

# Enlightenment as the normative principle of social rationality

*[O Esclarecimento como princípio normativo da racionalidade social]*

Joel T. Klein<sup>1</sup>

Universidade Federal do Paraná (Curitiba, Brasil) / CNPq

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## Abstract

This paper argues that Kant's philosophy entails a normative concept of social rationality distinct from other normative concepts such as moral and juridical rationality. I also argue that the normative demands of social rationality are embodied in the regulative idea of enlightenment which implies a profound intersubjective and moral character that unfolds in multiple layers and perspectives.

**Keywords:** Social rationality; normativity; enlightenment; Kant.

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<sup>1</sup> Professor at the Philosophy Department of the Federal University of Paraná. CNPq. E-mail: joel.klein@ufpr.br This study was financed in part by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - Brasil (CAPES) - Finance Code 001. Project CAPES/DAAD/PROBRAL (88887.627936/2021-00): "Perspectivas Kantianas sobre as causas da irracionalidade social". I am also grateful to Jean-Christophe Merle, Cristina Consani, Alessandro Pinzani, Maria de Lourdes Borges, Frank Rettweiller, Vinicius de Figueiredo, Marcus Willaschek, and Achim Vesper, for questions and suggestions.

This article argues that the concepts of social rationality and enlightenment are closely related. The analysis and reconstruction of arguments take place in two sections. Firstly, I reconstruct Kant's concept of social rationality and showcase the specificity of its normative field and present the sources of social irrationality. In the second section, I lay out the various aspects and layers of Kant's concept of enlightenment and argue that its requirements are actually the constitutive normative principles of social rationality. I finally draw some conclusions and sketch an outline of proposal for a system of normative contexts.

## 1. The Kantian concept of social rationality

Does a concept of social rationality exist in Kant's philosophy? Could there be, in a Kantian perspective, a specific normative context of the use of reason that could be called social, and which would be distinct from the ethical, the juridical, the political, the epistemological, or the religious ones? In other words, does a normative principle of social rationality exist that is capable of distinguishing sociology (as a descriptive science of society) from social philosophy (a discipline that evaluates social institutions)? Can a normative context of reason exist that might be understood as essentially or mainly social?

An almost sterile search for the word social or society in Kant's writings would lead us to think that this notion was of little importance to the philosopher.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the lack of a clear social normative context was behind several criticisms of epistemological and moral solipsism. However, I argue that this apparent lack of a clear social normative context is not the result of any contempt for the social but, rather, because it is omnipresent in Kant's philosophy and constitutes the internal link between the other normative contexts and principles.

The following passage is an important starting point for analyzing the notion of social:

*In the human being (as the only rational creature on earth), those predispositions whose goal is the use of his reason were to develop completely only in the species, but not in the individual. Reason in a creature is a faculty of extending the rules and aims of the use of all its powers far beyond natural instinct, and it knows no boundaries to its project. But reason itself does not operate instinctively, but rather needs attempts, practice and instruction in order gradually to progress from one stage of insight to another. Hence every human being would have to live exceedingly long in order to learn how he is to make a complete use of all his natural predispositions; or if nature has only set the term of his life as short (as has actually happened), then nature perhaps needs an immense series of generations, each of which transmits its enlightenment [ihre Aufklärung] to the next, in order to finally to propel its germs in our species to that stage of development which is completely suited to its aim. And this point in time must be, at least in the idea of human being, the goal of his endeavors, because otherwise the natural predispositions would have to be regarded for the most part as in vain and purposeless (Kant, IaG, AA 08:19).*

The essay *Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan aim* is framed by a teleological and practical approach, which structures different uses of reason and different dispositions. This teleology leads inevitably to the social perspective since humans are neither able to develop nor fulfill predispositions on their own. Only by living in society can the human species achieve this goal. It can be stated that reason and rationality are by their nature always social

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<sup>2</sup> Kant's Doctrine of Right can be said to express his theory of society and social rationality. In a certain sense this is true because the entire doctrine of right, especially that of private right, deals with the juridical relations that can exist even without a state. As Kant argues: "For in the state of nature, too, there can be societies compatible with rights (e.g., conjugal, paternal, domestic societies in general, as well as many others)" (MS, 06:306). However, even though all rightful relations are also social, not all social relations are subject to regulation by right. So, the relations based on right are different from social ones and are regulated by a specific normative principle. This is a way for maintaining the peculiarities and differences between legal, political, and social philosophy. Even though they are closely related, each has its specificity. I am grateful to Achim Vesper for raising this issue.

and intersubjective. If Kant fails to emphasize the concept of the social, it is not because it is irrelevant, but because it is fundamental and ubiquitous in his philosophy. The same is true for the concept of representation, which is also used throughout his work without any clear elaboration. Some might see this as a flaw to be corrected, but Kant seems to understand it as a premise justified and understood due to its explanatory and problem-solving capacity, which is a result of his anti-foundationalist approach.<sup>3</sup>

The development of rational dispositions is not based on instinct, but on a fundamental intersubjective process that entails discovering, learning, refining, and transmitting them through teaching. It relies on numerous attempts and is easily subject to different forms of failure. The main nature of the social lies precisely in this aspect of the development of rational predispositions, in the *ability to obtain and transmit some degree of enlightenment to future generations*. This process is closely related to the development of arts and sciences as Kant states in *Anthropology*:

The sum total of pragmatic anthropology, in respect to the vocation of the human being and the characteristic of his formation, is the following. The human being is destined by his reason to live in a society with human beings and in it to cultivate himself, to civilize himself, and to moralize himself by means of the arts and sciences (Kant, Anth. AA 07: 324).

From these quotations, at least three characteristics of the social as related to enlightenment emerge as central. Firstly, it is related to the activity of people in a society. Secondly, the social element is rooted in a process of discovery (attempts and failures), learning (deputation, intelligibility, and retention of a correct use of a principle to produce a cognition, an action or a skill), and transmission (teaching and learning) of enlightenment. Finally, its aim must be the qualitative development of the different uses of reason and their reciprocal relations, which are promoted by the development of science and art.

In this process, failures can occur at different moments. They can arise with respect to specific contexts, but also in the reciprocal relationship of contexts, so that social irrationality can manifest itself in myriad ways, but it is *always characterized as a failure in the process of the gradual development of a natural predisposition to the use of reason*. Assuming that this reconstruction is correct, then it may be considered that every normative context can be affected by social irrationality. However, although all forms of rationality and irrationality in the different normative contexts carry in themselves a social element, what specifically characterizes social rationality is the processual development of rational predispositions in society throughout several generations. Thus, for example, the correct use of an epistemological principle such as efficient or teleological causality is more properly characterized as having normative validity in the field of epistemology. Similarly, the proper use of the categorical imperative is a question of morality or moral normativity. It is obvious that these uses always contain a social aspect as well. However, the proper social aspect is related to the conditions for the gradual and constant development and transmission of epistemology and science, or the proper gradual development of morality in society, i.e., *for those principles to have an increasingly correct and proper use in history*.

