

Kant in the Dialectics of Enlightenment

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In *Dialektik der Aufklärung* discussions of Kant's ideas feature more than those of any other philosopher. Those discussions, however, rarely attempt to understand the argumentative structure of Kant's philosophy. Kant's ideas are invoked largely as an aide to gaining greater insight into the broader phenomenon of the evolution of modern reason. The text's treatment of Kant's work is, as a consequence, fragmentary and partial. Neither scholarly accuracy nor systematic reconstruction plays a role in Horkheimer and Adorno's methodology. Sometimes Kant is presented as an important though typical enough enlightenment thinker, as blind as any other to the destructive power of totalizing reason. Yet Kant's concepts of "synthesis" and "schematism" are also highlighted as amongst the most radical efforts to ground the Enlightenment interest in the mastery of nature. The text returns frequently to these concepts. Only occasionally are there acknowledgements that Kant's conception of the limits of knowledge might actually separate him from a single-tracked scientific rationalism. Perhaps the most critical assessment of Kant found in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* comes in the shape of associations made between Kant's moral rigorism and the amoralism promoted in Sade's Juliette.

In order to gain an overview of the various uses to which Kant is put in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* this chapter will focus on the two most substantial topics. First is the relationship between transcendental idealism and enlightenment rationality. This topic will bring us to Horkheimer and Adorno's interpretation of synthesis, schematism and the transcendental unity of apperception. The second section considers the identification of Kant's moral theory with Enlightenment amoralism. Before concluding, Horkheimer and Adorno's qualified moderation of their portrait of Kant as an arch Enlightenment thinker will be noted.

1. Transcendental Idealism and Enlightenment Rationality

Horkheimer and Adorno were immersed in Kant's philosophy long before they came to collaborate on *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Both had written dissertations on various

* In Horkheimer/Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Klassiker Auslegen* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2017), ed. Gunnar Hinrichs (pp. 115-129)

aspects of Kant's critical philosophy. Little of that expertise is utilized in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Rather, a number of Kant's concepts are treated in abstraction from the justifications provided in the first and second *Kritik*. Kant's efforts to establish transcendental idealism as a solution to problems generated by empiricism and rationalism are not considered. Instead, the question Horkheimer and Adorno bring to their engagement with Kant is that of the degree to which transcendental philosophy assumes a fractured relationship between mind and nature.

1.1 Synthesis

In the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* Kant argues that perceived objects and events are not independently whole or combined. It is through a distinctive act of consciousness, to which he gives the general name "synthesis", that objects gain the form in which they appear to us in experience. Consciousness therefore has a constituting capacity. In this respect, Kant's theory directly contradicts the view of ordinary realism that our experience of objects is a passive process, one in which we simply record the inherent properties of objects. Synthesis is a form giving activity and, according to Kant, it operates under rules that lie within human consciousness. These rules, from which consciousness cannot deviate, explain why we experience the regularity of appearance of persistent objects, and also why it is that there is shared experience of objects and events. Synthesis might be considered one of the most central theses of the *Kritik* in that its justification requires Kant to develop a complex range of supporting elements. Among those elements are: the categories, which are, in effect, the rules of combination; judgment, which is the application of those categories; and the transcendental unity of apperception, in which an "identical" "Ich denke" is said to accompany all representations or ideas, and therefore permits the experience of the continuity of objects and events. Although the point is not emphasized by Kant the synthesis thesis implies that the world, considered in independence from the synthetic judgments of consciousness, is formless.

What Kant maintains departs, in key respects, from some of the scientific commitments that are associated by Horkheimer and Adorno with the modern Enlightenment. Most obviously, what Kant proposes is not a materialist reductionism, since for him objects cannot be explained solely in terms of their material constituents. Consciousness is also (not necessarily exclusively so) a constituting element. And

