

LIBERATION v. LICENSE

Apollo
The Bible

Dionysos
The media, instance "The Sandpiper" (1965)

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636
Phone 508.775.8008
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At Esalen (Big Sur, CA), not far in space or time from when & where this film was shot, Sam Keen asked me to critique his MS "Apollonian & Dionysiac," precursor to his TO A DANCING GOD, which became a Human-Potential classic. He'd been an Apollonian (prof. of theology & culture, Louisville Presbyterian Seminary), having a well-disciplined mind & life, but was in process of converting to Dionysianism--in his modified sense, emphasis on the sensate over the intellectual, the sensuous over the spiritual. Then as today, I tilted in the opposite direction, yet saw enough truth in what he was trying to do that he thought me an appropriate successor to him at Louisville, & I was offered the contract. This personal story should warn you against reading this Thinksheet's title as though it presents a simple true/false moralism.

1 At his inaugural, Pres. Elect Clinton put his hand on a well-worn personal Bible open to Galatians, whose theme is **freedom** in Christ. We use that Anglo-Saxon word to explain the two Latinisms in this Thinksheet's title (as indeed English uses its Anglo-Saxon base to exegete its own Latinisms, Grecisms, & foreign imports). "Liberation" is the act or process of becoming **free**; & license is permission, other-or-self-given, to be **free** of constraints, restraints, regulations, rules, laws, customs, conventional behavior, morals, obligations, responsibilities.

Specifically, the old Bible's opening was at chap.5, which begins "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." Sounds like license if you don't know who it is who has set us free: not Dionysos the libertine (god of wine & frenzy) but Christ the Liberator, who has freed us to his discipline (to be his "disciples") both from alternative disciplines & from license. His discipline frees us from invidious human prejudices (3.28), so that we can freely "do good to all" (6.10) while knowing that it's not easy (vs.9, "let us not grow weary in well-doing...faint not") & that what counts is "faith working through love" (5.6). Cynicism enervates, & utopianism's certain collapse leads to cynicism. But we can, & are enjoined to, restore the fallen (6.1) & "bear one another's burdens" (vs.2) while each one shoulders one's own pack (vs.5 Phillips).

Note on **liberty**: Clinton's Bible read "Stand fast...in the liberty...." (Gal.5.1 KJV). Why do we have the Liberty Bell (not the Freedom Bell), the Statue of Liberty, "liberty and justice for all"? Because the FF, our U.S. Founding Fathers, being familiar with Latin, a language of higher dignity because they'd learned it in school, invested richer & solemn meanings in "liberty" than in "freedom"--& also because of their frequent use of the assonant phrase "liberty & law." The association of the two words helps explain why our legal phrase is "religious liberty," while the cultural phrase is "religious freedom."

Dionysos is for license, but the Bible is for liberation from both "bondage" (Gal.5.1) & irresponsible behavior. Feels good to have in the White House a chief resident who understands that.

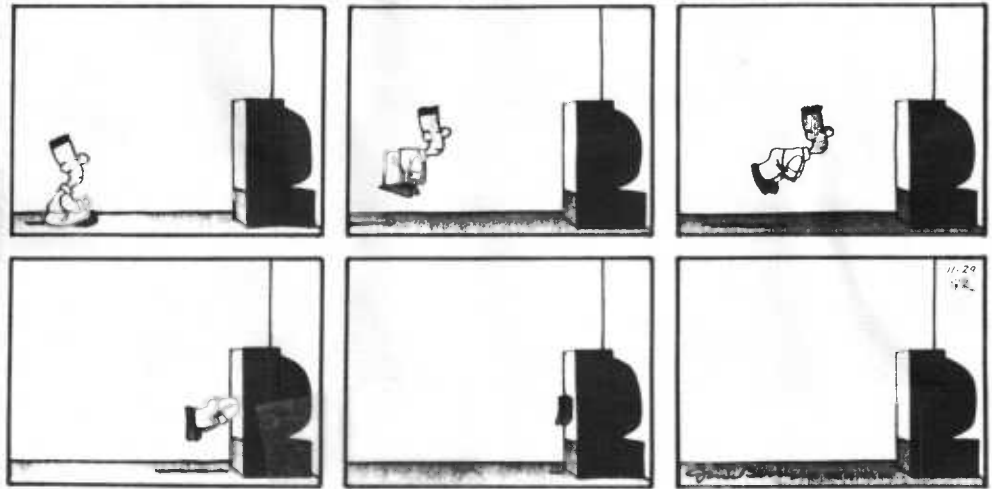
2 One more Latinism does it for now: **liberalism**. Culturally, it means a predisposition to freedom. Politically it means (1) on the right, the citizen's freedom from governmental invasions of privacy (including private property); (2) on the left, the citizen's entitlements to conditions essential to the full exercise of freedom (thus, empowerments). Religiously, it signals a preference for new light over against the relative darkness of old light (thus, modernism). Antonyms? "Radical" & "conservative." Depending on the item, I'm a conservative liberal, a liberal conservative, a radical conservative, or a radical (the last, on environmental issues). Eg, radical: I'm against our species' having license to breed freely: the right to reproduce must be degraded into the privilege of becoming a parent.

