Big Waves, Small Bubbles.
The Lisbon Earthquake as a Sign of Hope and Freedom in Europe[1]

Abstract: In contrast to other previous and later disasters the Lisbon earthquake November 1st 1755 was more than a local disaster that changed the life of the Portuguese and later became subject to the merciless oblivion of history. This cataclysm left lasting traces in European science, social life, religion and philosophy. The material effects were rapidly felt all over Europe with effects on economy and on the whole conception of how humans should think and act in a world where such events occurred. This paper follows the change in Immanuel Kant's philosophy after the earthquake based on the thesis that it contributed fundamentally to the formation of Kant's mature philosophy and its paradigmatic status in European thought until the present day. Also the contrasting poems by François Voltaire and Hans Adolph Brorson show the broad European effect of the earthquake.

Resumé: I modsætning til tidligere og senere katastrofer var jordskælvet i Lissabon den 1. November 1755 mere end en lokal ulykke som ændrede portugisernes liv, og som senere blev offer for historiens ubarmhjertige glemsel. Denne katastrofe efterlod sig varige spor i europæisk videnskab, socialt liv, religion og filosofi. De materielle virkninger kunne hurtigt mærkes over hele Europa med indflydelse på økonomi og på hele opfattelsen af hvordan mennesker skulle tænke og handle i en verden, hvor sådanne begivenheder indtraf. Denne artikel følger forandringerne i Immanuel Kants filosofi efter jordskælvet ud fra den tese at det bidrog væsentligt til udformningen af Kants modne filosofi og dens paradigmatiske status i europæiske tænkning ind til i dag. Også François Voltaires og Hans Adolph Brorsons kontrasterende digte demonstrerer den brede europæiske virkning af skælvet.

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Ouy les anglais prennent tout, la France souffre tout, les volcans engloutissent tout.

Voltaire on the Lisbon earthquake, December 1st 1755

A European Shock

The Lisbon earthquake was a major disaster on a global scale with a massive impact on the entire cultural life of Europe. It may seem preposterous to subtitle an essay on this catastrophe with a reference to hope and freedom. How could the traumatized people of Lisbon hope for anything? And how could anyone think of freedom, faced with natural forces of a magnitude that left humans with no choices to take action and change the course of events? Nevertheless, in spite of the merciless forgetfulness that history has always shown toward human sufferings, the Lisbon earthquake is actually part of the collective memory of Europe, in contrast to many previous and later earthquakes and other natural and human catastrophes on the same scale. This status was obtained because of the progressive reflection on human hope and freedom it inevitably entailed, generated by the equally merciless irony of history, which creates an often unpredictable discrepancy between harmful causes or intentions and beneficiary effects, and vice versa. As a natural event the earthquake was a unique phenomenon, unprecedented and unrepeatable; as a cultural fact it gained, like previous spectacular events, a widespread effect through the manifold consecutive writings and actions it produced. In this process it was transformed from a brute and brutal fact to a complex cultural sign, partly shaped by but also shaping and redirecting material and mental processes in Europe and merging with the complex contemporary scientific, ideological, political and other developments that secured its long lasting afterlife. The topic of my paper is to trace the development and structure of some of those signs.

Immanuel Kant and the Small Bubbles

The young Immanuel Kant was fundamentally shattered in his world view and philosophical thinking when the news and effects of the Lisbon disaster reached him in Königsberg (present day Kaliningrad) close to the Baltic Sea and surrounded by moors and semi-humid areas. He was profoundly concerned with nature, not in any direct or empirical way though, but as a purely philosophical and theoretical enterprise which, in these days, was considered an integral part of natural science. His early writings focused on the basic vital and dynamical forces of nature, *Gedanken von der wahren Schätzung der lebendingen Kräften* from 1747 (Kant 1910a) and on the general cosmology that offered a totalizing interpretation of the manifold processes and phenomena of nature, *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* from 1755 (1910c). In a short paper, *Die Frage, ob die Welt veralte* from 1754, he also addressed the question of the aging of the world – does the world undergo essential change, or is it a finished creation from the beginning? (1910b). All such topics were hot issues on the scientific agenda of the day. Researchers and thinkers tried to find a balance between, on the one hand, the empirical insights of the real processes of nature gradually dismantling the image of nature as a static creation by God some thousands years ago and, on the other, the necessity of still placing God – with absolute knowledge, goodness and power – in the center of this same nature.

