

One Europe ?

The age of revolution vs. the present age

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'OR WHAT, indeed, could there be for poetry to do in a time when the younger person who is striving after something higher must feel in a spiritual sense the same symptoms as the Frenchmen on their march across the Russian steppes, where the eye vainly seeks a point on which it can rest..?', asked Kierkegaard in 1838 sitting in his study in Copenhagen, a small Western European capital (Kierkegaard 1990, 72). When the French entered Russia, their eyes were guided by the revolutionary ideas of *liberté, fraternité* and *égalité*. In this eastern European country, where both thinking and actions were ruled by other principles, they 'vainly sought a point' they could recognize and understand.

In one sentence Kierkegaard thus captures three main divisions splitting the continent: first, the distinction between East (Russia) and West (France); secondly, the contrast between revolution and peace (or better: a *status quo* situation); and lastly, that of the more ambitious poetry vs. the mere prose of everyday life. According to Kierkegaard, poetical activity is similar to revolutionary activity. Like the Frenchmen the poet tried to change the state of things. The French entered Russia with their ideology and weaponry, and these were precisely what 'blinded' them to the Russian landscape. The poet experienced the same symptoms when trying to rise to a level 'higher' than that of everyday life. What was the cause of the 'blindness' of both? Was it the 'emptiness' of the Russian landscape before the soldiers' eyes ? The 'nothingness' of the landscape of everyday life to the poet's mind ? Or was the soldiers' blindness ideological and the poet's aesthetic?

Today, ten years after 1989, we try to shape *One Europe*. We are spectators of, if not participants in, the eradication of the old European frontiers such as North-South and, especially, East-West. Is the revolution-peace distinction of the same nature? Can we, for example, abolish the divisions between the *anciens regimes* and the insurrections in the Europe of our time (not to mention those between poetry and prose)? Or must we say that a period of 'peace, progress, and prosperity' on the Continent is always followed by an age of revolution?

The actual creation of European identity is based on the concept of a threefold unification of (1) political systems, (2) juridical-social practices and (3) economic-monetary activities (common currency). The idea of *One Europe* seems to be a project for the simplification of the existing European tradition, which consists of a complex network of *contradictory* political, social, anthropological and religious values and ideas. One of these contradictions, the fundamental opposition between the anthropological-religious needs of human being and the socio-political ones, is described in Kierkegaard's works as a source of the European search for truth and authenticity.

Kierkegaard's question deals with the incongruity between the political ideas of the West and the East during the Napoleonic period. He also deals with the problem of poetry for his 'present age', with its lack of individual passion and ambitions. The younger poet could not 'see' his own position against the backdrop of the prosaic life of his city. But there is still another possibility: that both the romantic poet and the Frenchmen could not comprehend the culture of the opposite party, the cultures being either similar or contradictory to those of Napoleon's soldiers and the poet. The Frenchmen were blind to the Russian values, the poet to the values of the so-called 'normal' people.

Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), the national poet of the Poles, was an enthusiastic admirer of Napoleon and his marching troops. During his stay in the German town of Dresden, Mickiewicz wrote the famous patriotic poem *Forefathers' Eve* (1832). One of the characters of the poem passionately prophesies the 'doom of the [Russian] czarist empire, that kingdom of evil incarnate. The great flood with its unleashing of elemental forces brings to completion, thus, the symbol of winter present throughout [his] poem' (Miłosz 1983, 224).¹

¹ There were other similarities between Søren Kierkegaard and Adam Mickiewicz, who both died in 1855. For example 'in 1835 he [Adam Mickiewicz] expressed the opinion, in a letter to a friend, that too much poetry had been written for mere entertainment and that in the future a poet must be a saint...' (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ij, 37\$). Kierkegaard would probably only add to this sentence: and a martyr.

According to the Polish and (Kierkegaard's) French eyes, Russia was a country of wild natural life without any form of vigorous intellectual or social activity. But we know, both from Eastern and Western European history books, that the intellectual life of Russia in those years was very dynamic. We also know that at least some Russians *were able* to grasp the new 'points' in Western Europe. One of the most eminent students of Russian 19th century culture, Professor Ju. M. Lotman, has emphasized that at the time many Russians were equal partners in the cultural dialogue with the West. The poet Aleksandr Sergeevic Puskin (1799-1837), among other romantic writers, played an outstanding role in this process. He was able to absorb western ideas, thanks to his 'excellent knowledge of French culture' (Lotman 1988, yf).

