

"SOCIAL ACTION": FOUR POINTS OF VIEW ----- ELLIOTT #1815

Broadbeamed is a term appropriate for a ship whose girth is more-than-usual to its length. Peder Stiansen, the great church historian from Norway, was braodbeamed. He was Viking to the core, noble, powerful; but he was Christian in the inner core, compassionate, gentle. When a student at Chicago's NBTS (where I cotaught with PS, though I'd known him previously in other connections) would say something ignorant, or deliberately outrageous, or transverse PS's own powerful convictions, he'd smile and say "It all depends upon your purnttavu" (point of view). He was spiritually convex but intellectually only concave; and I knew he was feeling sad when he said "Brother Elliott,...." after I, 1/2 century younger, had said something convex....This thinksheet is (1) against "social action" as a dogmatic, anticonvex concavity, and (2) for "social action" as a modest though firm proclamation-action within the limits of balancing, in the interest both of intelligence and of love, concaving/convexity while being adversarial, when necessary, for concavity<sup>2</sup> against concavity<sup>1</sup>....It's more than 40 years ago today (Mar/84) that I last saw PS. In the light of his wisdom and love I've tried to make one advance on him: I've tried to integrate thinking/feeling vis-a-vis concavity/convexity.

1. One who doesn't know Bucky Fuller's lingo couldn't be expected to make much sense of the above paragraph. As a design engineer, BF could feel/think fields/vectors. Material and structures flexed, i. e., bent, forces inside the curve focus toward a center; forces outside are antifocal, expansive, omnidirectional. (Augustine, 16 cs. ago, used the same geometry analogically: "God's center is everywhere and his circumference nowhere.") History is replete with expansive/contractive movements--e.g., precatholic Christianity was expansive, and the catholicizing tendency soon set in to organize the church for the values of order and protection. \*E.g., I.153(Anchor/73): "all the systems which subdivide Universe/Into insideness and outsideness,/Are concave on the inside/And convex on the outside./.../The concave and the convex/Always and only coexist" as compression and tension, as (WE analogy) a bow bent to shoot an arrow. (In this passage, BF is seeking scientific analogies of "co-occurring phenomena" to illumine the mind/brain differentiation: in this thinksheet I'm doing likewise to illumine two psychologies.)

2. Yes, two psychologies, moods, modes, tones: (1) The centrifugal, expansive, reaching out for (Ac.17.21) "the latest," as Chaucer's Oxenford clerk ("And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche"--which well describes the passion-religion-life of Isaac Asimov, who eagerly sang gospel songs with me because he'd never done it before); and (2) The centripetal, contractive, drawing in (as in evangelism, apologetic, polemic, and all ideology and dogma). The former is convex: the curve is seen from outside, as astronauts see the earth. Half my thinksheets have this point of view. The latter is concave: the curve is seen from inside, as geologists imagine earth's surface. The other half of my thinksheets have this point of view.

3. This two-way conversation of view-points (or orientations, or styles) becomes four-way when "new-wave" thinking emerges from each--so the diagram:  
V1 is concavity in its old (orthodox)

	CONCAVE	CONVEX
OLD-WAVE	V1	X1
NEW-WAVE	V2	X2

or rejuvenated (neo-orthodox, evangelical, or fundamentalist) mode. Three recent books have detailed the meaning of "social action" in this mode (e.g., the antislavery and temperance movements). X1 is the reactions, at the old-wave level, to V1 (reactions as both ex-<sup>ter</sup>

tensions and oppositions) (e.g., attitudinal and methodological modernisms, and social and moral liberalisms). V2 is concavity in its new (biblical-radical) mode, reactive to V1 and X1 but also actively starting afresh to perceive "social action" with one deontological eye (the viewpoint from human need in light of the human sciences) and one revelational eye (the biblical viewpoint)--and increasingly in tension with X2, which is radical nonbiblical (much of it Marxist) "social action." NB: "Nonbiblical," not necessarily "antibiblical" (for Marxism, e.g., is a radical-"critical" intensification of some biblical concerns, and philosophically contributive though pseudo-scientific and economically disastrous).

4. So what am I trying to do in this thinksheet?

(1) To set out the four "social actions."

(2) To imply (more than to express) that each has a dogmatic tendency that needs mellowing through encounter/dialog with the other three. As an old schoolman who studied/taught/lived in many schools of many persuasions (meaning pushed points of view), I see this mellowing as necessary both to vision-faithfulness and to service that sees the human condition and human situations with minimal doctrinal distortions.

(3) To suggest that interactions with this "purttavu" quartet will improve thinking theology as well as "doing theology." For one thing, the slogans of each point of view will be more obvious to all, and this mutual sophistication will both deliver from dogma and refresh social thinking. Can't resist quoting, here, a statement of my Cape Cod theologian-colleague Paul Schilling (GOD AND HUMAN ANGUISH, 52): "We are likely to come closest to the truth if we continually reassess the meaning of our experience as a whole, seeking always the most coherent and illuminating understanding of the facts. As part of this process, we shall ask what truths concerning God are indicated by the diversified events of our lives when they are taken together: our realizations of ethical, intellectual, aesthetic, and religious value, and the circumstances that thwart such attainment; our greed and pride and our moments of selfless concern for others; our illnesses, pains, and sorrows, and our surges of strength to surmount them; our defeats and our victories; our failures and our successes; our sense of guilt and our awareness of forgiveness; our irresponsible and our responsible attitudes and actions; our feelings of aloneness and alienation, and our consciousness of divine support received in worship and prayer. Out of such searching will not come a neat, seamless garment of understanding with no loose ends or frayed edges, but there may appear one that fits our actual existence, a faith that is at home in the real world, and truths that will enable us to live with courage and meaning."

4) To state that while, here/there//now/then, I take my stand in each of the other three, my "at rest" position on "social action" is V2. Nothing new: it's been my position since, the week of Pearl Harbor, I tried to become a Navy chaplain (and couldn't because of my eyes). By "biblical-radical" I mean two things: (1) A radical approach to the Bible--to be free IN it, knowing it thoroughly; to be free WITH it, mastering its use in ministry; and to be free FROM it, "not as the scribes" (proof-texting and otherwise giving it a sanctional status larger than life) but on Jesus' life-first model; and (2) A radical approach to human relations, institutional habits, and societal taboos and structures--illuminated by the biblical vision.

5. In this thinksheet I've written "social action," not social action: the phrase is itself a slogan, and the quote-marks signal "Beware!" and "Technical term!" It's commonly narrowed to mean "social justice"; it should include theory/praxis honesty/integrity.