further, although synthesis occurs according to rules, these rules are not themselves explicable as features of the spatio-temporal world. For this reason, some features of the judging consciousness can be said to be free of the laws of sufficient reason (i.e. space, time, causality) and therefore not subject to the conditions in which empirical processes operate. However, what is of interest to Horkheimer and Adorno, in their critique of the modern Enlightenment, is not exclusively the growing predominance of scientific rationality. They also attempt to understand the development of the distinctly modern notion of the human individual – of modern subjectivity – as an entity independent of nature. In the Kantian version of this notion the sovereignty of human beings consists, allegedly, in their power over nature. Order or form is brought to nature through the system of reason. Kant is taken by Horkheimer and Adorno as the most significant proponent of the view that meaning is produced through the subject's constitutive actions upon the supposedly meaningless object (17). This account of meaning contributes to a "Verselbstständigung" of human thought (17). It is, though, they argue, gained at the expense of the integrity of independent objects and the relations that exist between them. In so far, then, as Kant promotes the autonomy and executive capacities of the subject – of consciousness – he is innocent of the scientism of which *Dialektik der Aufklärung* is famously critical. However, his advocacy of the constitutive subject aligns him with a key feature of the Enlightenment, the feature that Horkheimer and Adorno describe as the "Entzauberung der Welt" (11).

Much of the discussion of the "Entzauberung der Welt" is concentrated in the first chapter of *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. In that chapter the dynamic of synthesis over the alleged chaos of nature is also examined (11), though Kant's version of this idea is not referred to explicitly. It is in the later chapter on Anti-Semitism that the idea of synthesis as a specifically Kantian concept comes into view. Much of the force of the criticism developed by Horkheimer and Adorno against Kant's synthesis thesis is based on the alternative claim that nature contains meaning prior to synthesis. Although this claim is a critical fulcrum, no theory of the independent meaningfulness of nature is set out. The approach Horkheimer and Adorno take is to identify the possibilities of experience that can be available only if nature is meaningful. What they argue, in essence, is that the Kantian picture of experience is a unidirectional process in which the subject acts without reciprocation upon an object. But what that

process forgets is that experience arises because of the ways in which human beings respond to the objects they encounter. In real human experience individuals are, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, immersed “im Auf und Nieder der umgebenden Natur” (190).

A central claim of *Dialektik der Aufklärung* is that the human tendency to respond to nature has been compromised by the advance of Enlightenment. Response is increasingly reduced to the business of applying the “correct” pre-existing category to objects. This observation has implications for the criticism of Kant’s notion of synthesis. Kant’s notion is not, in fact, identified as a case of bad epistemology. Rather, that epistemology captures the limited ways in which response is now possible. Response occurs according to rules. Horkheimer and Adorno foreground Kant’s contribution to this new disposition towards nature by citing his idea that knowledge is always “Rekognition im Begriff” (190). This Kantian phrase is taken from the section of the first *Kritik* (A, 103) in which the synthesis thesis is discussed. Recognition, in this theory, is not a responsive act. It is, rather, what Kant thinks of as a spontaneous act of the subject. Spontaneity here means acting without causality, but also acting within rules. In “Rekognition im Begriff” objects of nature become knowable by being subsumed under concepts/categories that belong to consciousness.

It is a curiosity of the text that Horkheimer and Adorno, in the same chapter in which Kant’s notion of synthesis is criticized, appear also to consider synthesis more positively as, potentially, a non-distorting mode of experiencing objects. This discussion does not reference Kant, though it might be interpreted as an effort to rescue the activity of synthesis from Kant and the Enlightenment generally. In this context synthesis is contrasted with “blinder Subsumtion” (211). Real synthesis, it is claimed, is involved in any effort to understand how concepts or properties or experiences might fit together. Synthesis of this kind means the placing together of items that really are mutually related. The rejection of the Kantian variety of synthesis does not mean, then, that we must also reject the idea that experience involves an effort to form integral wholes through judgment. But that idea needs to be reframed so that it can accommodate the claim that genuinely responsive experience learns from objects. An example of a productive and responsive synthesis is found in our experience of artworks. In sustained experience of artworks we do not allow our

“synthetic” judgments about what they are and mean to become final. Their objectivity defies a settled reaction, yet, as Adorno would later explain in *Ästhetische Theorie*, that reaction itself requires a dynamic subject. The experience of a work of art “ist Durchbruch von Objektivität im subjektiven Bewußtsein. Durch jene wird sie eben dort vermittelt, wo die subjektive Reaktion am intensivsten ist” (AGS 7, 363). There is an effort to bring unity to our experience of the work – a unity which is sensitive to what the work seems to want to do or say – but not a unity which closes off new ways of considering or engaging with the work.

