From Kant to Sade: A Fragment of the History of Philosophy in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno explain the relevance of the Second Excursus of their co-authored *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in the following way:

> The second excursus is concerned with Kant, Sade, and Nietzsche, whose works represent the implacable consumption of enlightenment. This section shows how the subjugation of everything natural to the sovereign subject culminates in the domination of what is blindly objective and natural. This tendency levels all the antitheses of bourgeois thought, especially that between moral rigor and absolute amorality. (DA, 21-22; DE, xviii)[1]

From this passage the Second Excursus can be taken to illustrate how the dialectic of enlightenment develops in such a way as to result in the opposite of enlightenment's own fundamental goal of removing domination, whether it concerns the domination exercised by human beings in relation to one another or the domination of human beings by natural forces. Enlightenment rationality proves to be self-undermining because reason itself and the human beings whom it is meant to liberate by means of the domination of nature become subject to forces to which reason must simply accommodate itself. This outcome anticipates how individuals have become subject to blind, quasi-natural economic and social forces in capitalist modernity and under Fascism. In addition, this outcome has resulted in the abolition of any

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[1] I use the following abbreviations of writings whose full bibliographical details are provided in the list of references:

AA = Kant, *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*

CJ = Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*

CPR = Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*/*Critique of Pure Reason*

DA = Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*

DE = Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

KCPR = Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*

KKrV = Adorno, *Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft*

LHP = Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6, Volume I.*

VGP = Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie, Teil 1.*

WE = Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?'

objective moral differences. For how can such differences be rationally explained in terms of blind forces whose authority stems only from the fact that they have proven to be more powerful *vis-à-vis* other forces? In connection with how blind natural drives have come to govern human behaviour, Horkheimer and Adorno answer that no such explanation is possible: 'Enlightened reason no more possesses the means of measuring one drive within itself against others than of ordering the universe into spheres' (DA, 114; DE, 71).

The idea that enlightenment rationality undermines its fundamental aims and ideals requires showing that this form of rationality does indeed contain the seeds of this self-undermining of its own aims and ideals. This suggests that in the case of the Second Excursus of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno must seek to establish an essential connection between Kant's philosophy, which exemplifies enlightenment rationality, and the next stage in their attempt to illustrate the dialectic of enlightenment. This next stage concerns certain ideas and principles of action that find expression in the novels of the Marquis de Sade. To excuse the absence of any demonstration of an essential connection between Kant's philosophy and the novels of Sade by an appeal to the historical context in which the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was written, and with which the text itself engages, or on similar grounds, must, therefore, be considered unsatisfactory. This line of defence in any case begs the question, by assuming that Horkheimer and Adorno do not attempt to demonstrate any such connection.

I shall attempt to explain Horkheimer and Adorno's account of the essential connection between Kant's philosophy and the relevant ideas and principles of action encountered in Sade's novels, by arguing that for them Sade's novels make explicit the *practical* implications of key aspects of Kant's *theoretical* philosophy, in the sense of what it would mean for the aspects of reason in question to be embodied in principles of action and in human practices. In this way, I show that Horkheimer and Adorno's account of the transition from Kant's philosophy to Sade's novels in the Second Excursus of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is not as arbitrary as it may well appear to the reader. First, though, with reference to the idea of a 'history of philosophy', I want to say something about the *nature* of the connection that Horkheimer and Adorno seek to establish.

The Second Excursus as fragment of the history of philosophy

An attempt to write a systematic history of philosophy that, for reasons shortly to be explained, is relevant to the Second Excursus of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is to be found in Hegel's

lectures on the history of philosophy. [2] For Hegel, the history of philosophy ought not to be the narration of a random succession of philosophical standpoints and theories. Rather, the standpoints and theories that form the objects of this history are to be presented as 'distinct but necessary stages in the development of reason as it comes to consciousness of itself' (VGP, 226; LHP, 58). The history of philosophy must, moreover, aim to comprehend the *whole* process through which reason progressively achieves self-consciousness, by showing how each stage represents an essential moment of the unfolding of reason. It can fulfil this aim by exhibiting the inner necessity that connects each stage in the development of reason with the previous one, and the most recent philosophy (in this case Hegel's own philosophy), by comprehending and uniting the earlier stages, will be 'the richest and most concrete philosophy, containing all the earlier philosophical principles within itself, although only as elements that previously presented themselves as the whole' (VGP, 228; LHP, 60). Thus, the concept of reason is both the object and the end of the history of philosophy. Horkheimer and Adorno do not appeal to the idea of a higher end towards which the history of philosophy is moving. Their account of the transition from Kant's philosophy to the novels of Sade can nevertheless be thought to exhibit the following key features of Hegel's idea of a history of philosophy:

(1) The idea that there is some kind of essential connection between one stage in the history of reason and the next one which must be brought to light. Since, for Hegel, the object of the history of philosophy is the history of reason, we might think of Horkheimer and Adorno as seeking to provide a fragment of the history of philosophy in a Hegelian sense by attempting to demonstrate the inner necessity which connects Kant's philosophy and the novels of Sade and explaining this necessity in terms of the concept of reason.