These examples offer us a foretaste of what we may call 'European blindness'. Formed as a deep political, geographical and intellectual dichotomy, it divides Europe in two (if not more) parts. Can this contrast between on the one hand the 'emptiness' of the Russian steppes (and winters) as opposed to the lively culture of Western Europe, and on the other hand the Romantic description of an authentic individual facing the anonymous masses be explained within one, encompassing and all-mediating theory? Or are these contradictions immovable and forever mutually antagonistic parts of European consciousness?

Kierkegaard gives us a clue in his 'Literary Review' of Madame Gyllembourg's novel *Two Ages* (Kierkegaard 1978). In that book we can interpret the aforementioned distinctions in two ways. We may understand them as historical, and strictly connected with the context of 19th century Europe. And we can, as I will try to do now, accept them as a permanent European contradiction, liberated from the narrow historical context and fundamental to the life of the Continent. Let us look at how Kierkegaard expresses those distinctions. The Kierkegaardian 'actuality' is created by a dialectical relation between the age of the French Revolution and Kierkegaard's contemporary times: 'the present age' of the early 1840s. The review of

Two Ages was published two years before the revolution of 1848. But Kierkegaard retained the book's position in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* written during and after the 1848 revolution (Kierkegaard 1998, 31 footnote).

A model of the historical dynamics of modern Europe takes form in Kierkegaard's analysis of *Two Ages*. It covers the political, ethical and intellectual process of the 19th and perhaps also the 20th century with the perpetual shift between war and revolution and the 'peaceful' periods of 'prosperity'. Revolution signifies here the ahistorical, anthropological values of the individual: the passionate 'inner being'. Peace, 'the present age', stands for mass-society with its levelling of individual values by means of 'abstractions' such as newspaper journalism or paper money. Thus, according to Kierkegaard:

(1) 'the age of revolution is essentially passionate, and therefore it essentially has *form*.² Even the most vehement expression of an essential passion *eo ipso* has form, for this is the expression itself, and therefore also has in its form an apology, an element of reconciliation' (61);

(2) 'the age of revolution is essentially passionate and therefore essentially has *culture* [Danish *Dannelselse/B.Ś.*]. In other words, the tension and resilience of the inner being are the measure of essential culture. A maidservant genuinely in love is essentially cultured; a peasant with his mind passionately and powerfully made up is essentially cultured' (61f);

(3) 'the age of revolution is essentially passionate; therefore it must be able to be violent, riotous, wild, ruthless toward everything but its idea, but precisely because it still has one motivation, it is less open to the charge of *crudeness*. However externally oriented his ambitions, the person who is essentially turned inward because he is essentially impassioned for an idea is never crude. [...] When individuals (each one individually) are essentially and passionately related to an idea and together are essentially related to the same idea, the relation is optimal and normal. [...] On the other hand, if individuals relate to an idea merely *en masse* (consequently without the individual separation of inwardness), we get violence, anarchy, riotousness; but if

² Further on Kierkegaard says about the dialectics of forms: 'What is *formlessness*? It is the annulled passionate distinction between form and content; therefore in contrast to lunacy and stupidity it may contain truth, but the truth it contains can never be essentially true.' (Kierkegaard 1978, 100)

there is no idea for the individuals *en masse* and no individually separating essential inwardness, either, then we have crudeness' (62I, translation slightly changed);³

(4)'the age of revolution is essentially passionate and therefore also has a concept of *propriety* [Danish *Decorum/B.Ś.*], It may well be that it has a false concept of propriety, but it does not lack the concept. It might be supposed that propriety is a category of the understanding [i.e. Kantian reason/B.Ś.], yet it is anything but that. [... Propriety] is feeling's and passion's own invention. [...] Thus even if the age of revolution wanted to abolish marriage, it did not abolish falling in love, and for the very reason that where there is an essential passion there is also a propriety' (64F);

(5)'the age of revolution is essentially passionate and therefore has immediacy. Its immediacy, however, is not the first immediacy, and in the highest sense it is not the final immediacy, either; it is an *immediacy of reaction* and to that extent is *provisional*. [...] From the standpoint of the idea, a person finds definitive rest only in the highest idea, which is the religious, but it may well be that many remain true to themselves in the provisional all their lives. The immediacy of the age of revolution is a restoring of natural relationships in contrast to a fossilized formalism which, by having lost the originality of the ethical, has become a dessicated [*sic*] ruin, a narrow-hearted custom and practice' (65);

(6)'the age of revolution is essentially passionate; therefore it is essentially *revelation*, revelation by a manifestation of energy that unquestionably is a definite something and does not deceptively change under the influence of conjectural criticism concerning what the age really wants' (66); and

(7)'the age of revolution is essentially passionate; therefore it has not *nullified the principle of contradiction* and can become either good or evil, and whichever way is chosen, the *impetus* of passion is such that the trace of an action marking its progress or its taking a wrong direction must be perceptible. [...] If, however, the individual refuses to act, existence cannot help' (66).

