The Dialectic of Utility: Reconsidering Enlightenment in Hegel and Horkheimer/Adorno

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Abstract

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel places the concept of utility at the centre of his analysis of the Enlightenment period. Utility does not appear merely as a criterion of individual action, but describes a social context of mutual support, realized in a collective referred to by Hegel as a 'troop' (*Trupp*). In Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of a reason fixated on utility, the Hegelian image of the 'troop' came to symbolize a repressive equality which removes the freedom of the individual and seals the failure of enlightenment. In contrast, this article demonstrates that Hegel's concept of utility cannot be reduced to an attitude which instrumentalizes everything and everyone. In fact, utility refers to a mode of interaction which also takes account of the heterogeneity of each individual. Drawing on Hegel and going beyond his analysis, the article develops a post-Hegelian concept of utility as a formation of social practices that neither instrumentalizes people, nor simply represents an instantiation of social freedom, but rather establishes a constitutive relation between caring for oneself and being useful to others. From this perspective, the concept of utility is not only part of the problem of enlightenment, but also contributes to the endeavour to which Adorno and Horkheimer committed themselves: to work towards an affirmative understanding of enlightenment.

In his discussion of the historical period of the Enlightenment in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel gives the concept of utility a central place. Hegel argues that enlightenment is not only an intellectual struggle against the religious beliefs of the time, but also a practical relationship with the world: a social formation in which concern for oneself is connected with being useful to others. Hegel describes this social formation with the term *Trupp* (translated as 'troop'; *PhG*: ¶327/305).[1] Because its members make themselves useful to each other, the 'troop' gives the concept of utility a collective shape which can be interpreted

affirmatively, as this article will show. For Horkheimer and Adorno, meanwhile, the definition of reason according to utility became the target of their critique of enlightenment. They refer to Hegel's image of the 'troop', even if they do not focus on his argument in detail, and take it as the perfect illustration of failing enlightenment and its result: they understand the 'troop' as a uniform collective in which the freedom of the individual is replaced by social coercion, which prevails economically in industry and politically in fascism (*DA*: 9/19). However, when it is fathomed in its full depth, the concept of utility as realized in the 'troop' appears not only as part of the problem of enlightenment, but also as part of a possible solution. For utility can be at the heart of a positive understanding of enlightenment, which Horkheimer and Adorno aim for but do not themselves formulate. I will show that utility can be understood in relation to Hegel as a form of social fabric in which use and care do not mutually exclude each other but are connected. Through Hegel, we can gain a sense of the ways in which individual self-care can be constitutively linked to making oneself useful to concrete others—without individuals having to subjugate themselves to a collective benefit which ignores individuals.[2]

This reading of Hegel makes it clear that he locates the problem of the (French) Enlightenment in the concept of utility, which shifts from a social formation of mutual support to become the absolute freedom of the individual and finally the terror of the Revolution. Through this development, Hegel's understanding of utility proves to be more complex than the category of utility as implied by Horkheimer and Adorno. I will show that their respective understanding of utility marks the crucial difference between Hegel's conception of enlightenment and that of Horkheimer and Adorno. Although the influence of Hegel on Horkheimer and Adorno is thematic in the research literature, this difference has not often been explored.[3] However, it is central to a new evaluation of Hegel's assessment of the Enlightenment. Hegel analyses—and criticizes—the structure of utility in the context of his engagement with the historical period of the Enlightenment in France.[4] I will show that the concept of utility—deviating from Hegel's own intention—can guide a contemporary understanding of enlightenment as a form of social interaction that can neither be reduced to exploitative instrumentality, nor regarded as identical with social freedom as outlined in his theory of ethical life. While Hegel is often criticized for leaving no room for the heterogeneity of individuals,[5] in my interpretation his concept of utility evades this criticism: as the social formation realized in the 'troop', utility takes into account not only the heterogeneity of individuals but also their concern for one another.

In the first section of the article, I turn to Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of enlightenment, which should not be equated with Hegel's own view. They may

agree with the main thrust of Hegel's argument that enlightenment's attempt to realize freedom leads not only to domination, but ultimately to murder (cf. *PhG:* ¶343/320 and *DA*: 151/192),[6] but unlike Hegel, they reduce utility to an attitude of applicability and appropriation of all things and living beings. Against this background, I explain in the second section how in Hegel's account, utility is the key to the dialectical failure of enlightenment, but also more than that: it is not just a type of knowledge that turns the world into an object to be appropriated, but also a type of practice that links use with care. Building on this reading of enlightenment, in the third section I develop a post-Hegelian concept of utility which also points to an affirmative understanding of enlightenment.