If we use the teleological perspective to frame this view, we can say that the full development of human natural dispositions depends on the normative principle of social rationality. This principle requires a systematic manner of organizing the different predispositions or normative contexts, not only to prevent them from conflicting with each other but also so that they might enhance each other. This systematic organization must be seen as analogous to organic systems, while, on the other hand, from the perspective of the systematic unity of reason under the assumption of the primacy of practical reason (see Kant, *KpV* AA 05:119ff.). Thus, the full development of natural predispositions regarding reason is *systemically and fundamentally moral*. The systematic and moral aspect is understood by the manner in which the sciences and the arts

<sup>3</sup> Here I follow O'Neill's (2015) constructivist interpretation of Kant.

develop, while the economic structure of society should also be in accordance with the moral requirements of reason.

After establishing the nature of the end, “the social” can be claimed to address the adequate means for the realization of that end, in other words, the process of the appropriate development of rational predispositions. The quest for the correct thing to do in order to achieve something is an aspect of practical philosophy. Rephrasing, the “how to do something” directed towards the means is a proper issue of hypothetical imperatives, both those of instrumental rationality (how to use things to achieve a certain end) and of prudential rationality (how to use other human beings to achieve a certain end), under a specific moral point of view.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the proper normative feature of social rationality has to do with the appropriate means for the full development of natural predispositions of reason in the human species. *It is a matter of both instrumental and prudential rationality*, which is subject to that specific moral end.

The normativity of social rationality is intrinsically related to the instrumental and prudential perspectives, and yet, no direct equivalence can be drawn between them. Some instrumental and prudential reasonings are *too narrow in scope* and can *contradict* the end of nature, which has a broad demand for systematicity and morality. Such an overly narrow instrumental and prudential perspective would actually produce an incomplete and partial viewpoint that is incompatible with the very idea of reason as a system of normative contexts subject to morality. These partial views would instead be an expression of social irrationality. So, *the criterion of social rationality is only normatively legitimate under the conditions of systematicity and moral unity*. This means that scientific and artistic development should not collide with the demands of morality but must always promote it as fully as possible.

Once the criteria of instrumental and prudential reasoning are encompassed within the higher requirement of *systematicity and moral unity*, then a new location appears for a critical concept of happiness. The human being “*should produce everything that goes beyond the mechanical arrangement of his animal existence entirely out of himself, and participate in no other happiness or perfection than that which he has procured for himself free from instinct through his own reason*” (Kant, IaG, AA 08: 20). Human happiness is not a natural one, because it cannot be achieved by instincts nor given by nature. The human being “*have [to] labored himself from the greatest crudity to the height of the greatest skillfulness, the inner perfection of his mode of thought, and (as far as is possible on earth) thereby to happiness*” (Kant, IaG, AA 08: 20). Thus, the critical concept of happiness is encompassed within the conditions of merit and self-esteem.

Social rationality is, then, how enlightenment is acquired, transmitted, and developed over generations, during which the human being “*should labor and work himself up so far that he might make himself worthy of well-being through his conduct of life*” (Kant, IaG, AA 08: 20). By way of analogy, social rationality can be said to be a kind of engineering dedicated to finding a self-conscious way to “*bring up higher the edifice which was nature’s aim*”. This process generally takes place by way of blind groping. Social rationality requires that we discover the optimal way for this process to happen. If a direct path cannot be found to promote it, the obstacles can at least be identified, and attempts made to mitigate them.

## 1.1. Sources of social irrationality

Before continuing our search for the sources of social irrationality, it is important to distinguish failures and mistakes from irrationality. The former result from the improper use of some principle, while the latter is a *manner of thinking and acting* grounded on an erroneous principle.<sup>5</sup> So, rationality and irrationality have to do with methodological concerns about acting on inappropriate or false principles.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding the differences and the relationships between the moral and the prudential see Klein (2021).

<sup>5</sup> Kant calls attention to this when portraying types of egoism. This issue is further dealt with below.

Sources of irrationality can be located in the tension between animality and human rationality, or between the tendencies toward impulses and physical subjective conditions and the rational predispositions, as well as in the crude manner in which humans find a way to balance those different tendencies and predispositions in a systematic and moral unity. As Kant says in *Anthropology*,

No matter how great his animal tendency may be to give himself over passively to the impulses of ease and good living, which he calls happiness, he is still destined to make himself worthy of humanity by actively struggling with the obstacles that cling to him because of the crudity of his nature (Kant, *Anth.* AA 07: 325).

When not critically enlightened and disciplined, reason becomes the servant of these impulses and aims merely to satisfy them. It builds for itself principles that cannot be normatively valid since they have not been critically justified. This is how different types of egoism (logical, aesthetic, and moral, see Kant, *Anth.* AA 07: 128ff) or even the passions arise (see Kant, *Anth.* AA 07: 265ff.). In other words, certain impulses of our animality and sensibility tend to guide reason, which then becomes the servant of the passions by assuming and creating for itself strange and illegitimate principles. Social irrationality is this servitude and partiality of reason to animalistic nature and tendencies.

In *Conjectural beginning of human history*, Kant provides three examples of the “conflict between the striving of humanity toward its moral vocation, on the one side, and the unalterable following of the laws placed in its nature for the crude and animal condition, on the other side”. The first conflict refers to the difference between physical majority (sexual capacity to generate offspring) and sexual drive, on the one hand, and social majority or the capacity of an individual to support himself and his kind in civilized society on the other. A gap of at least ten years extends between physical and social maturity. However, “nature has certainly not placed instincts and faculties in living creatures so that they might struggle with and suppress them. Thus, its predisposition was not at all cut out for the moral condition, but merely for the preservation of the human species as an animal species”. This conflict might only be removed in a “perfect civil constitution (the uttermost goal of nature)”. Meanwhile the human species has to deal with “vices and their consequences, the manifold of human misery” (Kant, *MAM*, AA 08: 116f.n.).

The second conflict arises regarding the constitution of human physical force as an animal and the development of the rational faculties, namely, between “humanity as an animal species and humanity as a moral species”. On this teleological framework, Kant argues that

nature obviously has taken its decision about the life span of the human being from a viewpoint other than that of the furthering the sciences. For if the most fortunate mind stands at the brink of the great discoveries he might hope for from his skill and experience, his age steps in; he becomes dull and must leave it to a second generation (which begins again from ABC and has to traverse again the whole stretch that had already been gone through) to add a next span to the progress of culture (Kant, *MAM*, AA 08: 117n.).