One the most important solutions to this philosophical and theological dilemma was defined by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in 1710 his *Essais de Théodicée* introducing the theory of the best of all possible worlds. It is true, Leibniz states (Leibniz 1965: 108), that we – that is from the narrow view of humans – can imagine all kinds of worlds without any vice, sufferings and deprivations. But if God had found such a world to be a better world from *his* point of view, he would have created it. Ergo, the actual world we know is the best possible world, and what we

find painful in it serves a higher purpose. Hence, everything that is, is good. Among the most ardent followers of Leibniz regarding this mixture of logic, blind faith and common sense was Alexander Pope in his *Essay on Man* from 1733. The young Kant, too, basically subscribed to this program and used a series of quotes from Pope as epigraphs of all the chapters in the most ambitious of his early works, *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* from 1755. Here he tries to evaluate the most important theories of nature of his day in order to form a unifying interpretation in the footsteps of the theodicy.

In his treaty from Spring 1747 on the vital forces of nature, *die lebendige Kräften*, he tries hard to reconcile the mechanical world view of Descartes with the dynamic and teleological principles of Leibniz. He admits that there is a mechanical coherence in the world that can be turned into mathematical formula based on certain quantifiable constants, but also that such a system as a whole must be created by one purposive mastermind. Kant's main preoccupation is to argue that the sum total force in the universe is not constant in a mathematical sense, because vital forces exist that can acquire an absolute freedom of movement, also in the limited time frame of earthly existence and thus expand the amount of forces in the world.

From this point of view he arrives at the conclusion that a successive and expanding making of life is possible. The world is a developing world. Thus he comes close to an organic world view which later flourished in Romanticism (Kant 1910a: §124, Kant 1910b). Therefore the world is not yet finished, but is a work in progress toward perfection. It is aging, not in the sense of decaying, but in the sense of maturing (Kant 1910b). Here Kant refers to the principle of continuity that informs Leibniz' theodicy (Kant 1910a: §163): nature does not allow for leaps, holes or any other discontinuity. God does not create voids, but a world of

gradual change toward the better, that is a more continuous totality.

In Spring 1755, the *Berliner Akademie* received the competing treaties responding to a prize subject formulated earlier, inviting scholars to analyse Pope's axiom that everything is good (with the only slightly disguised intention of confirming it) (Löffler 1999: 372, Weinrich 1986: 68). Kant did not answer, but in March 1755 he published his great cosmology *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels*. In a sense it *is* an answer. Here he does not focus on specific aspects of nature, like its vital forces and its aging, but on nature in its entirety. Therefore, his reference to the overall purposiveness of nature emanating from god as the highest reason is much more pronounced than in the previous texts. Only "the most stupid" can deny this reference, Kant remarks tersely in a denigrating tone (Kant 1910c: 345). Nevertheless, he admits that, given the fact that nature has not yet reached it most perfect state, we may come across phenomena that superficially and in passing may look like loops and anomalies, but they do not belong to the essential vital forces of nature. Lucretius' theory of haphazardly colliding atoms does not stand a chance in the larger picture (ib.: 334).

Deeply engrained in this way of thinking Kant's natural philosophy takes on a purely speculative form. With logical shrewdness he scrutinizes the most advanced thinking of his day, at times reminiscent of a scholastic question-and-answer strategy without any reference to empirical investigation. Not that Kant denies the effects of causality. In the brief paper on the aging of the world published in August and September 1754, he lists four such causes for the aging process: the saltiness of the oceans, the rain and rivers, the withdrawal of the sea from land, and – finally – a unifying material and all-pervasive principle for the processes of nature. Kant opts for the last possibility, underscoring that he envisions a material dynamical principle, not a spiritual force. But he also admits hat he has not explained the aging of the world, but

only presented an irrefutable argument for the developmental thesis and a guideline for further investigations. In the very final lines of his paper he therefore suggests that new causes may be found to further understand the process.