I.   Horkheimer and Adorno: utility as applicability

Adorno and Horkheimer's account of a dialectic of enlightenment echoes Hegel's critique of enlightenment in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* and shares three central features with it: first, enlightenment consists in the struggle against an opponent, faith or myth, respectively; second, because enlightenment is in truth essentially related to this opponent, enlightenment fights and destroys itself; and, third, in its self-destruction, enlightenment achieves the opposite of what it seeks: violent death instead of free life.

     While Hegel addresses the French Enlightenment and Revolution, Horkheimer and Adorno trace enlightenment back to Greek antiquity. I will focus my reflections on the first chapter ('The Concept of Enlightenment') and on the first 'Excursus' (on Homer's *Odyssey*) of their book. In their account, enlightenment emerged in rivalry with myth. The rivalry is not so much about competing truth claims as about better achieving the same practical goal: preserving the human self from a frightening nature. In order not to fear nature, both myth and enlightenment seek to master it. They differ in their approach: myth aims to dominate nature by explaining and reenacting natural phenomena, enlightenment by steering and applying natural processes. The core argument of Horkheimer and Adorno is that myth and enlightenment, despite this difference, coincide not only in their goal, but also in the way they pursue it. Their strategies may appear different, but they share the same operational logic: the logic of sacrifice, exchange, and mimesis. Horkheimer and Adorno argue that myth is an early manifestation of enlightenment, the process of which does not overcome myth but continues it on a new level. I would like to show that it is precisely in their basic common ground—mimesis—that a difference emerges which makes myth and enlightenment somewhat more disparate in terms of their operational logic than Horkheimer and Adorno seem to suggest. For this, we need to take

a closer look at what they have in common and to what extent myth is already enlightenment.

According to Horkheimer and Adorno, myth is part of enlightenment because it is bound by the principle of rationality that consists of preserving the living self against the life of nature (*DA*: 42/61). Myth realizes this rationality in the form of sacrifice. Sacrifice is rational in the enlightenment sense, because it is based on the logic of exchange (*DA*: 40/56): I give so that you may give—*do ut des*—is the basis of sacrifice. Since this attitude of calculation will crystallize further in the process of enlightenment (*DA*: 40, 45/57, 65), myth already participates in enlightenment's rationality through the calculated exchange in the sacrifice. It is a rationality that follows the scheme of means and ends: sacrificial acts subordinate the gods to the 'primacy of human purposes' and thus to domination (*DA*: 40/57). By means of sacrifice, nature is controlled, because its powers are the gods. In the later process of enlightenment, sacrifice is not overcome but turned inwards, transformed into subjectivity: the rational, homogeneous self constitutes and preserves itself against the forces of external nature (and other human beings) by denying the natural within—everything deviant and impulsive in human existence is repressed. This self-constraint is the price—the sacrifice—that the establishment of the self demands (*DA*: 42f./61–63). In his *Philosophy of Modern Music*, which Adorno declared to be 'an extended appendix' to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, he makes this point sharply: self-determined rule is the most repressive, and, as he notes in relation to Stravinsky's music, subjectivity takes on the characteristic of sacrifice, destroying itself by siding not with the victim but with the destructive force (Adorno 2016 [1949]: xv, 46, 100; cf. also *DA*: 43/62). This sacrifice, according to Adorno, is demanded of every individual within the organization of late industrial society (Adorno 2016 [1949]: 117). It is the collective to which the individual is sacrificed (Adorno 2016 [1949]: 101; cf. also *DA*: 260, n.6/56, n.6). By establishing the rational self through renunciation, life—whose preservation is at stake—is neglected in its qualities (*DA*: 43/62f.). For Horkheimer and Adorno, such renunciation of all sensual fulfilment is a sacrifice that continues myth because it shares its mimetic character.

Enlightenment mimesis, however, has a crucial difference from that of myth: it is not the mimesis of living nature, but of the dead (*DA*: 44/64). Myth and the magical practices based on it had imitated the life of nature: its movements. Enlightenment, by contrast, imitates 'its rigidity' (*DA*: 44f./64): consciously handled adaptation ('die bewußt gehandhabte Anpassung') to nature immobilizes it, treating it as dead, as a mere object (*DA*: 44/64). In enlightenment, in contrast to myth, mimesis means adaptation in the mode of handling: the processuality of nature is interrupted, analysed and recomposed. Here, mimesis is not the reenactment of nature, but its management. Adapting to nature means modulating it by making it dead, passive and therefore designable. If the