A third conflict is also rooted in the rational demand for moral and epistemological equality, on the one hand, and the civil inequality produced by the contingent and violent manner in which human societies have established their economic and material relations. In this sense, “the human being was to labor himself out of the crudity of his natural predispositions by himself, and yet was to take care not to offend against them even as he elevates himself above them – a skill that he can expect to acquire only late and after many misbegotten attempts”. Meanwhile, humanity suffers the “ills that it inflicts on itself from its lack of experience” (Kant, *MAM*, AA 08: 118n.).

A dialectic exists between the animal and the rational parts of the human being. Natural animalistic tendencies should not be considered wrong or devoid of purpose. They can be understood, instead, as a natural force that pushes individuals and the human species toward

survival and dispersion. However, inexperience in finding the balance between these animal tendencies and the uses and requirements of reason gives rise to countless miseries and vices that hinder the development of both rational dispositions and the adequate satisfaction of animal and sensitive inclinations.

This dialectic of principles, which do not necessarily oppose each other but which clash in certain situations, is also seen teleologically as a way to promote the culture of reason itself. It is in this context that the thesis of unsociable sociability comes into play.<sup>6</sup> The most elaborate formulation of this position appears in the fourth proposition of the *Idea* and is understood as an anthropological statement about human nature. The unsociable tendencies serve to drive the development of rational dispositions. However, since this process lacks an appropriate culture of discipline, said dispositions end up leading to situations and behaviors that compromise the proper uses of rationality itself.

When the development of the various rational faculties is guided by animal or unsociable inclinations, reason not only becomes a slave, but it also becomes evil, since it submits to principles that lack legitimacy and which therefore tend to corrupt and frustrate its development. The sources of social irrationality can be said to be identifiable (through reflection) and even subject to neutralization (through correct discipline), but its roots cannot be eliminated.

This dialectic also affects philosophy, and in order to neutralize its negative effects, the philosophical investigation has to clearly determine the different types of validity and legitimate contexts for the use of the principles of reason. This is precisely Kant's aim in what he calls critical philosophy.

## 2. Enlightenment as the normative principle of social rationality

A practical teleological point of view, that tries to construct a moral and rational meaning for the existence of a rational species on earth<sup>7</sup>, have to consider how each generation “transmits its enlightenment to the next, in order to finally to propel its germs in our species to that stage of development which is completely suited to its aim” (Kant, *IaG*, AA 08:19). By taking the opposite path namely, the assumption that this practical project has no value or meaning, one “would remove all practical principles and thereby bring nature, whose wisdom in the judgment of all remaining arrangements must otherwise serve as a principle, under the suspicion that in the case of the human being alone it is a childish play” (Kant, *IaG*, AA 08:19). So, the meaning and normative content of what is enlightenment is at the center of what has to be considered social rationality. But what is enlightenment?

Kant defines enlightenment as

the human being's emergence from his self-incurred minority. Minority is inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another. This minority is self-incurred when its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* Have courage to make use of your own understanding! is thus the motto of enlightenment (Kant, *WA*, AA 08: 35).

This may be one of the most famous but also one of the most underestimated and superficially interpreted passages of the Kantian *corpus*. The essay *Enlightenment* has several layers whose meanings only come to light against the background of Kant's major writings and his idea of philosophy. I draw several distinctions below both raised and assumed throughout this essay so

<sup>6</sup> Regarding the concept of sociable unsociability, see Klein (2013).

<sup>7</sup> On the Kantian project of constructing an expanded moral image of the world from a practical reflexive teleology, see Klein 2016 and 2019.

that its full complexity may be understood and evaluated.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.1 The relation of two contexts: subjective and intersubjective

The concept of enlightenment is elaborated in two compatible but distinct contexts. Subjectively speaking, it relates to a particular agent's decision and behavior, while the intersubjective perspective deals with conditions, historical and societal, that make up social life. The subjective and intersubjective contexts are in constant interaction.

Regarding the intersubjective point of view, Kant argues against the idea that minority results from a natural and immutable condition inherent to the human being, which is supposedly caused by a malevolent nature or by a revengeful God. If neither nature nor providence can be blamed for the human situation, then the responsibility must inevitably fall to human beings themselves. In other words, human beings must be seen to be historically responsible for their condition. In this sense, wars, hunger, misery, ignorance, and most human sufferings result from human actions and decisions, which could have been different. Thus, they are neither the results of natural laws nor are they immutable facts.<sup>9</sup>

The intersubjective aspect constitutes the social and historical context of minority, and has by far the greater impact. Webs of social relations reinforce behavior, in which the absence of certain institutions and the actions of others maintain and further minority. A group educated in a desire for glory, power, and honor grows attached to playing the role of guardians of the people. Meanwhile, out of laziness or cowardice, others enact the role of domesticated animals. Nevertheless, the mistake must be avoided of thinking that the guardians are enlightened while those that are cared for are minors. Both groups are trapped in minority, yet the ills manifest differently. Those in command are slaves of their passions, while those who obey are used as mere things. An objectification takes root on both sides underpinning ways of thinking and feeling that appear to be a second nature and that engender affection. Minority is fostered by a dialectics strengthening the relation between guardians and their domestic animals, so much so that when it achieves a certain level it can truly incapacitate self-thinking. At work here is a kind of psychology, sociology, and anthropology of domination and minority.

It would be incorrect to say, however, that laziness and cowardice affect only those who obey. These conditions are equally strong in the guardians, who become accustomed to merely repeating what they have learned. Moreover, they constantly suffer the effects of their own web of prejudices. As Kant noted

the public, which was previously put under this yoke by the guardians, may subsequently itself compel them to remain under it, if the public is suitably stirred up by some of its guardians who are themselves incapable of any enlightenment; so harmful is it to implant prejudices, because they finally take their revenge on the very people who, or whose predecessors, were their authors (Kant, WA, AA 08: 36).

Collective responsibility walks hand in hand with that of the individual, and Kant never once indicated any hierarchy between the two. It is more likely that their importance would vary situation to situation. People born and raised in unfavorable conditions would have less

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<sup>8</sup> Some arguments developed in the next pages are found in Klein (2009). However, I have worked them out in several aspects in what follows.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. “[The human being] is not justified to ascribe his own misdeeds to an original crime of his ancestral parents, through which a propensity to similar transgressions has supposedly become hereditary in their posterity (for voluntary actions cannot bring with them anything hereditary); but rather that he must recognize with full right what they did as having been done by himself and attribute the responsibility for all ills arising from the misuse of his reason entirely to himself, since he may very well become conscious of the fact that he would have behaved in precisely the same way under the same circumstances and would have begun the first use of reason that way (even against nature hint’s). When this point about moral ills is set right, then the physical ills proper can hardly amount to a surplus in our favor in the balance of merit and guilt” (Kant, MAM, AA 08: 123). See also IaG, specifically, the third proposition.

responsibility for their minority than others in their society.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, to be enlightened is not at all only a matter of decision and courage, because it is also an issue of capacity, whose development is strongly related to social conditions.<sup>11</sup> However, from the acknowledgment of the relevance of social conditions, it does not follow that the “world of readers” should be or is restricted to a kind of economic upper class or to a kind of technocracy.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, Willaschek has correctly pointed out that the restriction of the freedom to the public use of reason to the scholarly world does not imply a social exclusion of “the great unthinking masses” (Kant, WA AA 08:35),

but results from the fact that a certain level of education is required to read and understand the publications in question and thus to participate competently in public discourse. The more people who have the necessary education, however, the larger the audience, which thus tends to approach a “society of the citizens of the world” (Kant, WA AA 08:37) (Willaschek (2023, 128). Translation by the author).