³ It is interesting that for Kierkegaard the French Revolution was the model of individual renewal, even though the revolution by building up an aggressive, democratic mass army, created 'the masses'.

Kierkegaard's revolution is 'essentially passionate', i.e. the revolutionary action answers the anthropological needs of human beings. The revolution combines passion with form, culture, violence (but not crudeness), the concept of propriety, provisional immediacy of reaction, energetical revelation and risky action; the object of the revolution is the individual, not the masses or political systems. Only if the individual internalizes the idea of revolution by means of inwardness, can he give a proper form to the idea of revolution.

The concept of culture in Kierkegaard's work is not the same as the conventional understanding of this notion. His idea clashes with the Enlightenment idea of culture understood as a 'socio-political body', separated from the individual. For Kierkegaard culture is not established until the individual's 'inner being' has absorbed the existing ideas by means of passion.

Revolutionary violence is the opposite of political crudeness. Here Kierkegaard tries to give us a recipe for *his* own ethical revolution. It begins with the individual's absorption of the idea of revolution. The individual thus enriched can then communicate the idea to others. If the order is reversed, and the idea is communicated to the individuals *en masse* in the first place, we get 'violence, anarchy, riotousness' instead of an 'authentic revolution'. The process of the revolution then creates its own *decorum*, its own code of conduct, its own rules of propriety. Revolution, however, is not to be understood as a kind of scientific or philosophic reflection, but as contained in the immediacy of an individual, ethical reaction. It opposes what we may call bureaucratic formalization of mass ethics. The ethics of revolution can be right or wrong—but its action expresses the individual consciousness. Such an individual will never act *en masse*; he will rather create a distance to other revolutionaries.

The opposite of revolution is Kierkegaard's (and perhaps our) 'present age' (Danish *Nutiden*/B.Ś.), a peaceful *status quo* situation. It is described as follows:

(i) 'the present age is essentially a sensible, reflecting age, devoid of passion, flaring up in superficial, short-lived enthusiasm and prudentially relaxing in indolence. If we had statistics on the use of prudence from generation to generation as we have them on the consumption of liquor, we would be amazed to see the enormous quantity used these days, what a quantity of weighing and deliberating and considering even a small non-official family uses although

it has ample income, what a quantity even children and young people use, for just as the children's crusade symbolizes the Middle Age, so the shrewdness of children symbolizes ours. I wonder if there is a person anymore who ever makes just one big stupid blunder' (68);

(2) 'An insurrection in the present age is utterly unimaginable; such a manifestation of power would seem ridiculous to the calculating sensibleness of the age. [...] However, a political virtuoso might be able to perform an amazing tour de force of quite another kind. He would issue invitations to a general meeting for the purpose of deciding on a revolution, wording the invitation so cautiously that even the censor would have to let it pass. On the evening of the meeting, he would so skillfully create the illusion that they had made a revolution that everyone would go home quietly, having passed a very pleasant evening' (70) ;

(3) [In the present age] 'the *participants* would shrewdly transform themselves into a crowd of *spectators* [...] That a person stands or falls on his actions is becoming obsolete; instead, everybody sits around and does a brilliant job of bungling through with the aid of some reflection and also by declaring that they all know very well what has to be done' (73 f);

(4) 'an age without passion possesses no assets; everything becomes, as it were, transactions in *paper money* [Danish *Repräsentativer* /B.Š.]. Certain phrases and observations circulate among the people, partly true and sensible, yet devoid of vitality, but there is no hero, no lover, no thinker, no knight of faith, no great humanitarian, no person in despair to vouch for their validity by having primitively experienced them. [...] But what is more primitive than wit, more primitive, at least more amazing, than even the first spring bud and the first delicate blade of grass? [...] So ultimately the object of desire is money, but it is in fact token money [Danish *Repräsentativ*/B.Š.], an abstraction. A young man today would scarcely envy another his capacities or his skill or the love of a beautiful girl or his fame, no, but he would envy him his money' (74f);