1.2 Schematism

Some of Horkheimer and Adorno’s discussions of Kant’s synthesis thesis focus specifically on the related thesis of schematism. Schematism forms part of Kant’s explanation of transcendental judgment. Transcendental judgment is distinguished from empirical judgment in that it is a condition of experience, and its action is therefore a priori. Through transcendental judgment, in which the so-called manifold of intuition is placed under a category, ordinary empirical experience is given objects about which it can then make empirical judgments. Kant, however, holds that transcendental judgment cannot be explained solely by reference to the pure categories of the understanding and the manifold of intuition which form its content. The categories are a priori, whereas what we gain through intuition is subject to time. Conceived in these terms the categories and intuition are opposed. Transcendental judgment must therefore contain a third dimension if we are to understand how it brings those two elements together in an experience. This element, schematism, must be “in Gleichartigkeit” (A138/B177) with the two other elements of judgment. Schematism, Kant says (and Horkheimer and Adorno cite, 197), is a “verborgene Kunst in den Tiefen der menschlichen Seele” (A 141/B 181), in which intuition and category are mediated.

Horkheimer and Adorno appear to acknowledge that a key feature of schematism contrasts with the “Erfahrungsverlust” (215) of the fully enlightened world. They claim that the epistemological experience of the culture industry is passivity. Individuals receive packaged narratives. All of the elements of works of the culture industry are intentionally designed so that there is no scope for a unique response to those works. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, experience of this type is

determined by a kind of pre-schematism. The works are produced in ways that deprive the consumer of the kind of agency which, in fact, is at the centre of Kant's notion of schematism: "Die Leistung, die der kantische Schematismus noch von den Subjekten erwartet hatte, nämlich die sinnliche Mannigfaltigkeit vorweg auf die fundamentalen Begriffe zu beziehen, wird dem Subjekt von der Industrie abgenommen" (152). This apparently favourable response to Kant's idea of schematism is, however, at odds with the essentially critical appraisal of that idea found in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*.

Horkheimer and Adorno's generally critical discussion links schematism – an exceptionally technical part of Kant's critical philosophy – with the key thought of Kant's less formal essay on Enlightenment – a work which is certainly not based on transcendental analysis – "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?" In that essay Kant puts forward the view that emancipation from the restrictions of irrational tradition is possible for human beings who have reached a condition of "Mündigkeit". Mündigkeit is closely related to the idea of autonomy. Both ideas refer to the capacity of human agents to determine for themselves what they will believe and how they will act. By contrast, "Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen" (quoted in 88). These claims, relating to the practical life, seem to have little to do with the a priori conditions of experience, the domain of schematism. The connection is made by Horkheimer and Adorno through the shared commitment of Mündigkeit and schematism to action constrained by rules. Kant may find external instruction to be an unworthy form of life for rational beings, but he does not licence anarchy as a higher alternative. Rather, nature – human nature, that is – must be brought into harmony with reason. Both external instruction and irrational human nature (desires) are opposed to the realization of true freedom, that is, of the freedom that is supposedly evident when one acts according to rules. In action of that kind the claims of our nature will be refashioned in two possible ways. They are either suppressed or they will be re-challenged through an endorsing principle, a principle which would be recognized as valid by all rational beings. What Kant does not appreciate, Horkheimer and Adorno maintain, is that Mündigkeit involves a hidden kind of subordination to reasons that do not originate with the agent. Kant's description of true freedom, as action according to reasons that are shared by other rational beings, is really an abstraction which forgets that what is to count as a good

idea or principle is always historically determined. In social reality valid normative principles are enmeshed with considerations of how the agent is to survive as an individual in his or her given context. The historical determination that is the focus of Horkheimer and Adorno's study is that in which reason, supposedly geared towards emancipation, is, in fact, directed towards the control of nature: "Zugleich jedoch bildet Vernunft die Instanz des kalkulierenden Denkens, das die Welt für die Zwecke der Selbsterhaltung zurichtet und keine anderen Funktionen kennt als die der Präparierung des Gegenstandes aus bloßem Sinnenmaterial zum Material der Unterjochung" (90).