(2) The idea that the history of philosophy concerns the development of 'but *one* reason' [*nur Eine Vernunft*] (VGP, 220; LHP, 54). In the Second Excursus, Horkheimer and Adorno speak of a concept of reason whose subjects are 'the bearers of one and the same reason' (DA, 106; DE, 65). Even if they do not operate with a single, unitary concept of reason in the strict sense of a concept

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[2] The claim that key features of Hegel's idea of a history of philosophy can be detected in the Second Excursus should not be confused with the claim that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* viewed *as a whole* contains some kind of history of philosophy.

of reason that can be reduced to one fundamental property or principle,[3] we shall see that their account of the transition from Kant's philosophy to the novels of Sade concerns the idea of a reason whose various modes of theoretical *employment* find practical expression in Sade's novels. The employment of theoretical reason assumes the following forms: the synthetic and instrumental activity of the understanding; speculative reason's search for increasing systematic unity; and a critical form of rationality that not only examines claims to truth, but also seeks to prevent the illegitimate extension of the use of speculative reason

(3) We can speak of a history of philosophy in the Hegelian sense also because the Second Excursus of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, by showing how Sade develops the practical implications of the reason whose employment not only forms the object of Kant's theoretical philosophy but is also the instrument of philosophical inquiry and critique, makes reason as it has manifested itself historically into an object of critical reflection. Thus, in the Second Excursus, we encounter an attempt to explain, to use Hegel's words, 'the development of reason as it comes to consciousness of itself'.

(4) The idea that the history of philosophy is not only concerned with something past. Reason, as the object of the history of philosophy, and the particular ideas and principles in which reason finds concrete expression, are present to us and inform our thinking and actions at the point of history which we ourselves occupy and from which we survey the history of philosophy. This is because these ideas and principles have shaped our self-understanding and our collective understanding of the world, thereby determining the social and political spheres as well as the spheres of culture and religion. Although philosophy is only one manifestation of the 'spirit' of an age, philosophy possesses, for Hegel, the

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[3] There is, however, one sense in which they think that all the forms of reason which they introduce in connection with Kant's philosophy, that is, critical reason, instrumental reason and speculative reason, are unified, namely, in virtue of their common subjection to the rules of logic, which demand that concepts be developed and linked in ways that avoid contradiction: 'The laws of logic establish the most universal relationships within the order and define them. Unity lies in self-consistency. The principle of contradiction is the system *in nuce*' (DA, 104; DE, 63). See also KKrV, 27-28; KCPR, 14.

privileged status of the clearest mode of spirit's self-knowledge (VGP, 236-238; LHP, 66-67). The object of the history of philosophy, that is to say, reason, is consequently something present with which, as Hegel puts it, 'we as thinking beings … have to deal [*zu tun haben*]' (VGP, 231; LHP, 62). For Horkheimer and Adorno, this means dealing with enlightenment reason's responsibility for how 'the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity' (DA, 25; DE, 1).

There are two features of this relation of the Second Excursus of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to the Hegelian idea of a history of philosophy that I would now briefly like to highlight.

(1) In seeking to show that Kant's philosophy has practical implications that become manifest in certain ideas and principles of action that can be detected in Sade's novels, and which can in turn be related to key features of Nietzsche's philosophy, Horkheimer and Adorno develop a novel account of the history of philosophy. This version of the history of post-Kantian philosophy goes from Kant through Sade to Nietzsche, rather than offering the more traditional type of presentation that proceeds from Kant through German Idealism and Schopenhauer to Nietzsche.

(2) If one is willing to grant Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* the status of a philosophical text, the historical distance that separates today's reader of this work from some of its earlier readers, who found themselves situated in the cultural, intellectual, social and political environment with which the text engages, allows us to situate it itself in the history of philosophy. Is this not evident from how we seek to locate the text not only in relation to the writings of earlier philosophers or social theorists but also in relation to later ones, and from how we try to place it in its own historical context which, now that it is no longer immediately present to us, is not treated as self-evident?

These two general features of the Second Excursus of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* can in turn be related in different ways to Horkheimer and Adorno's aim of offering an internal critique of enlightenment reason. The idea that enlightenment rationality, when judged in

accordance with standards that its own representatives have set up, must be thought to undermine itself, demands showing that this form of rationality does indeed contain the seeds of the destruction of its own aims and ideals. At the very least, therefore, the Second Excursus must render intelligible the way in which the dialectic of enlightenment is exemplified by how Kant's philosophy, which is taken to be representative of enlightenment rationality, has practical implications that become explicit in the novels of Sade and in the philosophy of Nietzsche. In other words, if the Second Excursus is to provide a convincing, previously missing fragment of the history of philosophy, Horkheimer and Adorno must themselves adopt a systematic approach, in the sense of demonstrating an essential connection between Kant's philosophy and the novels of Sade which can be explained in terms of the nature of enlightenment reason. Even if this connection does not pretend to be a strictly necessary one, the presentation of the transition from Kant's philosophy to Sade's novels must avoid the appearance of a narrative that lacks any internal coherence because of the disconnected nature of its key elements.[4] In possessing a systematic dimension, however weak it may in fact be, the Second Excursus of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* would have something in common with the type of *Philosophiegeschichte* in which Horkheimer and Adorno do not themselves claim to engage.

Our position as readers of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is different, however, for although this text may itself provide possible material for a history of philosophy, we can, as readers rather than as writers of such a history, restrict ourselves to analysing and assessing its claims. Given what has already been said above, part of this endeavour will consist in asking whether there is, in fact, any kind of genuine systematic connection between Kant's philosophy and the novels of Sade that can be explained in terms of enlightenment reason and how it has manifested itself historically. In the absence of such a connection, we may at best credit Horkheimer and Adorno with having developed a provocative thesis that is, however, far from perspicuous, let alone true. In short, for us, Horkheimer and Adorno cannot escape some of the responsibilities of the historian of philosophy, including the responsibility of making sufficiently plausible the connections that they claim exist between standpoints and theories

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[4] In the Second Excursus Horkheimer and Adorno claim that 'only exaggeration is true' (DA, 142; DE, 92). This claim is compatible with the claim that they are seeking to demonstrate an essential connection between Kant's philosophy and the novels of Sade, for in this particular case it may be a matter of exaggerating those elements of Kant's philosophy and Sade's novels that allow this connection to be established in such a way that people are made vividly aware of it.

that otherwise appear fundamentally different. It would be wrong, moreover, to assume that Horkheimer and Adorno had no interest in doing this.