The causes may even be such forces that "through a sudden cataclysm of the Earth they may produce its destruction" (Kant 1910b: 213). But – he adds immediately after – such fatal events has nothing to do with the aging process itself, just as a destruction of a building by an earthquake has nothing to do with its growing old. If discontinuity is not permitted permanently *in* the world, discontinuity from outside may nevertheless be involved at the apocalyptic end. The Lisbon cataclysm is still one year ahead, but Kant's grappling with the limits of what can be grasped by the human mind on the grounds of the theodicy makes him sensitive to what is coming.

Thus, Kant has, so to speak, worked himself up to receive a major blow by the news from Lisbon at the end of 1755. Of course, he was not the only one. But he was one of the most important ones because, even at the distance across the continent, he was so troubled that he changed his focus of thinking from speculation to experience. And this change paved the way for the single most influential philosophical contribution to the modernization of Europe in science, philosophy, religion, politics, ethics, aesthetics and social sciences. In his later work he tried to reconcile the restrictions of human capacities for action and recognition, imposed on us from our bodily senses and mental equipment, with the notion of the infinite previously located in god.

In Kant's view it is no longer primarily rooted in a divine power, but, as we shall see, in the development of human freedom. This effort required a new approach to the human kind, nature and god, manifested in Kant's later writings. The beginning to the thinking of the mature Kant was, however, very modest. His immediate reaction to the disaster consists of two small articles

and a longer deliberation over facts and findings concerning the earthquake of Lisbon, all three from the beginning of 1756 (Kant 1994).

The Scientific Turn

At this point we may talk about the scientific or the empirical turn in Kant (cf. Löffler 1999: Ch. III.4, 341ff). In the three texts all references to divine teleology have vanished; instead Kant is trying his best to stay with material, causal explanations. Moreover, the quiet confidence in providence has been replaced by a concern with materially founded prognostic procedures in order to avoid future catastrophes and an ethical obligation to try to come up with measures to prevent their effects. Furthermore, the speculative methods and sarcastic rebuffs of the logical deficiencies in the arguments of other scholars have disappeared in favour of meticulous reports on empirical details of the widespread effects of the disaster across the continent together with cautious suggestions of causal explanations. Finally, out of the shadows behind the notion of harmonious nature allowing for human freedom as a continuous natural development in the best of all possible worlds he sketches the first modest attempts to understand human freedom as conditioned by the confrontation with an enigmatic and threatening nature. In short: not only Kant's philosophical conception of nature and god is in the process of change, but also his way of writing, his value system and his focus of interest.

The point of departure is the irrefutable, overwhelming and surprising empirical details in Kant's surroundings. He not only lists the small bubbles in the hot springs of Töplitz in Bohemia (present day Teplice in the Czech Republic), but also registers all the reliable reports he can come across about the surprising movements of waters in the Baltic and Scandinavian ports as well as in the moors and humid territories in the European inland. Kant's idea is that the explanation of the

occurrence of the small bubbles may prove instrumental to explain also the big waves in Portugal, and thereby not only to understand the natural processes causing the eruption, but also to be able to foresee future events and prevent some of the damages and casualties. The preoccupation with empirical facts is therefore necessarily accompanied by a critical survey of contemporary causal explanations, but now deprived of any sarcasm regarding their incompleteness as in his *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* published just eight months earlier. The occasion is too overwhelming and incomprehensible.

The outcome is that Kant recontextualizes both his explanatory framework and his teleological orientation. His earlier theories of the vital and dynamical forces of nature, hitherto framed by a divine metaphysics, now becomes part of a causal explanation. Water and other liquid substances under high pressure act like a hard body and cannot be stretched out and 'relax' as a surface. Therefore the pressure is kept at a high pitch enabling it also to act on inland waters. Thus, seismologically true or not from a modern perspective, Kant tries to unite otherwise disconnected phenomena – waves near Lisbon and bubbles near Königsberg – by a causal link.

What happened then to the teleological perspective? In the context of the theodicy the unquestioned assumption is that infinity, order and purposiveness are united in God and that, consequently, all essential knowledge, criteria for truth and the ethical perspective on human life can be derived from this unity. The corollary that follows from this assumption is that knowledge, truth claims and ethics that go against this assumption are, per definition, untenable. That is also the argumentative logic in Kant's early works. But if one part of the assumption is denied, the whole assumption falls apart. That is what Kant learns from the earthquake when teleology crumbles, and he uses the rest of his life to come to terms with this situation in his philosophy.