It is this character of reason which connects Mündigkeit with schematism. Schematism, Horkheimer and Adorno claim, is not a genuinely transcendental action of consciousness but is – like Mündigkeit – an abstraction from a historical form of reason. The effort to bring about harmony between the categories of the understanding and the manifold of intuition is, again, nothing other than an effort to master nature. Kant's description of schematism – which we have already seen – as a "verborgene Kunst" is, to Horkheimer and Adorno, evidence that Kant is insisting on the possibility of harmony, even as he also concedes that the mechanisms in which that harmony is produced remain unknown to us. What is invisible to Kant, though, is not the mechanism but the fact that reason in the age of Enlightenment insists on the subsumption of nature under usable categories. It contrives a unity between categories and alien nature through categorical compulsion (Hindrichs 2008, 305). In this respect schematism, like practical reason (as we shall see), is not a transcendental dimension of the human understanding, but one of historical praxis: "Die wahre Natur des Schematismus, der Allgemeines und Besonderes, Begriff und Einzelfall von außen aufeinander abstimmt, erweist sich schließlich in der aktuellen Wissenschaft als das Interesse der Industriegesellschaft" (90-91). The processes of the a priori understanding are now the processes of an historically specific interest. Kant is not portrayed as an apologist for industrial productivity. However, his notion of schematism is identified as a misrepresentation of essentially practical needs that obscure the real origin of those needs.

It is on the basis of this criticism that Kantian schematism is interpreted as a theory of experience in its distorted form. According to Kant's theory, schematism presents

empirical consciousness with objects: without schematism experience of objects is therefore precluded. Likewise, Horkheimer and Adorno argue, what we can experience in everyday reality is determined by a schematism-like “Begriffsapparat” (91) which provides us with only limited forms of experience. Schematism in both its Kantian and everyday contexts, in short, expresses the historical state of experience: that only what is already subsumed under a concept over which, it seems, we have no control, is available in experience.

1.3 Synthetic Unity of Apperception

A further dimension of Kant’s synthesis thesis discussed in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* is the theory of the synthetic unity of apperception. This theory concerns the conditions of consciousness that support the fundamental claim that the regularity of experience is attributable to the activities of consciousness. Objects are present in experience and knowable to us because of their a priori synthesis. The agency of that synthesis must be, Kant holds, a subject which itself endures throughout experience in some unchanging form. It cannot be changeable, as ordinary consciousness is, since it is actually the ground for the regularity and continuity of experience. An ever changing ground could not give us continuous objects. Kant sets out the idea in this way: “Nun können keine Erkenntnisse in uns stattfinden, keine Verknüpfung und Einheit derselben untereinander, ohne diejenige Einheit des Bewußtseins, welche vor allen Datis der Anschauungen vorhergeht, und, worauf in Beziehung, alle Vorstellung von Gegenständen allein möglich ist. Dieses reine ursprüngliche, unwandelbare Bewußtsein will ich nun die transzendente Apperzeption nennen” (A 107). This unity of apperception is transcendental – it is also referred to as transcendental self-consciousness – in that it is the a priori condition of the possibility of objects for us. Kant also refers to this condition as the “Ich denke”, which is present identically throughout all experiences.

Even this very brief sketch of Kant’s theory of the transcendental unity of apperception shows us that the theory does not concern empirical consciousness, i.e. the flux of thoughts and feelings of which we are aware in varying degrees. It is therefore not an attempt to capture the ways in which individuals experience their own inner lives or the ever changing shapes of the world around them. Horkheimer and Adorno, however, perceive Kant’s emphasis on the pure and invariant qualities of

transcendental apperception as evidence of a quite new relationship between ordinary (i.e. non-transcendental) human subjects and nature. This critical theoretical interpretation of transcendental philosophy, which is found throughout Adorno's work, might be criticized on one level as a mistaken reduction (e. g. Braun 1983, 191– 225), though that criticism loses sight of the broader question of how Kant situates consciousness vis-à-vis nature. Human beings bring unity to nature, but at the cost of a genuine interaction with it. This interaction is precluded, Horkheimer and Adorno claim, precisely because the subject is fixed. It – the “ewig gleiche Ich denke” (32) – cannot adjust to nature, but can only form it through its synthesizing activities. This synthesis, as we have seen, supposes that the material the subject forms is initially formless or chaotic. Synthetic activities are limited to what lie within the supposed capacities of the subject. Horkheimer and Adorno write: “Die disqualifizierte Natur wird zum chaotischen Stoff bloßer Einteilung und das allgewaltige Selbst zum bloßen Haben, zur abstrakten Identität” (16). As a direct consequence, nature will appear to this subject only in limited forms.