Horkheimer and Adorno's account of how certain ideas and principles found in Sade's novels make explicit the practical implications of key aspects of Kant's philosophy has, not surprisingly, been challenged. It has been argued that although Sade should indeed be granted a place in the history of philosophy, this history of philosophy cannot seriously be regarded as one that proceeds from Kant's philosophy to the novels of Sade, with the transition in question being explained in terms of a common obsession with purely formal structures. It is here pointed out that in the case of Kant the claim that a concern with formal structures means that reason has no substantial goals of its own is obviously mistaken, because '[o]nly the hastiest reading of Kant's work could miss his attack on instrumental conceptions of reason', whereas for him 'the real task of reason is precisely to set ends' (Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, 193). This criticism will be shown partly to miss its target, however, by equating a purely formal conception of reason with instrumental reason. Moreover, even if Kant does seek to explain how *pure practical* reason is capable of setting its own unconditionally valid ends in the form of moral duties, and how reason is not, therefore, purely instrumental in character, Horkheimer and Adorno are primarily concerned with his account of *theoretical* reason. They in fact dismiss Kant's moral theory as an example of bourgeois bad conscience, as 'a horror of relapsing into barbarism' (DA, 108; DE, 67). Therefore, if we are to judge the intelligibility of Horkheimer and Adorno's account of the relation between Kant's philosophy and the novels of Sade, we must begin with Kant's account of theoretical reason. Thus, even if aspects of Kant's moral philosophy do feature in the Second Excursus, any references to them must first be traced back to his theoretical philosophy. It is in Sade's novels that for Horkheimer and Adorno the practical implications of key elements of Kant's theoretical philosophy become explicit, whereas they regard Kant's moral philosophy not only as a case of bourgeois bad conscience, but also as something that lacks any essential relation to the theoretical conception of reason encountered in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Hence Horkheimer and Adorno's statement that Kant's 'attempt to derive the duty of mutual respect from a law of reason, although more cautious than any other such undertaking in Western philosophy, has no support within the *Critique*' (DA, 108; DE, 67). [5]

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[5] For this reason, I find problematic the claim that Horkheimer and Adorno's subordination of practical reason to theoretical reason in their account of Kant's philosophy, which goes against the priority that Kant himself accords to practical philosophy, is the first and most important of their exaggerations in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

I shall accordingly begin with Horkheimer and Adorno's presentation of Kant's theoretical philosophy, before going on to explain how features of Sade's novels represent the practical expression of key elements of the modes of employment of reason are work in it. This will lead me to argue (1) that Horkheimer and Adorno's justification of the connections between Kant's philosophy and the novels of Sade depends on the claim that theoretical reason is *not* purely instrumental in character but is, nevertheless, incapable of setting any ends of its own, beyond the purely formal ones of organizing the material provided by intuition and organizing its own cognitions or principles into a systematic whole, and (2) that this claim, independently of any concerns about Horkheimer and Adorno's dismissive attitude towards Kant's moral philosophy,[6] indicates a weakness in their account of how we get from Kant's philosophy to the novels of Sade. This weakness concerns how a non-instrumental form of reason is ultimately not to be found in Kant's *theoretical* philosophy, even where we do appear to encounter one.

The presentation of Kant's conception of theoretical reason in the Second Excursus

Horkheimer and Adorno state that for Kant enlightenment consists in the employment of one's understanding without the guidance of another. This statement broadly corresponds to Kant's motto of enlightenment '[h]ave courage to make use of your *own* understanding', and to his description of the stage of immaturity from which enlightenment frees humanity as one that consists in the 'inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another' (AA 8 [WE]: 35). Horkheimer and Adorno proceed to link this critical rationality to a particular activity of reason, when they claim that the employment of the understanding (*Verstand*) is here guided by reason (*Vernunft*), and that this amounts to saying that the understanding 'combines its individual cognitions into a system in accordance with its own

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(see Christ, 'Exkurs II. Juliette oder Aufklärung und Moral'). Rather, as we shall see, they want to show that there is, in fact no essential connection between Kant's theoretical philosophy and his practical philosophy in so far as the latter makes distinctively moral claims, and that the absence of any such connection becomes explicit in Sade's novels. Thus, it is not so much a matter of subordinating practical reason to theoretical reason than a matter of demonstrating the gulf that separates them. This does not rule out the possibility that Horkheimer and Adorno nevertheless exaggerate the extent of this gulf so as to make this point more forcibly.

[6] Elsewhere, however, Adorno develops some independent arguments against Kant's moral philosophy. See Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, 102-120.

internal logic', with the rules of reason providing 'instructions for a hierarchical ordering of concepts' (DA, 104; DE, 63).[7]

Kant draws a distinction between the understanding and reason in terms of their respective functions and the extent of their legitimate claims to knowledge. In the Transcendental Analytic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the understanding provides the concepts (or categories) that organize experience into a law-governed whole, by providing the principles of cognition that serve to unite representations which either indirectly derive from sensory experience through the pure forms of intuition, that is to say, space and time, or derive from these pure forms of intuition themselves. In the Transcendental Dialectic reason, in contrast, is said to transcend altogether the limits of sensory experience and any possible intuition in its attempts to attain complete systematic unity and closure by providing the complete set of conditions for any conditioned item of knowledge. I shall return to this important distinction between the understanding and reason. For now, however, it is enough to point out that this distinction does not undermine the claim that we are dealing with a hierarchical ordering of concepts which involves an employment of the understanding that is guided by reason. This can be shown with reference to some general claims that Kant makes in the Prefaces and Introductions to the two editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