In contrast to many advanced contemporary thinkers who abandoned divine final causes and did not give much thought to ethics or infinity, Kant did not give up the basic problems altogether in favour of the structure of material processes. What he developed in his entire later philosophy is a radical reflection on all the three dimensions in their own right requiring each of them a new theoretical foundation. Knowledge as based on an explicit theory of recognition, truth rests on explicitly stated theoretical criteria, ethics regards inter-human relations and the relation to our natural foundation. The main point is not whether he was right or wrong in the details, but that he made it crystal clear that these matters are defined by humans, that they must rest on arguments we can understand and exchange on human conditions, and that they therefore can be changed in and by the history of mankind.

In the early papers he advances briefly the still vaguely formulated idea that it is not the prescribed position in the purposively ordered totality that make human beings aware of the true human nature and place in the universe. It is, on the contrary, the basically enigmatic character of nature in relation to god's intentions, the laws of nature and its processes that constitutes the condition of possibility – a precious notion in Kant – for the human being to be really human. Only face to face with the enormity and incomprehensibility of nature humans may acquire their true freedom in accepting the responsibility for whatever order there may be outlined in our life. It is exactly the absence, and not the presence of the divine *telos* in nature that makes its possible for another type of *telos* to emerge just as fundamental as any divine *telos*. Hence, the possibility of human freedom *is* for Kant the very *telos* of human life, given by and revealed by nature in its unpredictable enormity, inscribing infinity in mankind itself both as a possibility and as the never ending responsibility for the unfolding of this potentiality, and therefore also the driving force for the development of a new ethics based on human duty (Kant

could never subscribe to an utilitarian ethics based on the idea of most happiness for as many as possible).

In the final paragraphs of his third treaty on the cataclysm, Kant adds a few lines on nature in general and on the position of humans in it (Kant 1994: 135). Here, he opens the doors to his future philosophy of nature and human experience in his three critiques that changed the mental map of Europe – *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781), *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788) and *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790), including his aesthetic theory on the sublime ('das Erhabene') in *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. In the foreword to *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* he calls the change in his thinking for his Copernican turn. That this metaphor, often quoted in the Kant criticism, came to his mind can come as no surprise. The reason is not only the universal range Kant's claims for his philosphy, as is often taken for granted, but has also to do with the focus on astronomy, cosmology and geology in Kant's pre-earthquake writings. They contain the way of thinking he wants to distance himself from, but also resound in his most important book with a metaphorical echo precisely marking this distance.

The key notion of his aesthetics, the sublime, is also derived from this conception of human freedom. By being confronted with nature on a trans-human scale both in terms of size and force, like an earthquake, but still being able to see ourselves as humans, the human beings define themselves as free, even when it comes to nature, and thereby the human beings are absolutely responsible for individual and social life, internally and in relation to nature (Kant 1964a). Aesthetics and ethics are twins in Kant's universe, also without divine blessing.

What we today call the *risk society* is born in Kant's writings after the Lisbon earthquake and partly as a consequence of it. Thus, the massive, provocative, scaring, overwhelmingly powerful materiality of the earthquake is an essential moment, if not *the* essential moment, in the transformation of European thought that made it finally modern. It is strange, therefore, to

observe that Kant in his later writings never mentions the earthquake with one word, not even when he later in *Über das Misslingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodizee* from 1791 mercilessly refuted the plausibility of any theodicy (Kant 1964b), nor in his lectures on geology in the years just before his death in 1804. Also earthquakes in general are only rarely referred to after 1756, and when commented on, then not with any exclusive and decisive bearing on the argument. Did he repress it, too large to be remembered? Or had it just served its purpose: to reorient his philosophy, which then followed its own course opening his eyes to new dimensions of human freedom, hope – and responsibility beyond the particularity and singularity of the earthquake?