A further implication of the prioritization of the “Ich denke” over nature, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, is that it offers a paradoxical explanation of what is to count as knowledge. On the one hand, they claim, knowledge of objects is possible in the Kantian theory only because of the synthetic function of the transcendental self, but, on the other, this very thesis means that what we know can be nothing more than what we have constituted. Knowledge can never, within that theory, be a gain in anything radically new since knowledge is conceived as nothing more than a process of discovering what consciousness has already constituted. And given that the constituting activities of consciousness are already limited, the conclusion drawn by Horkheimer and Adorno is that Kant's theory allows experience to operate only within a circle. This reduces objects' possibility, and that reduction gives philosophical ground to our interest in controlling them: “Naturbeherrschung zieht den Kreis, in den Kritik der reinen Vernunft das Denken bannte” (32). Control is facilitated by reducing objects to the limited forms of our productivity, whilst the subject, positioned as the transcendental “Ich denke” – the supposed determining element of experience – is correlatively elevated.

This reference to the control of nature situates one of Kant's transcendental claims, once again, within the historical realm. The "Ich denke" is interpreted as a particular variety of socially evolved human agency. Horkheimer and Adorno turn to psychoanalytic concepts to support this claim. They contend that the process of adaptation to the kind of civilization that is characteristic of industrial society requires the repression of the human capacity for mimetic behaviour (64). Mimesis means more than imitation. It involves transformative adjustment of the person to the thing that is being imitated. The person, not constrained by a fixed identity, is motivated to become more like that thing. Identity is the product of this meeting of the self with what it imitates mimetically: "In nichts anderem als in der Zartheit und dem Reichtum der äußeren Wahrnehmungswelt besteht die innere Tiefe des Subjekts" (198). However, in societies that have developed through the force of Enlightenment rationality, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, there is a kind of behavioural discipline which prevents radical new experiences: "die rationale Praxis, die Arbeit" (189). This discipline is effective, it seems, because individuals come to perceive self-preservation within the terms of the behaviour that is socially demanded of them, a demand that is persuasive because it appeals to the identities they have gained through socialization: an economic actor, a citizen of a systematic state. Self-preservation, for this reason, refers to "psychological survival, that is the preservation of a 'sense of self' or 'identity', rather than merely biological survival" (Sherratt 2002, 90). Within this environment, mimetic behaviour appears to be disruptive and uneconomical since it takes the individual away from the prescribed form of life. This process of self-control, of "Verhärtung" (190), is what produces the "I". Horkheimer and Adorno maintain that the "I" of transcendental philosophy is a philosophical expression of the ego or "I". But the development of the "I" is more aptly captured, they maintain, by psychoanalysis as a theory of the organism's adjustment to reality. If, then, the "I" of the Kantian "Ich denke" can be appropriately captured by psychoanalytic theory it is now to be re-read as the self produced in response to the conditions of contemporary reality. It is not, again, an a priori condition. As Horkheimer and Adorno put it: "Selbst das Ich, die synthetische Einheit der Apperzeption, die Instanz, die Kant den höchsten Punkt nennt, an dem man die ganze Logik aufhängen müsse, ist in Wahrheit das Produkt sowohl wie die Bedingung der materiellen Existenz" (94). Kant's notion of the "Ich denke" captures abstractly the "I" already given in social reality.