In the Introduction to the second edition of this work, Kant has the following to say about reason: '[R]eason is the faculty that provides the principles of cognition *a priori*. Hence pure reason is that which contains the principles for cognizing something absolutely *a priori*' (CPR, A11/B24). The understanding and reason in the narrow sense of the object and source of the transcendental dialectic both concern the application of *a priori* principles: in the one case with respect to how such principles guide the synthesizing activity of the understanding and in the other case with respect to application of principles in the search for complete systematic unity and closure. The understanding and reason can therefore be classed as particular modes of the employment of *one and the same* reason, whose distinctive concern of reason is the identification and application of such principles. There is, however, the following fundamental difference between the understanding and reason in the narrower sense. The principles of the understanding are validated by their application, which takes the form of an act of synthesis, in relation to the sensory manifold that is given to the mind through the pure forms of intuition, space and time. Reason, in contrast, seeks to apply the same logical

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[7] For a more detailed attempt to link Kant's concept of enlightenment to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, see the sixth of Adorno's 1959 lectures on this text (KKrV, 91-107; KCPR, 57-68).

principles, 'whose use is unavoidable in the course of experience and at the same time sufficiently warranted by it', independently of any such validating intuition. In its drive to discover the unconditioned, reason is led to introduce its own concepts, which Kant terms 'transcendental ideas'. This employment of reason generates logical difficulties that reason is incapable of solving, because the difficulties in question 'transcend every capacity of human reason' (CPR, A vii). The essential difference between the understanding and reason is therefore a difference in the employment of reason understood more generally and in the corresponding *a priori* principles and concepts, with one use of reason generating successful cognitions in a way that the other use of reason is unable to do. These fundamental differences do not entail, however, that reason, understood more broadly as a faculty concerned with the identification and application of *a priori* principles, and thus as that which both guides the employment of the understanding and generates insoluble logical difficulties when it seeks to transcend the bounds of all possible experience, does not in each case seek to organize concepts in a hierarchical fashion.

As regards the ordering and systematic tendencies of reason when it is understood in the broader sense of a faculty concerned with the identification and application of *a priori* principles, Kant claims that transcendental philosophy would amount to a system of concepts that make possible *a priori* knowledge of objects and that it thus aims at analysis of 'the principles of *a priori* synthesis in their entire scope' (CPR, A12/B25). Further principles can be derived from these principles of *a priori* synthesis. Transcendental philosophy thereby appears to open the way for a more complete system of *a priori* principles, in which lower principles are subsumed under more general ones. Thus, '[a]n **organon** of pure reason would be a sum total of those principles in accordance with which all pure *a priori* cognitions can be acquired and actually brought about. The exhaustive application of such an organon would create a system of pure reason' (CPR, A11/B24-25). This ordering of principles of knowledge aims not only at completeness ('the principles of *a priori* synthesis in their entire scope') but also at the unification of the relevant principles as parts of one and the same interconnected and internally consistent whole, that is to say, a system. This demand, which as we shall see is only a regulative idea, follows from Kant's characterization of the essential nature of 'pure speculative reason' which

> is, in respect of principles of cognition, a unity entirely separate and subsisting
> for itself, in which, as in an organized body, every part exists for the sake of all
> the others as all the others exist for its sake, and no principle can be taken with

certainty in **one** relation unless it has at the same time been investigated in its **thoroughgoing** relation to the entire use of pure reason. (CPR, B xxiii)

Even at the level of the use of the understanding, therefore, a hierarchical and systematic ordering of its concepts is held to be possible, one that is, however, undertaken by reason rather than by the understanding itself. This would resemble how reason, in the narrower sense of the object and source of the transcendental dialectic, seeks to subsume all conditioned items of knowledge under the concept of something unconditioned which unifies these conditioned items of knowledge, thereby generating a 'transcendental idea', for which a validating intuition is this time lacking.

Horkheimer and Adorno claim that this is an essentially formal notion of reason. Reason is concerned with the identification and application of *a priori* principles and the systematic ordering of such principles, while lacking any substantive content of its own. Where reason does appear to generate some content of its own, that is, in the form of the transcendental ideas, it is forced to recognize the problematic nature of such ideas, given their lack of any validating intuition and the logical difficulties that they generate. These ideas are reduced to merely regulative ones that are granted the formal function of facilitating increasing systematic unity with regard to *a priori* principles of cognition that can be validated by a corresponding intuition. Horkheimer and Adorno explain this purely formal form of rationality which lacks any substantive content of its own in terms of the critical use of reason which finds expression in Kant's motto of enlightenment. This explanation of the reduction of reason to something that is purely formal in nature appeals to the corrosive effects of the critical use of reason and, in particular, the radical suspicion of the mere idea of any kind of substantive content whose truth can be demonstrated:

> Reason contributes nothing but the idea of systematic unity, the formal elements of fixed conceptual relationships. Any substantial objective [*Ziel*] which might be put forward as a rational insight is, according to the Enlightenment in its strict sense, delusion, falsehood, "rationalization," no matter what pains individual philosophers may take to steer us away from this conclusion and toward a reliance on philanthropic feeling. (DA, 105; DE, 64)

One can call this claim 'the purely formal nature of reason claim'. The claim that reason is purely formal in nature, when applied to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, is in one sense clearly

false. This is because reason, in its critical function of examining the limits of its own capacity to know objects, has itself as its object and is, in this sense at least, not without its own content. Horkheimer and Adorno, however, are concerned with a specific type of content, namely, ends or purposes. The claim that reason is purely formal in virtue of how the lack of any substantive content of its own results from how the critical employment of reason undermines the mere idea of any such content, should, therefore, be taken to mean the absence of any ends or purposes that are *internal* to reason.[8] One might, therefore, think of Horkheimer and Adorno as claiming that there is no way of explaining in purely conceptual terms how we can get from Kant's theoretical philosophy to the idea of a pure practical reason that is capable of generating its own content. Any ends that practical reason adopts will instead be external to reason, and thus not 'pure', reducing reason to a means of achieving given ends, that is to say, to a purely instrumental form of rationality.