In due respect for Kant's newly acquired respect for empirical facts we may return to the event itself. The big waves that destroyed Lisbon were caused by a submarine eruption in the Atlantic, which sent a devastating tsunami toward the shore and up the river Tejo hitting Lisbon in the morning of November 1st, 1755. The force is estimated to be about 9 on the Richter scale, close to the latest tsunami in the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004. The number of casualties varies and can only be subject to a rough guess – between 35.000 and 50.000 (just for the sake of comparison: Copenhagen contained in 1755 about 25.000 people inside its walls). The magnitude still surprises geologists, Lisbon not being placed directly on colliding tectonic plates (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1755_Lisbon_earthquake, cf. Couto 2000).

One of the reasons why we know so many details is the work organized by Marquis de Pombal who was in charge of the reconstruction of Lisbon. He was a both practical and visionary person, ruthless and down to earth. He did not spend much time on interpreting the presumable signs from god, but began economical and urban reconstruction right away. Moreover, and of importance today, he collected systematic information about the material signs surrounding the earthquake in Portugal, based on a

serious of questions circulated to all communities in the country (the results are still kept in the archives in the Tombo Tower in Lisbon). He wanted to know about 1) the duration of the eruption, 2) the number of consecutive eruptions, 3) the behaviour of animals, 4) the reactions in lakes and moors, etc., a series of questions which on material grounds only were intended to enable him to establish a cluster of signs to warn people in the future in a more reliable way than wonders and omens. Some modern seismologists exploiting the knowledge of historical eruptions to better understand the multitude of enigmas in the field (http://nisee.berkeley.edu/lisbon), even regard the marquis de Pombal as one of the founding fathers of seismology (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1755_Lisbon_earthquake). One may say that Kant's philosophical reflection on the small bubbles and the practical approach of the marquis vis-a-vis the big waves work hand in hand in the secularization of our conception of nature and society and the hope and freedom in it.

Ideology and Poetry

The ideological and aesthetic effects followed the same line, mostly reacting to the small bubbles produced in matter and mind by the big waves. The material effects were felt more or less all over Europe and contributed to the mythological status of the earthquake, which for the European public overshadowed both the reality of other contemporary eruptions and the reality of the city of Lisbon itself. The material effects were from the first moment absorbed by and transformed by the ideological and aesthetic preconceptions. But, at the same time, the magnitude of the event itself changed also these ideas and supported the scientific and philosophical revolution that Kant, among others, exemplifies. The ideological agenda of Europe was reorganized forever.

The material effects were felt and much talked about across the continent (Kendrick 1956, Breidert 1994, Eifert 2002), in

fact the earthquake was accepted as the "strongest in the world," as an anonymous German visitor reported (cit. from Eifert 2002: 652, cf. Kemmerer 1958: 15). The news spread with considerable velocity (Eifert 2002: 649, Breidert 225): *Gazeta de Lisboa* is of course first, November 5th; later Berlin is informed on November 11th in *Berlinische Nachrichten*, Paris on November 22nd in *Gazette de France*, London on November 26th in *London Magazine*; later Hamburg receives the news via Vienna with French mail November 29th, and in Copenhagen the readers of *Kjøbenhavns ridende Post* [The Riding Mail of Copenhagen] from December 5th can enjoy the shocking reports (Brorson 1956: 179). Long before the journals appeared, private letters, secret intergovernmental reports and internal commercial correspondance in the companies with properties and goods in Lisbon have spread the information in closed circles.

Although Lisbon was no longer a rich and important imperial capital, but only a somewhat dilapidated city with a limited number of rich families and attached to the most important transatlantic port of Europe (Couto 2000), the general public still indulged in the quasi-mythological conception that Lisbonne was a guilded city. "This city which has been the richest of Europe, which has provided all nations with diamonds, where one could see gold everywhere, now this city is nothing," the anonymous German tells us (cit. from Eifert 2002: 652). When the poets set out to interpret the event for their readers they relate to this blending of reality and mythology that raised Lisbon to an almost metaphysical status. Both the poets and the general public simply forgot that the Lisbon earthquake was but one in a series of greater and smaller eruptions around 1755, in Morocco in particular. Nor did they take much notice of more devastating eruptions in Europe and elsewhere before and after the Lisbon disaster, like Tokyo 1703, Hokaido 1730, Syria 1759, Sicily 1783 (www.schoolweb.de/milleniumobserver/katastrophen/erdbeben1.htm.) If registered at all, they are registered as local events, not as events with a general European importance. With the combination

of reality and mythology together with the location in an important place in Europe the Lisbon earthquake attracted all interpretive capacities of the enlightened Europe of its day, and made subsequent interpretations of later or more important eruptions superfluous. The lessons to be learned – in science, philosophy, poetry, and ideology – were exhausted by this singular event, which then acquired an exemplary status, which continues to exercize its influence down to the present day (www.gospelcom.net/chi/DAILYF/2001/11/daily-11-01-2001.shtml, www.goethezeitportal.de/ic/a/cfp/katastrophendiskurs.pdf).