Horkheimer and Adorno's engagements with Kant's notion of the synthetic unity of apperception are not purely critical. Arguably, their own theory of knowledge emerges in response to Kant's claims for the constitutive agent explained by transcendental self-consciousness. As an explicit revision of those claims Horkheimer and Adorno's theory of knowledge is partially committed to some of the territory marked out by Kant. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, Kant's theory acknowledges only the subject in the production of experience. They claim, by contrast, that experience is a process of "Vermittlung" – mediation – in which the subject reacts to the particularity of the outer world (198). At one level this is a direct contrast with Kant's position, at least if Kant is to be understood as conceiving of experience as the product of general rules. Nevertheless, one aspect of Kant's position is revised rather than completely rejected in the mediation theory of experience. According to this theory the subject is the creative dimension of experience, even as it seems simply to mirror the object. Objects are experienced by subjects as they endeavour to form concepts of those objects. Knowledge is not passive registration of an independently conceptual object. In this respect Horkheimer and Adorno agree with Kant. Where they differ, though, is in granting the object some kind of authority in what is to count as knowledge. The claim that "[u]m das Ding zu spiegeln, wie es ist, muß das Subjekt ihm mehr zurückgeben, als es von ihm erhält" (198) can make sense only if Horkheimer and Adorno hold that the object places some kind of demand on our epistemic activities. That demand cannot be met with the certainty, that, for example, naïve realism maintains. For naïve realism there is a kind of identity between what we claim the object is and what it independently is. In idealism the object is understood exclusively as the product of the subject's judgments. In this respect the object is made identical to the subject: the idealist subject makes "die Umwelt sich ähnlich" (196). Horkheimer and Adorno, though, maintain that identity is excluded as a possibility. We respond fallibly to the demands of the object since an "Abgrund" (198) exists between the object and the subject. If the subject addresses itself to the object without prejudice, however, it will allow its judgments to be revised in the face of the object, "so daß dem wahrgenommenen Gegenstand sein Recht wird" (211). In this way genuine experience arises through the efforts of the subject, through its revisable conceptualizations, to close the distance to the object, though it can never finally succeed.

2 Kant and Enlightenment Amoralism

Horkheimer and Adorno set out to show that the distinctive features of Kant's moral philosophy, like his theory of knowledge, are based on the assumption of a disenchanted nature. In the preface to *Dialektik der Aufklärung* Horkheimer and Adorno claim that they will demonstrate "wie die Unterwerfung alles Natürlichen unter das selbstherrliche Subjekt zuletzt gerade in der Herrschaft des blind Objektiven, Natürlichen gipfelt" (6). Kant's moral system, together with Sade's and Nietzsche's, they claim, are the "unerbittlichen Vollender der Aufklärung" (6) in which nature is denigrated as the human spirit or intellect is granted authority over everything that is unlike whatever it takes itself to be. It is not only external nature that is relegated in this process. Equally, human sensuous nature becomes subject to rational control (42). Horkheimer and Adorno understand this subjection to be some kind of distortion of morality. By adopting this critical perspective they appear to posit an effective – though not necessarily harmonious – connection between nature and morality prior to the Enlightenment. No justification for that connection is offered, yet by assuming it Horkheimer and Adorno generate a series of radical accusations against Kant's enterprise.

Horkheimer and Adorno hold that what is damaged by, what they call, "[d]ie Herrschaft des Menschen über sich selbst" (62) are, in fact, the possibilities of the self itself. When human beings identify primarily with the capacity for calculation and planning – activities that supposedly define the species' separateness from nature – much of what motivates them is obscured. By separating themselves from nature, and at the same time conceiving of themselves as subordinate to reason, human beings lose an understanding of "alle die Zwecke, für die [sie] sich am Leben [erhalten]" (62). Horkheimer and Adorno's thought is that the human form of self-preservation manifests itself in an interest in "gesellschaftliche[n] Fortschritt, die Steigerung aller materiellen und geistigen Kräfte, ja Bewußtsein selber" (62). Those purposes, it seems, can be considered to be motivated by what Horkheimer and Adorno think of as nature. Without nature, however, self-preservation becomes, they claim, an end in itself and not a means to an end.