To understand why Horkheimer and Adorno make the claim that reason is incapable of generating any ends of its own, and that it must therefore function as an instrument in connection with ends that are external to it, we need to think of them as posing something like the following question: why does reason, in the form of the understanding, perform the synthesizing function that Kant attributes to it? Now, one might object that such a question cannot be meaningfully posed, in that it is simply the case that the human mind performs this function, whereas if did not do this, a unified experience of the world and the objects within it would not be possible at all, and so one could not, therefore, even pose such a question. Yet if one were to pose this question, one might well come to answer it in something like the following way: the knowledge which is thereby made possible ultimately concerns the conditions of biological survival, for this knowledge turns out to be the basis of all knowledge that enables us to orientate ourselves in the world.[9] Theoretical reason does not, and cannot, however, specify the determinate ends in accordance with which we seek to orientate ourselves within world. Rather, it identifies and applies only the minimal, most general conditions by means of which the human mind organizes its experience of the world and is thereby able to

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[8] For Kant, it is, of course, the task of pure practical reason, not theoretical reason, to generate such ends. This is evidence of the extent to which Horkheimer and Adorno dismiss the central claims of Kant's moral philosophy which, as we have seen, are explained by them in mainly sociological terms.

[9] See Gottschlich, 'The Necessity and Limits of Kant's Transcendental Logic, with Reference to Nietzsche and Hegel', 303.

act effectively in it, though this is not to say reason necessarily provides the *most* effective means of doing this.

Horkheimer and Adorno could here appeal to Kant's own claim that the validity of the principles of the understanding is confirmed, and thus validated, by their application to an experiential content which these principles in turn render possible, in the sense of organizing the intuited manifold in such a way as to transform it into a possible object of knowledge ('Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind' [CPR, A51/B75]). When this claim is taken together with how the end of reason, in so far as its concerns the understanding, ultimately appears to be biological survival, the validity of the principles of the understanding appears to be demonstrated by how systematic knowledge proves to be compatible not only with modern physics but also with everyday praxis. One can call this claim 'the confirmation by experience claim'. Ultimately, then, the demand to validate the *a priori* principles of the understanding by demonstrating their application to experience finds practical expression in the demand that knowledge serve as an effective means of mastering nature in accordance with human ends. Thus, in so far as it does become practical, reason assumes the form of instrumental reason. In this way, the validity of philosophical critique is itself made to depend on its ability to justify the fundamental principles of all knowledge by demonstrating how these principles possess an explanatory and predictive value in relation to the given, purely natural end of self-preservation:

> A thinking which fails to maintain agreement between system and intuition [*Anschauung*] does not merely violate isolated visual impressions; it conflicts with real praxis. Not only does the expected event fail to occur but the unexpected happens: the bridge collapses, the crop fails, the medicine causes illness. The spark which most conclusively indicates a lack of systematic thinking, a violation of logic, is not a fleeting perception but sudden death. The system which enlightenment aims for is the form of knowledge which most ably deals with the facts, most effectively assists the subject in mastering nature. The system's principles are those of self-preservation. Immaturity amounts to the inability to survive. (DA, 106; DE, 64-5; translation modified)

To sum up, when taken together the purely formal nature of reason claim and the confirmation by experience claim generate the further claim that nature will be dominated in accordance with an end that is itself purely formal. The end in question is that of self-preservation, which

Horkheimer and Adorno accordingly describe as 'the constitutive principle of science, the soul of the table of categories' (DA, 109; DE, 68). The end of physical survival is purely formal in that it represents a necessary condition of having ends at all, but does not itself determine either what these ends are, beyond the purely natural ends connected with the desire for self-preservation, or what they ought to be.[10] This is, in effect, to make the maintenance of the capitalist mode of production together with accommodation to its requirements into the end of reason, because this mode of production has become the condition of individual self-preservation in modern society. As an economic system governed by a purely formal, instrumental form of rationality, capitalism is, moreover, that which unites individuals who, compelled by the desire for self-preservation, engage in acts of cooperation that establish merely external relations between them. At the same time, each individual is functionally replaceable by other individuals in the modern division of labour:

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[10] The way in which I identify self-preservation with the preservation of the individual as a purely biological entity might be said to run counter to Horkheimer and Adorno's concern with the preservation of the psychic unity of the subject. This unity is presupposed by the idea of the subject associated with Kant's concept of the synthetic unity of apperception. This is the unity of the subject that, with the aid of the categories, unifies *its* representations, which requires that it is able to recognize these representations as its own representations and to do so in the course of time, which entails the self-identity of this subject. I have two responses to this potential criticism. First of all, the examples to which Horkheimer and Adorno appeal in one of the key passages that I have cited clearly concern material threats to physical survival ('the bridge collapses, the crop fails, the medicine causes illness'). Secondly, self-preservation in a biological sense is a material precondition of self-preservation in a psychic sense, unless, that is, one wants to claim that the self could exist as a psychic entity without at the same time existing as a material entity. The fact that Horkheimer and Adorno see these two entities as necessarily related in existential terms is implied by the following statement:

> Even the ego [*das Ich*], the synthetic unity of apperception, the agency which Kant calls the highest point, from which the whole of logic must be suspended, is really both the product and the condition of material existence. Individuals, in having to fend for themselves, develop the ego as the agency of reflective foresight and overview; over successive generations it expands and contracts with the individual's prospects of economic autonomy and productive ownership. (DA, 109-10; DE, 68).