If Kant’s moral philosophy is taken as a parameter, it should be recalled that his intention was never to present a theoretical ethical theory for evaluating individuals’ actions. His was a normative moral theory aimed at evaluating principles, in particular the maxims of agents. The same holds true in *Enlightenment*. Kant is not interested in presenting criteria for identifying who has more or less responsibility in any particular situation. He defends, instead, that minority is a human responsibility, with both its social and individual dimensions, so said responsibility is shared both by the society and by singular individuals.

Whereas the social is of greater impact both for fostering enlightenment and perpetuating minority, it is the individual who hold the potential for starting a change. The new condition always starts with a few individuals with peculiar capacities and qualities that allow them to overthrow the yoke of minority.

For there will always be a few independent thinkers, even among the established guardians of the great masses, who, after having themselves cast off the yoke of minority, will disseminate the spirit of a rational valuing of one’s own worth and of the calling of each individual to think for himself (Kant, WA, AA 08: 36).

If the process depends necessarily on the initiative of a few independent thinkers, it is the social context that will assure the success or failure of their efforts. “Social context” should be understood to be comprised of all political and state institutions. It is the state that has greater conditions to amplify and propagate its effects. In Kant’s words,

one must admit that the greatest ills that oppress civilized peoples steam from war, yet to be sure less from one that actually is or has been than from the never relenting and even ceaselessly increasing *armament* for future war. To this are applied all forces of the state, all fruits of its culture that could be used for a still greater culture (Kant, MAM, AA 08:121).

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10 In the *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant stresses that the degree of guilt is based on the obstacles from the grounds of duty: “the possibility to talk of greater or less guilt based on the less the natural obstacles and the greater the obstacle from grounds of duty, so much the more is a transgression to be imputed (as culpable). - Hence the state of mind of the subject, whether he committed the deed in a state of agitation or with cool deliberation, makes a difference in imputation, which has results” (Kant, MS, 06:228).

11 In this sense I agree with Willaschek, who writes: Kant “is therefore by no means of the opinion that enlightenment and thinking for oneself is a mere matter of decision. The opponents of vaccination may have the courage to use their own minds without the guidance of others, but this does not yet mean that they are capable of doing so” (Willaschek, 2023, 130, translation by the author).

12 Kant’s rejection of technocracy and the restriction to enlightenment to a ruling class is related to his position against Plato’s idea of a Philosopher King: “That kings should philosophize or philosophers become kings is not to be expected, but it is also not to be wished for, since possession of power unavoidably corrupts the free judgment of reason. But that kings or royal peoples (ruling themselves by laws of equality) should not let the class of philosophers disappear or be silent but should let it speak publicly is indispensable to both, so that light may be thrown on their business; and, because this class is by its nature incapable of forming seditious factions or clubs, it cannot be suspected of spreading propaganda” (Kant, Zef, AA 08: 369).



As long, however, as states apply all their powers to their vain and violent aims of expansion and thus ceaselessly constrain the slow endeavor of the inner formation of their citizens' mode of thought, also withdrawing with this aim all support from it, nothing of this kind is to be expected [the moralization of humanity], because it will require a long inner labor of every commonwealth for the education of its citizens (Kant, IaG, AA 08: 26.).

For while the people feel that the costs for education of their youth ought to be borne, not by them, but by the state, the state for its part has no money left (as Büsching complains) for the salaries of its teachers who are capable and zealously devoted to their spheres of duty, since it uses all the money for war. Rather, the whole mechanism of this education has no coherence if it is not designed in agreement with a well-weighed plan of the sovereign power, put into play according to the purpose of this plan, and steadily maintained therein; to this end it might well behoove the state likewise to reform itself from time to time and, attempting evolution instead of revolution, progress perpetually toward the better (Kant, SF, AA 07:93).

The social and intersubjective aspects can be said to take precedence in the sense that they are decisive for the comprehensive and everlasting effects of a way of thinking. In this respect, Kant's evaluation is clear: If throughout history the human species had invested all its effort and money in education instead of war, it would have already made the transition from an age of enlightenment to an enlightened age. Nevertheless, it is the subjective and personal point of view that has historical and epistemological precedence. Understanding this order of relation is key because, although the social perspective is absolutely central to enlightenment, it lacks capacity to take responsibility for all the work. At the end of the day, each of us has to free ourselves, and the most that society can do is to foster and increase our possibilities. Only in this sense should Kant's philosophy be understood to be subject-centered. This differs greatly from the Hegelian interpretation that claims that Kant's philosophy fails to recognize the importance of the social and intersubjective sphere or that it bears a monist and egoist conception of reason and rationality.

## 2.2 Precepts and formulas versus principles

The first definition of enlightenment is having the courage and the ability to make use of one's own understanding. But what does this mean? The notion of thinking for oneself does not elucidate much, because it seems that we are walking in circles. Yet, in the third paragraph, an important hint appears, namely that "precepts and formulas, those mechanical instruments of a rational use, or rather misuse, of his natural endowments, are the ball and chain of an everlasting minority" (Kant, WA, AA 08: 36). What does it mean to be chained to precepts and formulas as mechanical instruments that do not allow "free movement"? Could Kant be claiming that thinking freely might allow one to give up thinking according to rules? This is not the case, because, as argued in section 1 above, they are the two sides of the same coin.

Making free use of reason and understanding does not mean thinking without rules. On the contrary, it means engaging in reason by following merely the rules given by reason, despite and independently of precepts and formulas laid down by religions, cultures, and customs. In *What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?*, Kant claims that "freedom in thinking signifies the subjection of reason to no laws except *those which it gives itself*; and its opposite is the maxim of a *lawless use* of reason (in order, as genius supposes, to see further than one can under the limitation of laws)" (Kant, WDO, AA 08:145). So, for Kant, freedom means following the laws that reason gives itself, while the maxim of lawless thinking will end in a position that Kant calls libertinism, i.e., "the principle of recognizing no duty at all" (Kant, WDO, AA 08:146).