This shift is exemplified, Horkheimer and Adorno argue, in Kant's effort to defend, through the categorical imperative, "die Pflicht der gegenseitigen Achtung" (92). Kant is interpreted as understanding this functional concept solely in terms of reason. This narrow focus, however, allegedly leaves him blind to the material interests and forces of violence that, Horkheimer and Adorno suggest, are the real reason mutual respect must be maintained. It seems, then, that real human interest in the maintenance – if not progression – of civilization, along with the threat of aggression, underpins mutual respect. Once human beings forget what this imperative is designed to achieve solutions to the problems of coordination are assessed purely on the basis of logical reasoning (95). This, however, leads to a form of morality which no longer refers to life, but to its own internal rules: "Die Nichtberücksichtigung der Kontexte erscheint dann als Unterdrückung der inneren und äußeren Natur durch die Macht der in sich selbst ruhenden Vernunft" (Günther 1985, 232). Hence, for Horkheimer and Adorno, the architectonic structure of Kant's moral system is evidence of its essential moral emptiness. It is nothing other than an exercise in organization in which every aspect of life gains a meaning exclusively through its incorporation into this system. That incorporation is decided on the basis of whether it can be defended on a principle which is acceptable to the abstract assessment of pure practical reason. What is lost sight of, however, is the need to base our principles on what we understand will serve our self-preservation. Kantian rationalism in forgetting the underlying demands of self-preservation is a reification of rational principles.

Horkheimer and Adorno liken Kant's architectonic to the imaginary games of Sade's Juliette in which sensuousness conforms to the strict rules of sexual sport. These rules place an external and independent structure on the exercise of sensuality. Morality in Kant, like sensuality in Sade, is voided of substance once it is reified in this way. The moral life becomes a process of ratiocination without a moral end: "Sie ist zur zwecklosen Zweckmäßigkeit geworden" (96). It nevertheless bears the semblance of purpose because it is pursued with planning. This planning involves the subjugation of spontaneous inclinations. Human beings, understood as essentially rational actors, cannot permit themselves to surrender their autonomy to those inclinations. Those inclinations are wrongly understood as external to the agent. Kant's *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Tugendlehre* is quoted: "ohne daß die Vernunft die Zügel der Regierung in die Hände nimmt, jene [Gefühle und Neigungen – BO'C] über den

Menschen den Meister spielen” (102). Morality, understood in this way, involves the application of rules which are produced by the intellect, and have no basis in feeling or inclination. And, returning to the claims of Kant’s essay on Enlightenment, morality of this kind really involves “das von Bevormundung befreite bürgerliche Subjekt” (93). The subject is free, in accordance with whatever set of purely rational precepts it chooses, to act as it wishes. This is a disastrous consequence of the new “Mündigkeit”. The Kantian process is mirrored, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, in Sade’s *Juliette*. They cite one passage in which Juliette gives instruction on how to assume the qualities of a ruthless murderer. The process involves mastery over certain inconvenient inclinations, from facial expressions to conscience. And perfect planning, rather than spontaneous action, is essential. Horkheimer and Adorno consider conscience to be a kind of feeling, a feeling that the purely rational actor is forced to abandon: “Die Freiheit von Gewissensbissen ist vor der formalistischen Vernunft so essentiell wie die von Liebe oder Haß” (102). This abandonment of feeling is evident too in the case of pity (Mitleid). Clairwil – another of the amoral protagonists of Sade’s *Juliette* – rejects the idea that pity is a virtue. Rather, Horkheimer and Adorno report, pity is for Clairwil a weakness which stands as an obstacle to the kind of self-possession she variously recommends. That self-possession is a state of being in which what convention perceives as the cruellest actions can be conducted in perfect coldness: without “Erschütterung” (109). Horkheimer and Adorno, once again, find the same tendency in Kant. They cite a passage from his *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* in which pity is described as lacking “die Würde der Tugend” (109). Horkheimer and Adorno do not, though, as Freyenhagen points out, simply replace reason with feeling, sharing with Kant the worry about its precariousness of sentiment based law (Freyenhagen 2013, 130). Nevertheless, the text hints at something more promising in morality shorn of all calculation.