In other words, the extent and the strength of the ego is conditioned by the material conditions of the individual's life and will therefore vary according to these same conditions.

> [R]eason is the agency of calculating thought, which arranges the world for the purposes of self-preservation and recognizes no function other than that of working on the object as mere sense material in order to make it the material of subjugation. The true nature of the schematism which externally coordinates the universal and the particular, the concept and the individual case, finally turns out, in current science, to be the interest of industrial society. Being is apprehended in terms of manipulation and administration. Everything – including the individual human being, not to mention the animal – becomes a repeatable, replaceable process, a mere example of the conceptual models of the system. (DA, 106-107; DE, 65)

The question as to whether this explanation of the practical implications of Kant's theoretical philosophy shows that Horkheimer and Adorno have met the minimal requirements of a history of philosophy, however fragmentary, nevertheless remains unanswered, since we have not yet examined their account of the transition from Kant's philosophy to the novels of Sade. In the next section, I shall attempt to explain this transition on the basis of Horkheimer and Adorno's account of the nature of theoretical reason as described by Kant and with regard to the practical implications of this form of reason that, or so they claim, are made explicit in Sade's novels.

From Kant to Sade

In connection with the transition from Kant's philosophy to the novels of Sade, the enlightenment subject is said to become 'the bourgeois subject freed from all tutelage' (DA, 109; DE, 68). Here, reason deprives itself of any substantive content in the form of ends that are internal to it through its relentless unmasking of the untruth of any claims concerning such ends. Thus, we arrive at the purely formal nature of reason claim by means of the corrosive effects of the purely critical employment of reason. The outcome is essentially the same, moreover, in that, through being deprived of any substantial content of its own, reason is reduced to the instrument of given natural ends that it then seeks to legitimize, instead of being the sovereign authority that it takes itself to be:

> Because it unmasks substantial goals as asserting the power of nature over mind and as curtailing its own self-legislation, reason, as a purely formal entity, is at the service of every natural interest. Becoming simply an organ, thinking reverts to nature. (DA, 110; DE, 68)

Horkheimer and Adorno go on to suggest that this purely formal rationality can, in fact, cease altogether to concern itself with determinate ends. Instead, reason engages in the activities of calculation, planning and organization simply for their own sake, and thereby concerns itself with what were previously merely means, but now not as means but as ends in themselves. It is here that we encounter a claim that is key to Horkheimer and Adorno's account of the transition from Kant's philosophy to the novels of Sade, and which, despite how Kant's conception of theoretical reason is otherwise associated with an instrumental rationality, implies the existence of a non-instrumental, but nevertheless amoral or even immoral, formal conception of reason:

> Reason is the organ of calculation, of planning; it is neutral with regard to ends; its element is coordination. More than a century before the emergence of sport, Sade demonstrated empirically what Kant grounded transcendentally: the affinity between knowledge and planning which has set its stamp of inescapable functionality on a bourgeois existence rationalized even in its breathing spaces. The precisely coordinated modern sporting squad, in which no member is in doubt over his role and a replacement is held ready for each, has its exact counterpart in the sexual teams of Juliette, in which no moment is unused, no body orifice neglected, no function left inactive ... The special architectonic structure of the Kantian system, like the gymnasts' pyramids in Sade's orgies and the formalized principles of early bourgeois freemasonry – cynically reflected in the strict regime of the libertine society of the *120 Days of Sodom* – prefigures the organization, devoid of any substantial goals, which was to encompass the whole of life. What seems to matter in such events, more than pleasure itself, is the busy pursuit of pleasure, its organization; just as in other demythologized epochs, imperial Rome, the Renaissance, and the Baroque, the schema of activity counted for more than its content. (DA, 111; DE, 69)

Here planning and the formal organizational activity of reason more generally have become ends in themselves ('[w]hat seems to matter … is the busy pursuit of pleasure, its

organization'). [11] Reason is therefore no longer concerned merely with the successful identification and application of the means to ends that are external to it, such as the production of pleasurable sensations. This purely formal activity of reason, which has become an end in itself, finds its theoretical expression in the systematic drive of pure speculative reason identified by Kant ('[t]he special architectonic structure of the Kantian system') which finds practical expression in the complex, elaborate, but essentially pointless and pleasureless ways in which the orgies described by Sade are organized. The purely formal nature of reason claim remains in play, because reason lacks any determinate content of its own. Its end is instead simply its own activity. With respect to content, all that matters to reason is that it has a given content to organize. This content is the means that allows reason to engage in an activity that has become end in itself, and to this extent instrumental reason plays a subordinate role. What the content in question actually is, however, is a matter of indifference to reason, which can engage in its formal organizing activity equally as well in relation to one end and its corresponding material as in relation to another end and its corresponding material ('it is neutral with regard to ends'). Reason's engagement in a form of activity purely for its own sake means that the employment of reason here essentially differs from how reason, in so far it guides the employment of the understanding, performs a synthesizing function whose ultimate goal is self-preservation.