This difference also arises in Kant's debate with his former student Herder. Kant begins his first review of Herder's *Ideas for the philosophy of the history of humanity* by praising his sagacity and fruitful mind, but he then goes on to harshly criticize his student's methodology. His way of analyzing and presenting ideas, Kant argues, makes them "less capable of communication",

according to which Kant means “a logical precision in the determination of concepts or a careful distinction and proof of principles”. Rather than follow this procedure, Herder chooses the path of a

sagacity adept in the discovery of analogies and a power of imagination bold in the use of them, combined with the skill in captivating its object, always held at an obscure distance, through feelings and sensations, which allow more to be surmised about them as the effects of a great content of thoughts, or as hints pregnant with meaning, than cold judgment would ever encounter in them outright (Kant, *RezHerder*, AA 08: 45).

So, we can fairly establish a distinction between precepts and formulas, on the one hand, and the autonomous principles and rational rules, on the other. Giving up these self-imposed rules would imply an inability to communicate thoughts, while precepts and formulas have no authority based on our self-reflection but come from external sources. Kant writes, “it is so comfortable to be a minor! If I have a book that understands for me, a spiritual advisor who has a conscience for me, a doctor who decides upon a regimen for me, and so forth, I need not trouble myself at all. I need not think, if only I can pay; others will readily undertake the irksome business for me.” (Kant, *WA*, AA 08: 35) The submission to foreign *supervision* does not mean taking others’ opinions and arguments into account. Rejecting arguments of authority is not the same as rejecting the authority and coherence of others’ thoughts. This is expressed in the motto: “*Caesar non est super grammaticos*” (Kant, *WA*, AA 08: 40). We must draw a distinction then between *authoritative thinking* and *authoritarian thinking*. In other words, although striving for enlightenment implies not accepting arguments of authority, it also implies a rejection of logical egoism, which can only lead to relativism and skepticism. In Kant’s lectures of logic, we find the following definitions of logical egoism:

This so-called logical egoism consists, then, in nothing but the presumed but often false self-sufficiency of our understanding, existing for itself and, so to say, isolated, where one believes he knows enough by himself, and believes he is infallibly correct and incorrigible in all his judgments. And we easily see that this conceited mode of thought is not only completely ridiculous but is even most contrary to real humanity (Kant, *V-Lo/Blomberg*, AA 24:151).

*egoismus logicus*[,] seems initially actually to be allowed. One has no need to consult other judgments, of course, when one cognizes something correctly oneself;] one need not seek to bring about an agreement of others with the cognition that one has oneself. But on closer investigation we find that one cannot be certain whether one has judged rightly or not if one has not compared his judgments with the judgments of others and tested them on the understanding of others. For a cognition is not correct when it agrees with my private understanding but when it agrees with the universal laws of the understanding of all men. (...) Logical egoism is opposed, however, to another prejudice, namely, where one builds all his judgments on the reason of others, judges nothing himself, but merely imitates, in that one elevates others above oneself and trusts nothing to oneself. To speak briefly, these are the prejudices of the lazy (Kant, *V-Lo/Blomberg*, AA 24:187f., see also *Log*, AA 09:80).

Of logical egoism {Logical egoism is a selfish prejudice} This is not merely conceit but rather a kind of logical principle, which takes as dispensable the criterion of truth, to compare one’s opinions with those of other men (Kant, *V-Lo/Dohna*, AA 24:740).

According to Kant, then, the minority of laziness cannot be surpassed by logical egoism, because egoism falls short in respecting “the universal laws of the understanding of all men”. To a certain extent, we can say that enlightenment opposes both the laziness of accepting everything from others and the arrogance of the logical egoist. Agreeing with the laws of understanding and reason is not something that can be decided by statistics, such as conducting a survey asking how many people believe or do not believe that the Earth is flat or round. Instead, this question is something that has to be proven through argument.

Being enlightened has less to do with the content of the thinking or believing than with

the manner it is done. The issue is not so much the content of the book, the specific moral commandments, or advice of the priest or even about what specific diet is to be followed. It is, above all, about the *way* or the *how* one assumes these contents. Enlightenment is not about replacing some prejudices with others. For this reason, Kant is skeptical of revolutions. They “may well bring about a falling off of personal despotism and of avaricious or tyrannical oppression, but never a true reform in one’s way of thinking; instead new prejudices will serve just as well as old ones to harness the great unthinking masses” (Kant, WA, AA 08: 36). Enlightenment is about taking a critical position about one’s own assumptions. Before taking something-to-be-true, it must be subjected to critical evaluation. In this sense, being enlightened is not about knowing something, it is, rather, about being capable of publicly justifying it, which can only happen if one has seriously reflected on it.

Thinking for oneself means seeking the supreme touchstone of truth in oneself (i.e., in one’s own reason); and the maxim of always thinking for oneself is *enlightenment*. Now there is less to this than people imagine when they place enlightenment in the acquisition of information; for it is rather a negative principle in the use of one’s faculty of cognition, and often he who is richest in information is the least enlightened in the use he makes of it. To make use of one’s own reason means no more than to ask oneself, whenever one is supposed to assume something, whether one could find it feasible to make the ground or the rule on which one assumes it into a universal principle for the use of reason. This test is one that everyone can apply to himself; and with this examination he will see superstition and enthusiasm disappear, even if he falls far short of having the information to refute them on objective grounds. For he is using merely the maxim of reason’s self-preservation. Thus it is quite easy to ground enlightenment in individual subjects through their education; one must only begin early to accustom young minds to this reflection. But to enlighten an age is very slow and arduous; for there are external obstacles which in part forbid this manner of education and in part make it more difficult (Kant, WDO, AA 08: 146n.).

For the sake of practice in thinking for ourselves, or philosophizing, we will have to look more to the method for the use of our understanding than to the propositions themselves at which we have arrived through this method (Kant, Log, AA 09: 26).

But how can precepts or formulas be distinguished from self-imposed principles of reason in a particular situation? To a certain extent, this question can be easily answered. General logic is a necessary, though insufficient, condition for thinking correctly. As was pointed out in the first section, logic is not a descriptive, but a normative discipline which uses understanding and reason to bring them into alignment.

Logic is, however, only the formal criteria for evaluating our thinking. Philosophy (in a broader sense) provides more substantive criteria. In *Critique of pure reason*, philosophy as a *conceptus cosmicus* is defined as the “science of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*), and the philosopher is not an artist of reason but the legislator of human reason.” (Kant, KrV, B 867) In this case, the philosopher represents a normative ideal, something that never will be fully empirically realized. This does not mean that philosophers have to be considered as oracles, on the contrary. The key here is the role that philosophy has to perform, namely, to investigate the rules and principles that enable a rightful way of thinking and reasoning. In order to fulfill its task, philosophy must be granted the freedom of the public use of reason. “So, the philosophy faculty, because it must answer for the truth of the teachings it is to adopt or even allow, must be conceived as free and subject only to laws given by reason, not by the government” (Kant, SF, AA 07: 27). Therefore, enlightenment is not the refusal of any kind of authority, because the grammarians still hold legitimacy based on their knowledge and specialties. Their legitimacy supersedes even *Caesar’s authority*. Their work is subject to challenge, but neither from outside the field nor by using procedures and methods alien to the subject at hand.

