

Modernity, Madness and Hermeneutic Sacrificial

1 – Kant: dare to use your own reason because one must not "gladly remain a minor long after nature has freed them from external guidance". But is enlightenment not like any other human product inevitably a double-edge sword?

2 – Kierkegaard describes modern society as a network of relations in which individuals are leveled into an abstract phantom known as "the public". The modern public, in contrast to ancient and medieval communities, is a creation of the press, which is the only instrument capable of holding together the mass of unreal individuals "who never are and never can be united in an actual situation or organization". In this sense, society has become a realization of abstract thought, held together by an artificial and all-pervasive medium speaking for everyone and for no one. (Gary Aylesworth, SEP entry on *Postmodernism*)

3 – Dare to use your own reason. One uses reason to make decisions. Even if one reasons just like that one is influenced by that to some decision rather than another. One's *own* reason. But obviously one's own reason is learned and adopted from external sources. Is it at all possible to demarcate one's own reason from otherwise? How about false consciousness, that technology accelerates alienation, that the pressure of marketplace manufactures one's reason, that the public is controlled by the mass media, that the modernity is the triumph of stupidity (Flaubert) . . . is there any prospect for one to use one's *own* reason?

4 – Perhaps there is a peculiarly undecidable sense in which one uses one's "own" reason. **Either** if the decision which one undertakes involves a choice with conspicuous utility which one unhesitatingly undertakes—wholehearted endorsement of one's choice even under false consciousness. **Or** cases of *reluctance*: if the decision which one undertakes involves choices with no conspicuous preferability over other choices.—The instant of decision is madness. Is one's *own* reason is revealed more by madness or by overflow of rational?

5 – Perhaps we should stop talking about one's own reason. A remarkable exception: in Melville's *Benito Cereno*, pre-rebellion slaves did not make decisions, they did not need exuberant rational resources beyond the purpose of survival. But they did use their own reason to forge their enslavement post-rebellion.

6 – The upshot of bureaucratic, procedural, and informational complexity of modernity is the degenerative reversal of decision-theoretic madness. One in modern times makes insignificant decisions but fully rationalized while significant decisions are deferred to and made by the so-called public, by the mass media and technological priorities cooked under the pressure of marketplace. The significant decisions are to be comprehensively seamlessly rationalized. In pre-modern, perhaps only insignificant decisions did not need to enroll madness.

7 – "There is no more action or decision in our day than there is perilous delight in swimming in shallow waters". The courage to use one's own reason is invitation to take more actions—implicating excessive use of agency, under false consciousness or not. If one does nothing and gains nothing, one is not subject to any evaluation or interpretation. Modernity is an ongoing incessant festival of cruel hermeneutic sacrificial—because "without cruelty there is no festival".

References — Arnold Weinstein's lectures, *The Fiction of Relationship* — Michael Roth's lectures, *The Modern and the Postmodern*.