(5) [In the present age] 'to be a citizen has come to mean something else, it means to be an *outsider*. The citizen does not relate himself in the relation but is a spectator computing the problem: the relation of the subject to his king; for there is a period when committee after committee is set up, as long as there still are people who in full

passion want to be, each individually, the specific person he is supposed to be, but it all finally ends with the whole age becoming a committee' (79);

(6) [In the present age] '[t]he established order continues to stand, but since it is equivocal and ambiguous, passionless reflection is reassured. We do not want to abolish the monarchy, by no means, but if little by little we could get it transformed into make-believe, we would gladly shout "Hurrah for the King!"' (80f);

(7) 'Envy in the process of *establishing* itself takes the form of *leveling*, and whereas a passionate age *accelerates, raises up and overthrows, elevates and debases*, a reflective apathetic age does the opposite, it *stifles and impedes*, it *levels*. Leveling is a quiet, mathematical, abstract enterprise that avoids all agitation. [...] If an insurrection at its peak is so like a volcanic explosion that a person cannot hear himself speak, leveling at its peak is like a deathly stillness in which a person can hear himself breathe, a deathly stillness in which nothing can rise up but everything sinks down into it, impotent. [...] Leveling is not the action of one individual but a reflection-game in the hand of an abstract power' (84-86);

(8) For leveling really to take place, a phantom must first be raised, the spirit of leveling, a monstrous abstraction, an all-encompassing something that is nothing, a mirage—and this phantom is *the public*. Only in a passionless but reflective age can this phantom develop with the aid of the press,⁴ when the press itself becomes a phantom. There is no such thing as a public in spirited, passionate, tumultuous times, even when a people wants to actualize the idea of the barren desert, destroying and demoralizing everything. There are parties, and there is concretion' (90). In Kierkegaard's *Papers* we find another remark on the same subject. It reads: '...the press enables one single rabble-rousing scribbler to do incalculable harm. The public is the entity, the corps in whose name he speaks, but this corps can

⁴ But Mr. Thomas Carlyle, the author of the famous portrait of the French Revolution (1837) is of quite the opposite opinion. In his analysis the press, books, printed leaflets and paper money are a natural part of the revolution: '...shall we call it [the age of the beginning of Revolution], what all men thought it, the new Age of Gold ? Call it at least, of Paper; which in many ways is the succedaneum of Gold. Bank-paper, wherewith you can still buy when there is no gold left; Book-paper, splendent with Theories, Philosophies, Sensibilities,—beautiful art, not only of revealing Thought, but also of so beautifully hiding from us the want of Thought! Paper is made from the *rags* of things that did once exist; there are endless excellences in Paper'. (Carlyle 1837, i6)[B.Ś.]

never be called up for inspection, never appears together in any situation of the moment so that we can see it for what it is, so it can itself confirm whether or not this is what it thinks. [...] A public is something anyone can pick up, even a drunken sailor exhibiting a peep-show' (i38f, vii-i B 123).

Thus 'the present age' creates conventional individuals, trying to imitate each other by means of prudence. The concept of reflection means here that people mirror one another's 'indecision[,] lacking in the passion of engagement'.⁵ Passion, as well as stupidity, is always connected with the individual and does not exist in the age dominated by common sense and conformity. If the revolution creates an individual, the present age creates a society of uniform masses. The political characteristic of the present age is the creation of dichotomies: society suppressing the individual, idea against action, passion vs. shrewdness. The present age does not imagine a new revolution (except the 'revolution' by acclamation, 'revolution' synonymous with democratic impotence). We can say that the democratic power game cannot see (is blind to) the necessity of the revolution of 'inner being'. The democratic inhabitants reflect each other in so perfect a way, that they have no need for a revolution separating them from the crowd, the masses, and creating them as individuals.

The fear of becoming an individual, a participant, who 'stands or falls with his actions', leads to abstaining from any kind of independent action. People prefer to hide in the democratic organization of the masses. The crowd of spectators have just one true passion, money, which is an abstraction, a 'representation' of economical and political power. This abstraction is an enemy of both living passionate individuals and of nature.

