likely to reap their destructive side effects for some time yet. That is, unless we ourselves slowly take ownership of these problems. That we have begun to do with the environment. If we decide that self-interest and self-gratification are really self-defeating, then we have taken that all-important first step in eliminating those things which choke not only our environment, but also our humanity. Then our actions will enhance rather than retard life.

JOHN VALK
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