The importance is also seen from the fact that the poetic outpour following the disaster also made itself felt in the most remote corners of the continent, as Denmark for example. Already in January 1756 Hans Adolph Brorson composed the poem *Lissabons ynkelige Undergang* [The deplorable destruction of Lisbon], consisting of 380 verses in alexandrines, longer than Voltaire's famous *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne*. *Examen de cet axiome* "*Tout est bien*", also from 1756. Brorson was the bishop of Ribe, close to the present border to Germany, but in 1756 Denmark reached down to Hamburg. He was a Lutheran, but affiliated with the non-dogmatic group of pietists, gathering in the northern part of Germany and quite strong in Denmark. Otherwise Brorson could not have been made a bishop. Essential for the pietists was the individual, at times ecstatic approach to god, particularly to the suffering Christ. For his time Brorson possessed an extraordinary virtuosity in dealing with rime and meter, always in a simple and straight forward syntax, which still keeps its appeal to modern readers. His hymns are still a living part of Danish poetry and are sung regularly in church.

Brorson's poetry is penetrated by a corporeal sensitivity and a complex erotic symbolism, which communicate the direct and corporeal character of the unification with Christ and gives it a flavour of mysticism. A recurring vision in his poetry is final union with Christ in Heaven, as a marriage with Christ for men

and women alike, adding to his poetry an escatological dimension with an androgynous ambiguity. Hence, the moral lesson that can be drawn from the material and bodily suffering and destruction had an immediate appeal to Brorson from the reports he had access to. We do not know exactly what he actually read or heard from Portugal. Probably he read texts from Hamburg, sent by his pietistic brothers, and also the published news from Copenhagen on December 5th, the latter being referred to twice in the poem itself as the "mail" (Brorson 1956: 193, v. 161; 200, v. 325). As a bishop he, of course, adopts the position of the theodicy, although from a pietistic perspective, that is a more moralistic than philosophical attitude and embedded in a marked erotic symbolism.

Wolfgang Breidert spells out the components of the standard composition of the numerous poems on Lisbon (Breidert 1994: 10): 1) the glorious city, 2) anticipation of the disaster, 3) the first eruption, 4) the destruction itself presented through a series of standardized situations and images (the broken family, the weeping mother, the dilapidated house etc.), 5) a small interval, 6) the reinforced repetition of the eruption, 7) the overall destruction, 8) the moralising or philosophical conclusion. The echo of the traditional topological poem is clearly heard. By its sheer but varied repetition, also in Brorson's poem, this model contributes to the mythologization of Lisbon, and the use of it just a couple of month later on the margins of Europe proves to which extent the earthquake is really a European phenomenon.

In the opening of this poem Brorson underlines the lost glory of Lisbon, repeatedly represented by a diamond ("the most precious stone in all of Europe" (Brorson 1956: 187, v. 10; 196, v. 249-250; 291, v. 255)). But the perception of Lisbon is also filtered through his typical sensual imagery, here with an emphasis on degustative images related to the mouth and thereby seen as a highly personal process of incorporation, but in other poems at times with an almost cannibalistic vision merging with the erotic

symbolism when the union with Christ is depicted. In the opening verses he addresses the city:

> Thou, the best harbour of the past, where did you disappear,
> Leaving us just your name, no, only your shadow,
> You possessed, Lisbon, a splendour as the biggest star,
> A fertility like Lebanon, a soil like an almond kernel,
> Your land like Canaan spilled over with the most tasty fruits and bread
> As fine as manna and with the most superior honey.
> Seven hills shaped your home, and the wild sea your happiness,
> You sat at the bosom of peace like a diamond in its piece of jewellery.
>
> (ib. : 187, v. 3-10, I translate)