The type of rationality at work can even be said to exhibit a type of non-moral disinterestedness, because reason engages in the activity of organizing the available material without being driven to do so by any material interest or other external end that it has an interest in realizing. Therefore, if such a conception of theoretical reason is found in Kant's philosophy, it would anticipate his conception of pure practical reason as the capacity to set oneself ends, in the form of moral duties, independently of any material desires and interests. Although reason may have advanced beyond a purely instrumental form of rationality, and to this extent might be thought to escape the 'dialectic of enlightenment', in the case before us reason's ultimate indifference to content and the purely formal nature of its end means that it lacks both an unconditionally valid content and any determinate ends. Thus, the disinterestedness exhibited by this formal rationality would lack any essential relation to the Kantian notion of a pure practical reason that is capable a generating unconditionally valid ends in the form of a set of determinate moral duties. In Sade's novels, the lack of any essential connection between

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[11] See also the allusion to Kant's idea that '[p]urposiveness [*Zweckmäßigkeit*] can thus exist without an end [*ohne Zweck*]' (AA 5 [CJ]: 220) in connection with 'planning considered as an end in itself ' (DA, 112; DE, 69-70).

this formal rationality and morality is demonstrated. Instead of concerning itself with moral duties or any other type of moral norm, this formal rationality, whose own organizing and systematizing activity has become an end in itself, makes human beings into the material objects of planned activities that require treating their own wishes and ends as entirely irrelevant. Instead, their bodies become mere things that are to be exploited by an apparently sovereign subject to the greatest possible degree in accordance with a plan ('no moment is unused, no body orifice neglected, no function left inactive'), though not for pleasure but simply because this use of the bodies of others is required by the system that has been consciously and painstakingly planned by the rational subject. In this way, Sade develops the practical implications of key aspects of Kant's theoretical philosophy – that is, reason's purely formal character and how it engages in the activity of organizing its material into a systematic whole purely for its own sake – while radically severing the link between reason and the concept of morality. His novels thus make explicit the nature of enlightenment reason and they in this sense facilitate consciousness of what it essentially is. This achievement secures Sade's status as one of the 'dark writers of the bourgeoisie', who 'unlike its apologists, did not seek to avert the consequences of the Enlightenment with harmonistic doctrines' and 'did not pretend that formalistic reason had a closer affinity to morality than to immorality' (DA, 141; DE, 92).

The role played by this idea of a disinterested (but non-moral) formal rationality, which engages in the activity of organization purely for its own sake, in Horkheimer and Adorno's account of the essential connection between Kant's philosophy and the novels of Sade raises a problem with the idea that we are here dealing with one and the same reason. For how can Horkheimer and Adorno treat reason as both instrumental and non-instrumental in character without introducing a fatal ambiguity into their account of how enlightenment rationality manifests itself in Kant's philosophy and then, with regard to its practical implications, in the novels of Sade? Given the need to render intelligible the transition from Kant's philosophy to the novels of Sade, addressing this question amounts to showing that both an instrumental form of theoretical reason and a non-instrumental form of theoretical reason can be found in Kant's philosophy. In the previous section we saw how an instrumental form of reason can be discovered. It now remains to explain the existence of a non-instrumental form of reason of the relevant type. One response to the difficulty in question might be to claim that the instrumental character of reason and its non-instrumental character map on to the distinction between reason in so far as it guides the use of the understanding, on the one hand, and reason in the narrower sense of the object and source of the transcendental dialectic, on the other. I shall now explain how some of Kant's own statements concerning speculative reason may suggest a non-

instrumental form of reason of the relevant type, but that what we have is nevertheless an instrumental form of reason. In this case, however, although it is a form of reason that operates as the means to an end, it does not do this in such a way as to reduce the activity of reason to the systematic organization of a given content which is external to it. Rather, the content is internal to reason.

Let us look first at the evidence for the claim that reason in its speculative use is non-instrumental in character. In the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant maintains that '[h]uman reason is by nature architectonic' (CPR, A474/B502). The fact that the drive to attain systematic unity is part of the nature of reason explains its drive to attain completeness through the identification and demonstration of the complete set of conditions for any conditioned item of knowledge. In the absence of this set of conditions, the system of knowledge will remain incomplete, not only in terms of its extent but also in terms of the unifying grounds of the various elements of knowledge that form its parts. This explanation of the search for completeness does not entail the existence of some practical end, even that of self-preservation, that is external to reason itself. Rather, if we were to ask the same question that we asked in the case of the understanding concerning why reason engages in the activity that it does, the answer would be that there is a given drive for systematic knowledge that is internal to reason and that results in an activity in which reason engages purely for its own sake. The disinterested nature of this activity is stressed by Kant himself, when he claims not only that there is a 'natural predisposition' on the part of human reason to generate questions that cannot be answered because they arise from a use of reason that cannot be validated by experience, but also that this predisposition is connected with an employment of reason that is not 'moved by the mere vanity of knowing it all' (CPR, B21). On the contrary, reason's attempt to extend its use beyond the boundaries of experience requires a type of self-sacrifice in that

> the investigations of our reason … we hold to be far more preeminent in their importance and sublime in their final aim than everything that the understanding can learn in the field of appearances, and on which we would rather venture everything, even at the risk of erring, than give up such important investigations because of any sort of reservation or from contempt and indifference. (CPR, A3/B6-7)

This statement implies that the activity in which reason engages is experienced as something intrinsically valuable and to such an extent that the rational subject will be motivated to engage

in this activity independently of any prudential considerations, which must, in fact, be disregarded. Here, then, we have a form of rationality that does not appear, however implicitly, to operate as the means to given, external ends, and this is precisely the form of rationality required to render intelligible the transition from Kant's philosophy to the novels of Sade. Yet are such statements, which imply a disinterested, non-instrumental employment of reason, by themselves sufficient to justify Horkheimer and Adorno's account of this transition?