## 2.3 The difference between the private and the public use of reason and its claims of freedom

The *public* use of one's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among human beings; the *private* use of one's reason may, however, often be very narrowly restricted without this particularly hindering the progress of enlightenment. But by the public use of one's own reason I understand that use which someone makes of it *as a scholar* before the entire public of the *world of readers*. What I call the private use of reason is that which one may make of it in a certain civil post or office with which he is entrusted (Kant, WA, AA 08: 37).

It is important to note that the public use of reason implies two requirements. Firstly, the debate among a free community of equals<sup>13</sup> as a world of readers must always proceed by way of rational argumentation. Secondly it must be carried out according to certain procedures. When Kant claims that public use is only possible *as long as one behaves as a scholar*, the point here is not that only scholars can make a public use of reason, as this is often understood. Rather than proposing a technocracy, or a meritocracy based on erudition, Kant suggests appealing to the ideal of a scholar, in which the points and positions must be presented with solid arguments instead of merely irreflective and random opinions.

The world of readers and scholars' behavior establish necessary criteria for fostering enlightenment, as they imply a commitment not only to a manner of argument but also to the whole (or most of such) of the accumulated knowledge in that field. These conditions aim to avoid what was characterized in the *Conflict of Faculties* as an illegal conflict (Cf. Kant, SF, AA 07: 29-32). Said illegality arises from the illegitimate appeal to arguments based on authority (tradition or religion) or the prejudices and sentiments of the masses that are ignorant of the issue at hand. As a result, the conflict is relegated to the status of a mere dispute or discussion whose goal is only to win or impose a position.

The freedom for a public use of reason is absolutely necessary for enlightenment, and no civil compulsion in this matter is morally legitimate, unless intended to enable the freedom of the public use of reason itself. So, for Kant,

the freedom to think is opposed first of all to civil compulsion. Of course, it is said that the freedom to speak or to write could be taken from us by a superior power, but the freedom to think cannot be. Yet how much and how correctly would we think if we did not think as it were in community with others to whom we communicate our thoughts, and who communicate theirs with us! Thus, one can very well say that this external power which wrenches away people's freedom publicly to communicate their thoughts also takes from them the freedom to think - that single gem remaining to us in the midst of all the burdens of civil life, through which alone we can devise means of overcoming all the evils of our condition (Kant, WDO, AA 08:144).

Here again it becomes evident that the freedom of the public use is fundamental, because only with it can we communicate our thoughts and share methods for testing their legitimacy. Returning to an issue raised above, the enlightenment can be defined as being *a way* of possessing knowledge. Enlightenment cannot exist without objective knowledge, which is not reached simply by external agreement (as in a statistical survey of those supporting or opposing an issue) but is an objective and intersubjective construction that must follow certain principles, which can only become clear and be kept in check when someone behaves as a scholar or a philosopher in the community of free equal citizens of the world of readers.

However, Willaschek is right in stressing that Kant's statement that "a public should enlighten itself is more possible; indeed this is almost inevitable, if only it is left its freedom" (Kant, WA, 08:36) carries a kind "a rhetorical exaggeration that owes much to the political ambition of Kant's essay", but which is "relativized by Kant himself" (Willaschek 2023, 130.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. KrV B 766. See Höffe, 1996 and 2007.

Translation by the author). That the freedom alone is not sufficient is made clear by Kant himself when he stresses the importance of public education and the pernicious role of war. This rhetorical point should be seen as a strategy or as an example of Kant's political engagement in trying to convince the political elite that freedom of thought will not bring social chaos and disorder. So, we could summarize Kant's defense on the freedom of the public use of reason as covering a full spectrum of strategies and arguments:

- a) It is an inalienable right of humanity (Kant, WA, 08: 39; TP 08: 304; MM 06: 327).
- b) It is a necessary, although not sufficient condition for the enlightenment. There are also other important social, such as public education (see Kant, MAM, AA 08:121; IaG, AA 08: 26; SF, 07:93).
- c) It is “the sole palladium of the people's rights” (Kant, TP AA 08: 304).
- d) It is based in “a natural calling of humanity to communicate with one another, especially in what concerns people generally” (Kant, TP AA 08: 305).
- e) It does not endanger social and political stability<sup>14</sup>.
- f) Fostering the freedom of the public use of reason would be the only secure way by which future generations will truly honor the past “head of states as well as their servants” (Kant, IaG, AA 08: 31).
- g) Freedom of the public use of reason is a necessary political condition in order to assume that the “head of state” is truly interested in the commonwealth and is not in contradiction with its intention. So, denying the “freedom of the pen” means withholding from the head of state “all knowledge of matters that he himself would change if he knew about them and to put him in contradiction with himself” (Kant, TP AA 08: 304).
- h) Should one assume that the head of state does not need the information and opinions that result from the freedom of the public use of reason, this would be the same “to assume that the head of state could never err or be ignorant of something” and, therefore, it “would be to represent him as favored with divine inspiration and raised above humanity” (Kant, TP AA 08: 304).
- i) Those who foster suspicious on the head of state regarding the freedom of the public use of reason can only manage to awake “in him mistrust of his own power or even hatred of his people” (Kant, TP AA 08: 304).
- j) The existence of “the mechanism of the state constitution to coercive laws” without the freedom of the public use of reason leads to creation of secret societies, which undermines and jeopardizes the government (Kant, TP AA08: 305).

So, from all those arguments and quotations above, is transparent that one of the main concerns that Kant had in his defense of the public use of reason was about censorship.

Alternatively, the freedom of private use of reason, must always be restricted in some measure, otherwise life in a society would be impossible. Therefore, against what is usually understood in the literature, the private use of reason does not only concern the use of reason made by public officials and functionaries in the exercise of their office or function<sup>15</sup>. The

<sup>14</sup> See: “But the frame of mind of a head of state who favors the first goes still further and sees that even with respect to his legislation there is no danger in allowing his subjects to make public use of their own reason and to publish to the world their thoughts about a better way of formulating it, even with candid criticism of that already given; we have a shining example of this, in which no monarch has yet surpassed the one whom we honor” (WA, AA 08:41).

<sup>15</sup> See: “The only exceptions to this freedom of opinion and of the press are statements made by officials and functionaries in the exercise of their office or function. This is what Kant calls, terminologically

private use of reason reaches all social functions that an individual might exercise, including his position as citizen. Is precisely the distinction between freedom of the private and public use of reason that underlies this example given by Kant right after he discusses the cases of an officer, a tax official and a clergyman, namely:

A citizen cannot refuse to pay the taxes imposed upon him; an impertinent censure of such levies when he is to pay them may even be punished as a scandal (which could occasion general insubordination). But the same citizen does not act against the duty of a citizen when, as a scholar, he publicly expresses his thoughts about the inappropriateness or even injustice of such decrees (Kant, WA, AA 08: 37).