> [Du fordums bedste *Havn*, hvor est du siunken hen,
> Og lod os bar dit *Navn*, ja Skyggen kun, igien.
> Du havde, Lissa*bon*, en Glands som største Stierne,
> En Vext som Liba*non*, en Grund som Mandel-Kierne,
> Dit Land som Ca*naan* med lifligst Frugt og Brød,
> Saa nydelig som *Mann*, og beste Honning flød.
> Syv Bierge var din *Stavn*, og vilden Hav din Lykke,
> Du Freden sad i *Favn*, som Demant i sit Smykke.]

Let me note as an aside that the virtuous internal rimes in each verse are used in the entire poem (see my italics in the Danish original above). More importantly Brorson emphasizes the universal implications of the eruption, produced by the fact that Lisbon is an imperial metropolis situated in the center of the world:

You are placed in the center where the Earth is divided
[*that is between the old and the new world, SEL*] [...]
Two gates [*to those two worlds, SEL*] open to the treasures of the world
[...] Where you rule, the sun never sets.
(ib. : 187, v. 13-20, I translate)

[Du laae som mit i Skiel af Jordens Landemerke, […]
To Porte aaben stod til heele Verdens Skat.
[…] I din Regierings Egn gik Solen aldrig ned.]

Here, in the first part of the poem, Brorson sets up two presuppositions preparing for the religious moralism formulated only later. One is the role of Lisbon as center of the world, a gate to the world, a position which, automatically, qualifies the moral and metaphysical conclusions drawn from the destruction as universally valid. The other is the corporeal and direct nature of the experience which through the imagery makes the distant and universal event an immediate experience with a concrete and individual bodily appeal. Here, Brorson recognizes the same experience which Christ exercises on the community of believers when gathered for a religious ceremony singing the hymns of Brorson, most of them written to popular and secular tunes.

Once these two presuppositions are established Brorson continues with the wellknown arguments of the theodicy. The evil inflicted upon humans by god is caused by the sinful behaviour of the humans themselves, not only the sins themselves like avarice, false pride, ignorance of god etc., but an excess of these sins. By such excessive acts the human beings force god to react himself in an exaggerated way which, Brorson states, is "strange" to god (ib.: 198, v. 297-301) and only released by the extraordinary sinfulness in the world. He repeats Saint Augustinus who on Rome says that its glory and splendour itself produced its destruction, because there was too much of it. Moderate luxury is a sign of god's

blessing, but an overdose of luxury is the sign of the impermissible human lust for gold. From time to time god might find it necessary to mark the boundary between these two attitudes to richness and splendour. As a Christian Brorson cannot help taking notice of the date of the eruption, All Saints Day, and as a Lutheran he cannot avoid to show his satisfaction when he learns that the palace of the inquisition was said to be the first to crumble. In Brorson the cataclysm plays the same role as the monsters played in antique mythology, still alive in the 18th century. Through his discursive strategy, Brorson evokes this age old way of interpreting the disastrous signs from god, and thereby he not only inscribes the eruption in this tradition, but also renews and reaffirms it (Larsen 2004a).

Like many of his contemporaries Brorson adapts a regressive view of the eruption, only leaving hope to humans without freedom entirely inscribed in the plans of god. But his theodicy has a twist: An ambiguity is found in his poetry in general that still has an impact on modern readers. The strong emphasis on individual bodily experience as the highway to the spiritual experience of Christ also creates a necessary bond between the spiritual experience and the same body that ultimately denies it. The body is a necessary medium, but with an irreducible ambiguity. In the Lisbon poem this aspect is aesthetically demonstrated through the virtuous use of rime – a sensual delight in itself, but aiming at a better understanding of the moralizing content. Thus, two aspects of freedom is never reconciled in his poetry, the freedom from earthly existence in Heaven by way of the body and freedom through the uncontrollable, individual body itself. Therefore Brorson, in the Lisbon-poem and elsewhere, relates his hope for humans to a relief from this tension in the afterworld, more than to a relief from the material bodily life itself. In Heaven the body is finally fully accepted, but now as an ever present image pointing to the union of Christ.