Another 'representation', that of political power, has a form of democratic society composed of 'committees', political parties, and institutions. Faced with committees or parties the individual becomes an outsider, while political power becomes more and more consolidated within big organizations. The third characteristic of the political power of 'the present age' is propaganda which transforms a critical experience of power into objects of 'make-believe', images, pictures of non-reality. Propaganda together with the imitation of

⁵ See Hong's Historical Introduction, in Kierkegaard 1978, ix.

others, spectatorship, envy, the press, and political parties shape the socio-technical rules of modern democratic society. The result is levelling of society, the creation of an apathetic, anonymous public, instead of lively active individuals...

This kind of social and political critique was rather common in the 19th century, and its best known representative is, perhaps, the German philosopher Karl Marx. It seems that Kierkegaard's analysis, published two years earlier than Marx' *Manifesto* from 1848, aims at the same concerns, such as the belief that the authentic, anthropological needs of modern man are suppressed by the existing culture. By means of socialization, the existing culture has alienated the individual from his 'true nature' and converted him (or her) into a part of the 'faceless masses'. Both Kierkegaard and Marx found the relations between man's anthropology and the culture of the time unsatisfactory. They accused culture of playing a suppressive role in society; they saw revolution as liberation from culture, since only revolution could reveal the anthropological values of the individual, such as passion, faithfulness toward an idea, and immediacy of action.

Marx' medicine is, of course, very different from Kierkegaard's. For the Danish thinker revolution is a personal insurrection, liberating the individual from the chains of anonymity and the 'abstract' power of money, political parties and the media (the press). For Marx revolution is not a goal, but a means. He encourages individuals to create mass movements in order to restore their own nature. It is interesting that the connotation of the mass movements or 'the masses' was so different for Kierkegaard and Marx, despite the fact that they were writing almost at the same time and in the same place—Europe. The difference, however, is connected with the place.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels met the masses of modern Europe in the factories of Manchester, Berlin and other big centres of capitalism. According to the creators of scientific socialism, the masses were analphabetic, hard-labouring human beings with undifferentiated personalities. The historical destiny of the masses was thus to reconquer the humanity of individuals through political revolution. The leading power of this process was the revolutionary mass-party.

To Kierkegaard, who lived in a smaller city in Europe, the masses meant a bourgeois public composed above all of newspaper and book readers, i.e. city intelligentsia, and of an unproductive, lazy crowd of Tivoli visitors. 'One of the phenomena of modernity that Tivoli

brought into view in the Copenhagen of the 1840s was the urban crowd. Here the inhabitants of this provincial market-town were able to [...] lose themselves in it, whether as spectators or as making themselves into the objects of others' stares, seeing and being seen in the mode of the city spectacular [... That] public is in fact a manifestation of social disintegration [...] The unity figured in the public is the illusory unity that is all that levelling is able to produce. Those who understand themselves as members of the public never act in any decisive sense. Precisely by identifying themselves with the public they turn themselves into mere spectators of their own social existence' (Pattison 1998, 13).

The bourgeois masses here were as much atomized and, despite their education, unenlightened, as Marx' and Engels' workers. According to the two Germans hard physical labour was a sign of a spiritual and political alienation. The only possibility to change the situation was the laborious and bloody work of political revolution. Marx' and Engels' point of departure was thus manual labour. Kierkegaard's was that of a leisurely modern urban crowd of Copenhagen. In our time, when manual work is gradually decreasing and mass revolution has 'gone for ever', Kierkegaard's starting point is without question more modern (or, perhaps, postmodern) than the communist one. But even 'a lazy crowd' can create a strong anonymous power. It can become a political authority, ruthlessly speaking "on the times' behalf", as Kierkegaard formulates it in his *Preface*:

If a person wants to publish a book, he should [...] make sure that it will be of benefit. To that end he asks a publisher or a philosophical fellow or his barber or a passerby what it is that the times demand. Lacking this, he himself comes up with something, about which he does not forget to say that it is what the times demand. Not everyone, of course, is given the mental capacity to understand the demand of the times, so much the less when to the doubtful it may seem that the times' demand is multifarious and that the times, although one, can have [...] several voices. (Kierkegaard 1997, 13f)

The modern 'public opinion' has also 'a voice' as expressed by a publisher, philosophical fellow, barber—and a passer-by. The public, speaking with the voice of the times, tries to put its own words into the writer's mouth—or his book. If the writer is silent, his silence is his 'voice' — but, alas, that is not 'the voice of the times' ! "The times' demand" is a loud and powerful language; the writer *in spe* has silence on his side. The question is: is he right or wrong—to be silent?