The agreements owing from the field of the public use of reason cannot be subject to any compulsion (internal or external to the specific field); they must result from free agreement. Such agreements can be slow to achieve, however. Meanwhile, our preexisting prejudices and social arrangements that guide our daily life cannot be suspended. Thus, each person *cannot* be allowed to decide how to react in the event of a disagreement. Take a very simple example: Let us assume a situation in which people disagree about whether a traffic light should be taken down at some crossroad. Until a public decision is issued, each individual must continue to stop at the red light. The restriction of the private use of reason has the same importance for enlightenment as does freedom in the public use. So, we should not underestimate the importance of limiting the freedom of the private use of reason. It is in this sense that we should understand Kant's appraisal of Frederic's motto "*Argue as much as you will and about what you will; only obey!*" (Kant, WA, AA 08:41). Kant's point here was not to praise the king but to make a conceptual point about the importance of social arrangements.

## 2.4 Rational and historical knowledge

The requirement of thinking for oneself must be understood in some context, otherwise it would become absurd in its unrestricted demands. Already in Kant's time, it was impossible to critically evaluate all knowledge and beliefs. Thus, another distinction must be introduced, namely those between rational and empirical cognition and between rational and historical manners of knowing:

Cognitions of reason are opposed to historical cognitions. The former are cognitions from principles (*ex principiis*), the latter cognitions from data (*ex datis*). — A cognition can have arisen from reason and in spite of that be historical, however, as when a mere literator learns the products of someone else's reason his cognition of these products of reason is then merely historical, for example. One can distinguish cognitions, then,

1. according to their objective origin, i.e., according to the sources from which alone a cognition is possible. In this respect all cognitions are either *rational or empirical*;
2. according to their subjective origin, i.e., according to the way in which a cognition can be acquired by men. Considered from this latter viewpoint, cognitions are either *rational or historical*, however they may have arisen in themselves. Hence something that is subjectively only historical can be objectively a cognition of reason (Kant, Log, AA 09:22).

If we cross the categories of objective and subjective origin, three viable combinations arise: firstly, a knowledge that has a rational origin and is known by someone in a rational way (this is the case of a mathematician understanding a proof of some mathematical principle, or a moral philosopher who understands why some principle is moral); second, a knowledge that has rational origin but is known only historically (this is the case of someone that knows only how to use a mathematical principle to resolve a particular problem, or a moral person that knows how to follow some moral principle); the third category is that in which empirical knowledge is

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somewhat confusingly, the "private use" of reason, while the use of reason in the publications of a private scholar is a "public use" (Willaschek, 2023, 128).

known historically (I know that China is real because I believe in what other people have said). The fourth category is contradictory, because empirical knowledge cannot be known through any kind of rational demonstration (there is no way to rationally prove that Berlin exists or that some mammals can fly). Empirical knowledge can only be known historically, and this means that I always have to believe in someone, myself or someone else. For Kant there is no unquestionable preference for my experience rather than that of others when empirical knowledge is at issue.

These distinctions are highly important, because they imply differences in the way we reach enlightenment. Moreover, a person may be enlightened in mathematics but can be minor about politics and ethics.

With some rational cognitions it is harmful to know them merely historically, while with others it makes no difference. Thus the sailor knows the rules of navigation historically from his tables, for example, and that is enough for him. But if the jurist knows jurisprudence merely historically, then he is fully ruined as a genuine judge, and still more so as a legislator (Kant, *Log*, AA 09:22).

What distinguishes the case of the jurist from that of the sailor? The simple mechanical application of the law might work sometimes. However, without grasping the “spirit of the law” situations will always arise in which, without rational knowledge of the law, the consequences might be the complete opposite of what the law was meant to achieve.

Since it is impossible for anyone to be enlightened in every domain<sup>16</sup>, then the following issue arises: in which fields should everyone be enlightened and in which area would it be sufficient for a particular group of people to be so? Kant argues that everyone should *strive for enlightenment* in *at least* in what concerns morality, because it is the basic building block of genuine human life<sup>17</sup>. He goes on to state that everyone should also be enlightened about their specific fields of activity. For example, a mathematician should be enlightened about mathematics, but a philosopher need not be and vice-versa. It would be highly problematic were a mathematician incapable of understanding the principles of her field, for she would be a minor where she is supposed to be a citizen. She is a minor because she would only have the historical knowledge of her field. Therefore, she would not be able to conduct herself as a scholar before her peers. In my case as a philosopher, however, it is not a problem if I have only a historical knowledge of mathematics. In this sense, we have to recognize that an enlightened age would not be the one in which everyone is enlightened about everything. Instead, it is a period when most people are enlightened about religion, ethics, and politics, while particular groups are enlightened in specific areas. Having taken this into account, we can say that, for an enlightened age to exist, it is not required that everyone should have a rational knowledge about rational cognition or historical knowledge about all empirical cognitions. The point here is more about what kind of knowledge we are dealing with in each case and context, so that we might assess the claims each kind of judgment has and how their justification should be conducted, and also which kind of public expectations should be met in specific cases.

<sup>16</sup> Would this definition not conflate enlightenment with knowledge? I do not think that it is the case because having a rational cognition already entails that one does not only have the knowledge in a historical sense, but that understands in a rational way the principles on which that knowledge is build on. I am grateful to Marcus Willaschek for raising this question.

<sup>17</sup> In this sense I interpret the following passage: “If, therefore, a system of a priori cognition from concepts alone is called metaphysics, a practical philosophy, which has not nature but freedom of choice for its object, will presuppose and require a metaphysics of morals, that is, it is itself a duty to have such a metaphysics, and every human being also has it within himself, though as a rule only in an obscure way; for without a priori principles how could he believe that he has a giving of universal law within himself?” (MS, AA 06: 216).

## 2.5 The primacy of practical reason

One of the more common misunderstandings about Kant's position on enlightenment is that it was supposed to be restricted only to a theoretical realm. One such misinterpretation is that by Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialectics of Enlightenment*. Their position may have been prompted by an overly narrow interpretation of Kant's motto: "Sapere aude! Have courage to make use of your own understanding". It is assumed that "understanding" refers merely to the technical concept as defined in the *Critique of pure reason*. This clearly wrong as a careful reading of the essay can easily reveal.<sup>18</sup>

La Rocca wonders how so many readers have failed to notice that the concept of wisdom lies at the center of Kantian philosophy. He states

wisdom is for critical philosophy not just a word for the art of life, for the use of philosophy in life, but a focal concept of critical rationality as such, which is understood as a regulative ideal rather than a model already realized or even realizable (La Rocca 2004: 128).