The eruption is represented in the same way the same role – Lisbon is a sinful place, now destroyed, but it is on the other hand the necessary way to god as a relief of earthly pains and tension. The devastated and disordered Lisbon is a blessing in disguise, but a necessary disguise and stronger than the proclaimed order of the theodicy – Lisbon "opens our eyes", "is Christian ground", "is the salt of wisdom" (Brorson 1956: 192, v. 134; 199, v. 304 and 320). The quiet harmony of the theodicy is in Brorson transformed into an ambiguous relation to the earthly world, confirmed by Lisbon. This is a theodicy with modifications (this complexity is not unknown in Leibniz, though, but rather in his easygoing followers like Christian Wolff and Alexander Pope).

Brorson did not know Voltaire's *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne*. Although Voltaire openly refutes the slogan of Leibniz and Pope he does so in an ironical countermovement which also contains an ambiguity. The very last lines read as follows (Breidert 1994 : 76):

> Un calife autrefois, à son heure derniére,
> Au dieu qu'il adorait dit pour toute prière :
> « Je t'apporte, ô seul roi, seul être illimité,
> Tout ce que tu n'as pas dans ton immensité,
> Les défauts, les regrets, les maux, et l'ignorance. »
> Mais il pouvait encore ajouter *l'espérance*.

The face value of this statement is quite clear. Hope is the mode of existence of humans, therefore the future is solely the responsibility and the possibility of humans without interference of god. The question of his existence and intentions is simply irrelevant when it comes to hope. Thus, Voltaire goes hand in hand with Kant away from Lisbon into a secularized future.

But Voltaire also indirectly repeats Thomas of Aquinas' argument in his treaty against the unbelievers, *Summa contra gentiles* (1259-67) where he ruminates, reluctantly as it were, on "In

what sense some things are said to be impossible to the Almighty", that is to say as a corollary precisely of his almightiness. One such thing is that "God cannot make the past not to have been" (Thomas Aquinas). Another is his lack of vices, regrets, ignorance, and faults in general. This reference to one of the basic texts of Christian faith in Roman Catholicism is, however, put forward by one of the infidels it was intended for, a dying Muslim. On this background the final and straightforward suggestive line, pronounced by Voltaire himself or the narrator of the poem, becomes less simple and direct than it seems – the caliph could have added, but did not, that god lacks hope, an entirely human capacity. So, Voltaire both speaks in contrast to and on behalf of the caliph. If the caliph repeats the Christian Thomas, Voltaire echoes both the Muslim caliph and the complex story of Pandora from non-Christian Greek mythology.

The reflection on the Lisbon disaster in both Kant, Brorson and Voltaire shows a change in existing behaviour and thought. The defence of the theodicy in Brorson shows it to be a painful way of organizing the world; the simple human hope suggested by Voltaire freeing humans from god as an antidote to the theodicy, is but a complex mixture of contradictory ideological positions revealing more confusion than hope and freedom. Kant's revolution of European thought occasioned by the Lisbon tragedy is a transformation of his earlier scientific ideas and theological beliefs opening for human hope and freedom as a challenging experience.

With Lisbon as a subtext, as it were, Kant expressed this experience in his *Muttmasslicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte* from 1786: "A presentation of the history of mankind must recommend to Man in order to serve him as a lesson and an improvement, shows him: that he must not blame providence in any way for the troubles that harms him; that also his own destruction cannot be ascribed to an original sin committed by his primitive parents; […] but that he recognizes every single event as

if it in all respects were produced by himself, and that he therefore must accept himself the full responsibility for his own hardships, also those occasioned by abuse of reason." (Kant 1964a: 101). Kant's point is that although we are not responsible for the natural processes themselves, we are nevertheless responsible for these processes when they are turned into a larger event the moment humans are involved. As for example an earthquake, we may add. We are not responsible for nature as such but for our practical and intellectual relation to it.

The Lisbon earthquake merged with the early modernization in Europe defining human hope and freedom first of all as an unavoidable and troublesome responsibility for our shared future. This challenge has been with us ever since and we have never stopping thinking, acting, writing and dreaming on this condition, *la condition humaine*. In this sense Lisbon made our world human and modern.

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