Kierkegaard was not an enemy of language. His enormous production makes that quite clear. But he opposed the ideologization of language. As he put it:

At the moment the greatest fear is of the total bankruptcy toward which all Europe seems to be moving and men forget the far greater danger, a seemingly unavoidable bankruptcy in an intellectual-spiritual sense, a confusion of language far more dangerous than that (typical) Babylonian confusion, than the confusion of dialects and national languages following that Babylonian attempt of the Middle Ages—that is, a confusion in the languages themselves, a mutiny, the most dangerous of all, of the words themselves, which, wrenched out of man's control, would despair, as it were, and crash in upon one another, and out of this chaos a person would snatch, as from a grab-bag, the handiest word to express his presumed thoughts. [...] Under a curious delusion, the one cries out incessantly that he has surpassed the other [...] When I see someone energetically walking along the street, I am certain that his joyous shout, "I am coming over," is to me—but unfortunately I did not hear who was called (this actually happened); I will leave a blank for the name, so everyone can fill in an appropriate name. (Kierkegaard 1978a, *JSI* [5181; 1 A 328])

And he added: 'Most systems and viewpoints also date from yesterday...' (*ibid.*). The communication of his time (and perhaps ours as well) is thus composed by anybody's endless talking/shouting to anybody. Nobody listens, i.e. really accepts the opposite position in the structure of dialogue. Everyone is crying, that he (or she) is 'coming over' to the 'negative' position of their interlocutors. This communication is in fact a political battle about ideological domination. And, we must remember, most of this ideology 'dates from yesterday...!'

Kierkegaard is not an opponent of language. He only opposes false communication which pretends that the public and the individual share the same language interest and the same linguistic codes. He insists that the time has 'several voices', i.e. includes several codes, themes and interests. Therefore everybody has to create his own language. In the *Literary Review* of Madame Gyllembourg's novel *Two Ages*, the public is not much in favour of new ideas. The language interest of the public is thus conservative. It usually defends ideas of its own period, called 'the present age', against new words of 'the age of revolution'. 'The present age', as perhaps every 'present age', is aware of contradictory languages, but it chooses to close its eyes to 'strange' words. Perhaps in the same way the Frenchmen could not see anything in Russia (*because* of their ideas) but an empty space ready for cultivation by means of revolution.

Today we are well aware of the cruelty of the way of Karl Marx. The 'inner revolution' of the human being now seems to be a better choice. These days we try to abolish the European frontier separating the North of the continent from the South, and the East from the West. Can we do the same with the division separating 'the age of revolution' from 'the present age'? Or, to put it in other words: do we have any guarantee of a new revolution in our 'present age' ?

The frontiers dividing the population of the North from the people living in the South, and those living in the West from the inhabitants of the East can be found on the social and political stage, therefore they are visible to the naked eye. The categories of 'revolution' and 'present age' exist on different levels in Kierkegaard's work. The first one expresses an anthropological and perhaps religious need of human beings, the second—a cultural one. These needs express the complexity of the human being and cannot 'mediate' each other, because they are fundamentally in conflict. The two (or more) contradictory values are the very foundation of the European cultural tradition.

Until now we have not been able to resolve the conflict between passion and inwardness as opposed to rationality and peace in a satisfactory way. We cannot abolish the disharmony between the anthropological, religious and cultural layers of our existence, either by political laws, or by Jürgen Habermas' idea of a 'horizontal', rational-calculative dialogue, which suppresses the (irrational ?) silence of the individual on the political stage. 'In place of a monological conception of [Kantian] reason present to itself in the inwardness of consciousness, Habermas opts for a dialogical conception of reason as the public conversation that seeks consensus about disputed validity claims by means of arguments (as distinct from propaganda, the manipulative technologies of hidden persuaders)' (Westphal 1998, 8). But Habermas' idea of a vocal, dialogical reason is a simplification of the structure of human beings. Kierkegaard gives us a different and perhaps better concept of 'the true lover being "forsaken by language and people's understanding"' (Westphal 1998, 22).

Today, the individual involved in a passionate action usually does not 'see' the reason of the passivity of the masses, and the leading politician does not 'see' the individual faces of the members of society imitating each other. Therefore the apologist of the present age may, without Kierkegaardian irony, say that 'an insurrection in the

present age is utterly unimaginable; such a manifestation of power would seem ridiculous'. We should, perhaps, be aware of the possibility of an 'essentially passionate' revolution happening the moment we stop seeing the possibility of its existence, the moment, at which 'the eye vainly seeks a point on which it can rest'.

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