Kant’s moral philosophy is not conflated by Horkheimer and Adorno with the amoral precepts of Sade’s characters. Their thesis is that those two positions converge, in spite of the profoundly different intentions behind their respective projects. This is because in both cases nature is placed under the control of a form of reason that has become a value in itself. Sade’s violent protagonists seek to destroy our ties to moral convention by replacing empathy with calculation and disciplined coldness. Kant does not, of course, reject conventional morality. But Horkheimer and Adorno argue that

his rational reconstruction of moral motivation separates morality from the actual interests of moral experience. Morality is validated by the structure of a particular form of judgment. Once our moral inclinations are excluded from a rational moral system we are left only with the rules of reason to guide us. Those rules, however, have no moral substance and they may just as easily be employed, as they are in Sade, to defend cruelty (a critical point Hegel too had made in his *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, § 139).

3 Transcendental Idealism versus Scientism

Kant's philosophy, as we have seen, is broadly characterized in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* as promoting autonomous reason at the expense of nature. The case is made by emphasizing the range of theses that surround Kant's ideas of synthesis and, in the context of the moral philosophy, his rationalist account of moral motivation. Kant, however, is not aligned by Horkheimer and Adorno with the scientistic ideology of the Enlightenment. This is the ideology which holds both that the only real things in the world are those which can be confirmed by scientific method and that scientific method is the exclusively valid exercise of reason. The problem with that method, Horkheimer and Adorno repeatedly argue, is that its criterion of evidence is narrowed to what is empirically "positive": it engages only with what lies ready for empirical investigation. No exploration of the unseen conditions (in the case of its social science versions) that give us the world that confronts us falls within its range of activities. Horkheimer and Adorno write: "Dem Positivismus, der das Richteramt der aufgeklärten Vernunft antrat, gilt in intelligible Welten auszuschweifen nicht mehr bloß als verboten, sondern als sinnloses Geplapper" (32). Significantly, the word "intelligibel" refers to Kant's notion of a conceptual space which is irreducible to the laws within which the sciences of the physical world operate effectively. It is on the basis of this separation of what we now call the space of reasons from the space of causes that Kant believes he is justified in making, respectively, a distinction between what we may think and what we can know. The limits of strict knowledge are marked by what transcendental idealism can explain. But Kant continued to believe that there are enduring concerns of human experience that cannot be resolved within transcendently grounded understanding (namely, the concern for freedom, immortality, the soul and God). Furthermore, philosophical enquiry demonstrates that no theoretical resolution – for or against – these concepts is possible. In spite of their

forceful critique of Kant's commitment to formal reason Horkheimer and Adorno acknowledge that Kant's interest in preserving practical freedom is an endeavour "die Möglichkeit der Vernunft zu retten" (101). It would, in other words, be irrational to rescind our interest in those existentially profound questions simply because they are not discussable within the space of causes. Horkheimer and Adorno occasionally remind us of this feature of Kant's philosophy, thereby separating him from one of the Enlightenment's central objectives.

Even where Kant grants authority to science in the space of causes Horkheimer and Adorno distinguish his position from scientism. The basis of that distinction is found in Kant's effort to provide scientific knowledge with philosophical foundations, an effort which led "zu Begriffen, die wissenschaftlich keinen Sinn ergeben" (92). The very process of reflecting on those foundations rather than asserting the authority of science produces a self-understanding which, Horkheimer and Adorno contend, "widerstreitet dem Begriff der Wissenschaft selbst" (92). Kant's theory of synthetic a priori propositions, for example, might well be designed to capture the kinds of epistemic claims that make up valid and reliable scientific knowledge, but the very idea of a synthetic a priori proposition is not itself a thesis that is immanent to scientific practice. It belongs to transcendental philosophy. The standpoint of transcendental philosophy is necessarily outside the space of empirical determination: it is the space of reason. Later Adorno would write that Kant's reflective engagement with science, together with his maintenance of the intelligible sphere, is an effort to intervene "in die Dialektik der Aufklärung... wo sie in der Abschaffung von Vernunft selbst terminiert" (AGS 6, 377– 378). Kant's philosophy is positioned on one side of the tension between idealism and materialism, the latter being the dominant assumption of the Enlightenment. In this regard Kant can be understood as providing a kind of opposition to that assumption. Nevertheless, his alternative, that of granting constitutive capacities to the transcendental subject, ultimately supports the very idea of the mastery of nature and the elimination of meaningful interaction with objects.

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