Also, Brandt (2018, p. 147) stresses the point that for Kant the Enlightenment concerns essentially a moral and juridical issue<sup>19</sup>. A close relation therefore exists between philosophy and notions of wisdom, enlightenment, terminal end, and, thus, a concept of philosophy and enlightenment that constitutes an ideal projected by pure *practical* reason. This is confirmed by several other formulations of the motto.

Philosophia (doctrina sapientiae) ist nicht eine Kunst von dem was aus dem Menschen zu machen ist sondern was er aus sich selbst machen soll [*sapere aude!*] Versuche dich Deiner eigenen Vernunft zu Deinen wahren absoluten Zwecken zu bedienen (Kant, *OP*, AA 21: 117, emphasis added).

Zu allem Wissen (Scientia) dessen sich der vernünftelnde Mensch zu seinem Wohlseyn bedienen kann ist das Selbsterkenntnis (nosce te ipsum) ein Gebot der Vernunft welches Alles enthält: *sapere aude sey weise* (Kant, *OP*, AA 21: 134, emphasis added).

To make use of one's own *reason* means no more than to ask oneself, whenever one

<sup>18</sup> In this sense I agree with Willaschek (2023, 128): "Die verzweifelte Einschätzung, zu der Horkheimer und Adorno gelangen, ist angesichts der verzweifelten weltpolitischen Lage durchaus verständlich. Und dass die menschliche Beherrschung der Natur sich gegen den Menschen selbst wenden kann, wird man in Zeiten des anthropogenen Klimawandels kaum bestreiten können. Dass aber aufklärerisches Denken notwendigerweise zu Unterdrückung und Gewalt führt, scheint dagegen aus heutiger Sicht wenig plausibel. Die Verkürzung der Vernunft auf instrumentelle Rationalität ist eher eine Verkürzung des Aufklärungsgedankens durch Horkheimer und Adorno als eine angemessene Rekonstruktion aufklärerischen Denkens. Auch die Weise, wie die beiden Vertreter der kritischen Theorie sich in ihrem Werk auf den Begründer der kritischen Philosophie, also Kant, beziehen, beruht auf einem doppelten Missverhältnis: Sie kritisieren Kant für etwas, das er nicht gesagt und gemeint hat; und wo sie mit Recht eine These Kants kritisieren, da wird Kant gar nicht erwähnt." According to Willaschek, the critique that Adorno and Horkheimer could have rightly done to Kant was its optimism regarding the freedom of the press. I agree with Willaschek that "die Entwicklung der Zeitungslandschaft in vielen Ländern, dass staatliche garantierte Pressefreiheit keineswegs zu einem kritischen öffentlichen Diskurs, oder, in Kants Worten, zu einem aufgeklärten Publikum führen muss". However, I do not think that Kant's concept of the freedom of the press is a liberal one, but a republican instead. I have developed some aspects of it in Klein (2015). Other criticism to Adorno and Horkheimer regarding their interpretation of enlightenment is found in Brandt (2018, 148). According to him, Adorno and Horkheimer's thesis fall under a kind of performative contradiction.

<sup>19</sup> I disagree, however, with Brandt when he thinks that the enlightenment has nothing to do with the sciences and the technique. Firstly, not only the *Critique of pure reason*, which has as a strong theoretical emphasis, but also the development of sciences has an important implication for the enlightenment, either in the sense of delimiting different spheres of knowledge, or in the sense of fighting against various kinds of superstition. Secondly, Brandt is wrong when he disqualifies the instrumental reason and also prudence for the interest of Kant's philosophy (see Klein, 2021). If, on the one hand, restricting enlightenment to the mere technical realm is a mistake, on the other hand, it is also an error to restrict it to the practical moral realm.



is supposed to assume something, whether one could find it feasible to make the ground or the rule on which one assumes it into a universal principle for the use of reason (Kant, WDO, 08: 146n., emphasis added).

These formulations relate the ideal of enlightenment to reason, rather than merely to understanding, which, in turn, showcases its link to the higher faculty of practical principles. Enlightenment is always under the demands of morality. For a Kantian ideal of enlightenment, practical reason always takes primacy over the theoretical one.

### 3. Final Remarks

If this reconstruction is sound, enlightenment can be concluded to be a normative principle of social rationality. It requires the most appropriate means for fostering the full development of our rational predispositions, considered as a systematic and moral unity. In this sense, agency and institutions based on a principle undermining enlightenment can be seen to be an expression of social irrationality.

For in the face of the omnipotence of nature, or rather its supreme first cause which is inaccessible to us, the human being is, in his turn, but a trifle. But for the sovereigns of his own species also to consider and treat him as such, whether by burdening him as an animal, regarding him as a mere tool of their designs, or exposing him in their conflicts with one another in order to have him massacred - that is no trifle, but a subversion of the final end of creation itself (Kant, SF, AA 07:89).

Neither social rationality nor the normative content of enlightenment assume the point of view of nature, but the perspective of how human beings should relate to each other. At any moment an asteroid could hit Earth and exterminate human life. This omnipotence of nature is not under our control, nor subject to oversight. However, that we do it to ourselves is normatively wrong. We can understand and fulfill our responsibility to treat human beings as rational moral agents. Thus, social rationality must eradicate the treatment of humans as mere tools or, worse, their exposure to suffering or massacre.

The difference between social rationality and moral and legal rationality is not easy to grasp, because they are interdependent and overlap. However, some relevant distinctions can be identified. In ethics, for example, some demands can be made that require the agent to develop its potentialities, as is performed by the duty of virtue. Ethics, however, cannot tackle questions of how society should promote the development of these predispositions on a broader scale. In contrast with ethics, the normativity of social rationality deals more to with public institutions, and it tackles a broader scope of human relations. Social philosophy, on the contrary, engages with the normative, large-scale demands that are institutionalized in social practices. It is moreover closely related to the prudential and instrumental manner of discovering the right means to an end.

In comparison with the legal and political institutions, on the other hand, the social rationality does not always fall under external coercion and is more pervasive. From the point of view of right, the state should guarantee access to education and opportunities for people to develop their rational predispositions. It is the responsibility of social rationality, however, to organize social institutions (such as the family, the school, the workplace, associations, the press, and the internet) in such a way that they may also promote that end. Social and legal normativity may overlap in the sense that the law could constrain certain practices that conflict with peoples' right. However, law cannot and should not deal with all issues. Otherwise, such a coercive machine would be required that it would probably undermine any space for enlightenment since we would be outsourcing all responsibility to the State. From a Kantian perspective, not only must the connections between these normative fields exist, but their differences must also

be emphasized because the philosopher dealing with them has to be clear about what is subject to criticism, under which normative criteria, and also about the scope of what can be proposed.

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