The fact that they are not sufficient is suggested by Kant's view of the potential to aid the understanding, whose ultimate end is the self-preservation of the subject, possessed by reason's drive to systematic unity. This drive promises to enable reason to achieve ever greater systematic unity with regard to its empirical use. In other words, the search for the complete set of conditions for any conditioned item of knowledge may lead to the discovery of previously neglected concepts or to the recognition of connections between existing concept. Such achievements would help produce a systematic unity that must nevertheless remain incomplete if the extension of the use of reason beyond the bounds of all possible experience is to be avoided. This regulative use of reason is exemplified by the employment of the transcendental ideas of the mind as a simple substance, the concept of the world in general and the rational concept of God. In this connection, Kant speaks of utility and thereby makes explicit how even in its regulative speculative use reason is instrumental in character:

> [T]he pure rational concepts of the totality in a synthesis of conditions are necessary at least as problems of extending the unity of the understanding, if possible, to the unconditioned, and they are grounded in the nature of human reason, even if these transcendental concepts lack a suitable use *in concreto* and have no other utility [*Nutzen*] than to point the understanding in the right direction so that it may be thoroughly consistent with itself when it extends itself to its uttermost extremes. (CPR, A323/B380).

Here, pure reason in its speculative form is reduced to a means of extending and completing, in so far as this is possible, the domain of the understanding. Yet it is not the case, that speculative reason engages in this activity in accordance with material ends that are external to it. Rather, '[p]ure reason is in fact concerned with nothing but itself' (CPR, A680/B708). To this extent, what Kant says about this speculative use of reason may appear compatible with the idea that reason engages in an activity in which rational organization has

becomes an end in itself. Nevertheless, speculative reason serves the understanding which itself serves the drive for self-preservation.

The value that Kant accords to this speculative employment of reason is in any case limited, given the threat posed by any attempt on the part of reason to extend itself beyond the bounds of all possible experience. Such an attempt to extend the use of speculative reason therefore forms an object of criticism on account of its potentially harmful effects. The critique to which pure reason subjects itself in seeking to establish the limits of its legitimate employment aims, in particular, to avoid the harmful effects of the type of illegitimate extension of reason that Kant associates with metaphysics understood as 'a wholly isolated speculative cognition of reason that elevates itself entirely above all instruction from experience' (CPR, B xiv). This is what Kant calls the 'negative utility' of his critique. This critique nevertheless also has positive utility, in that it eventually allows for the extension of the practical use of reason beyond the bounds of experience, by demonstrating the limited competency of theoretical reason and by explaining the contradictions that it inevitably generates whenever its use extends beyond its proper bounds, thereby removing the suspicion that pure reason must inevitably be in contradiction with itself. Thus, '[t]o deny that this service of criticism is of any **positive** utility would be as much as to say that the police are of no positive utility because their chief business is to put a stop to the violence that citizens have to fear from other citizens, so that each can carry on his own affairs in peace and safety' (CPR, B xxv).

This analogy between the critique of reason undertaken by Kant and the role of the police in society suggests that the employment of reason is ultimately instrumental in character. The critical employment of reason serves to keep the speculative use of reason firmly in check but in such a way as to preserves the usefulness that it possesses in relation to the understanding. Thus, just as a police force is useful, though only in the negative sense of a necessary evil, because it guarantees peace and safety, which are themselves desirable ends because they allow citizens to pursue their personal ends without suffering interference from others, the critical use of reason is useful because it guards us against the false claims to knowledge that the unbridled use of speculative reason is liable to generate. At the same time, speculative reason can be allowed to continue to aid the understanding by means of its drive for systematicity, while this restriction on its use leaves room for the extension of pure reason in a practical form. The disinterested, non-instrumental employment of theoretical reason associated with metaphysics, in contrast, is, apart from its regulative function, consigned to the realm of error and disorder, where we can hope to encounter only 'reason's unfounded groping and frivolous wandering about without critique' (CPR, B xxx-xxxi), and it must therefore be carefully

policed by critical reason to ensure cognitive order. Thus, in so far as a non-instrumental character can be attributed to the speculative use of reason, it is associated with the type of dogmatic metaphysics that is to be abolished by and replaced with a critical metaphysics.

The speculative use of reason is thereby restricted to a means of gaining increasing, but necessarily incomplete, systematic knowledge of the conditions of experience (and of the self-preservation of the subject), while the critical use of reason is a means of ensuring that the bounds of possible knowledge are not overstepped. Moreover, any appeal to a form of reason that is so closely tied to a pre-critical metaphysics would require forgetting the part played by a corrosive critical rationality in the dialectic of enlightenment, as exemplified in the fragment of a history of philosophy presented in the Second Excursus. The practical implications of enlightenment reason, both in its critical and purely formal uses, are, however, unmasked by Sade rather than by Kant. It is in this sense that Sade, like Nietzsche, remains truer to the idea of a critical rationality and the liberating potential of enlightenment reason (DA, 142-143; DE, 93). This is because Sade helps remove the illusions that human beings have both about themselves and about the society in which they live, thus providing the negative conditions of a life of truth and freedom from deception. This absence of distortion and illusion represents the utopian moment in the writings of Sade and Nietzsche, and as we have seen in the case of Sade, it requires destroying the link between a formal notion of reason that may appear disinterested in character and morality. However, it is not evident that a non-instrumental form of reason of this kind can in fact be found in Kant's theoretical philosophy. Rather, this non-instrumental form of reason is associated with a pre-critical metaphysics, whereas both the critical employment of reason and the speculative employment of reason are understood in terms of a concept that implies an instrumental notion of reason, namely, the concept of utility.

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