3 Film critic Michael Medved has become the personal symbol of the rising attack on Hollywood (the cinema industry) license, which (along with the entertainment industry in general, especially television) has been Dionysizing Ameri-

ca (& the rest of the world to the extent, a considerable extent, to which various peoples' fall under the industry's spell). The prosecution's case is that decision-making in the industry is \$ bottom-line uninterested in the human bottom-line, the industry's moral-social-religious **trickledown**. Each of the past three generations has been more pervaded, brainwashed, inwardly-outwardly formed by the industry than the one before it as communications technology has steadily advanced.

BERRY'S WORLD here starkly pictures an electronic Moloch devouring a child who'd showed the total concentration reminding me of a saint in contemplation.

Which, then, is the alternative world? "Art imitates nature" (Seneca), but the reverse is also true: life imitates the screen; younger the life, stronger the grip.



4 Art modifies, even creates, culture & thus affects culture's root, which is religion. Arguments that the media should be only self-regulating are at the same low (il)logical level as similar arguments vis-a-vis drugs (including nicotine) & the health-care industry. The evidence is overwhelming that the media have been creating a culture hostile to the basic human values, licentious, violent, banal, hopeless--in short, anomic (a synonym of Dionysiac). Says the old culture, "Imitate what is good" (3Jn.11): say the media, "Give us your money" directly or, through response to our ads, indirectly. But the deeper question is why the public has permitted itself to become so plastic to this corrosive, corrupting mass culture, so passive to its anything-goes cynicism. Why, asks Wm. Fore of NCC, have the media succeeded for millions in taking over from religion the role of offering an alternative world? One fruitful line of answering, my line in this Thinksheet, is that "the movements," beginning four decades ago, while having done much good, have so alienated the public against what was bad in the past that what was good has fallen out of sight; & the criticisms have constellated themselves into an ideology of anti-values. Let's trace this **trickledown** from "The Sandpiper," which long ago preached:

(1) **Individual autonomy.** At film's end the characters have become monads. Rich. Burton, ex-headmaster of an Ep. boys' school, quits & drives off alone, leaving both his wife (Eva Marie Saint, who quit him when he admitted adultery with Eliz. Taylor, a booming-surf nature-woman painter whose other lover, Chas. Bronson, is a sculptor) & E.T. I can testify to the verisimilitude: almost everyone I met then--there was a Dionysiac monad cut lose from significant human ties & in love with "nature" under the metaphor of the booming surf, itself a symbol of what humanity experiences as the most coercive force of nature, viz. sex. (I was thought odd for my marital faithfulness & for preaching Jesus' "Take my yoke and learn from me," the discipline of Christian devotion-life-community.)The pop-culture creators-promoters are Dionysiac monads & are no hypocrites: they're preaching what they're living. But it's a sad, unsatisfying sermon.

(2) **Lust** (passion minus responsibility) **is stronger than love** (passion plus responsible commitment). If 10% of airline flights ended in fatal crashes, who would fly? But 10% is the minimum condom-use failure, yet it doesn't deter promoters of condoms in public schools.

(3) **Bliss is finding out who you are while doing your thing.** Taylor, who despises religion & church & formal education, half-converts Burton. And Saint says "Who am I? A wife & a mother. What else? Nothing. A nonentity!"

(4) **Freedom is sacred, faithful commitment is mere sentimentality.**