modulation of nature interrupts its life, what is the adaptation on the part of the rational self? Thinking conforms to the objectified world in a mimetic way, making itself into a (dead) thing, a mere 'tool', by submitting to the primacy of the mathematical method (*DA*: 19/31f.). For the scheme of modern mathematics is adaptation to death (*DA*: 48/68). It is such adaptation that enables the mastery of nature as well as 'its social successor, the many' (*DA*: 44/64). Myth and enlightenment both face otherness (nature) by mimetic comportment, but they do so differently. Mimesis in the enlightenment version—because it adapts to nature as dead—is not, as mythical mimesis, merely an attempt to influence the movement of living nature, but the act of transforming nature into an immobile object that can be moved and steered at will. The Homeric Odysseus is already practising such adaptation at the level of enlightenment. The forces of nature, which were animated in the early myth, are already petrified into legal relations that can be shaped: Scylla, the monster of the straits, is entitled to snatch six men from the ship, but not to destroy the whole crew; the sirens, whose song calls for destruction, can be defeated by a manoeuvre (*DA*: 45–47/64–67). This defeat means that 'the myths are finished', as Horkheimer and Adorno clearly state (*DA*: 47/67). With enlightenment's mimetic adaptation, myth—its mimetic reenactment of nature—ends.

It is true that both myth and enlightenment pursue self-preservation against nature by means of mimesis. But with enlightenment, it becomes a mimesis of the dead and not—as in myth—of living nature, in a fundamental break with myth that separates these two strategies of mastering nature more strongly than Adorno and Horkheimer imply. This becomes manifest, as I will show, in the way in which this difference in mimesis plays out: in the two distinct kinds of repetition that myth and enlightenment each practise, and in the principle of 'utility' (*Nützlichkeit, DA*: 3/12) that enlightenment posits against mythical imagination. Since 'utility' is, as I will argue, an instantiation of mimesis to death, it manifests the distinct operational logic separating enlightenment from myth. While both use reason as a means—indeed, both reduce reason to a means, to a mere function of self-preservation—the logic of utility is different from the mythical logic of reenacting nature.

In Horkheimer and Adorno's book, 'utility' is an important term, but not one which is often used. I take it to describe a central aspect of the 'instrumental reason' that characterizes enlightenment: the modulation of objectified nature and the application of its processes in industry.[7] For the so-called 'Frankfurt School Critical Theory', instrumental reason has remained 'the focal object' of critique, as Jay Bernstein emphasizes, up to recent debates on neoliberal reason (Bernstein 2019: 3).[8] In Habermas's words, instrumental reason refers to a 'purposive rationality' that 'abolishes the distinction between what claims validity and what is useful for self-preservation' (Habermas 1998: 119). To be sure,

the concepts of utility and instrumental reason cannot be equated, since utility is (only) one aspect of instrumental reason in the age of enlightenment. But it is a crucial aspect, since it is precisely in the question of 'what is useful' that the difference between myth and enlightenment becomes apparent: both see reason as the means of self-preservation, but only for enlightenment is reason governed by the principle of utility. If we take this crucial difference into account, there is a limitation to the dialectic they assert: in its struggle against myth, enlightenment does not turn against its *own* logic; rather, it seeks to replace myth with a logic of utility that is alien to myth. Thus, in attacking myth, enlightenment is not dialectically directed against itself. If this limitation has not attracted much attention, it is because Adorno and Horkheimer focus on another point of the dialectic: enlightenment's reason, orientated towards utility, fails as a means because it achieves the opposite of its aim—not self-preservation and freedom from fear, but terror and murder. Only one of the two aspects of the dialectic claimed by Horkheimer and Adorno is at work: instrumental reason dialectically destroys itself as a means by betraying its end; but it does *not* dialectically reproduce myth (mythical mimesis) by fighting it. Because Adorno and Horkheimer understand the two aspects as parts of *one* dialectical process—self-destruction *through* the struggle against myth—their dialectical claim has a weak point. Contrary to what Horkheimer and Adorno imply, the problem of a self-destructive, utility-driven reason does not, in their own account, arise as a continuation or reproduction of myth, but as a break with its operationality. Before discussing this break with myth, I will explain what Horkheimer and Adorno mean by enlightenment's self-destruction, which they place at the core of their argument.

According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the self-destruction of enlightenment occurs only in modernity, which attempts to master nature through industrialization and the associated division of labour (*DA*: 9/19). Reason plays the decisive role here. With regard to the mastery of nature through rationalization, Adorno and Horkheimer draw on Marx and Weber, as well as Lukács, who links Marx's theory of commodity fetishism in the exchange society with Weber's theory of the disenchantment of the world through rational calculation.[9] In Horkheimer and Adorno's account, it is reason that enables and serves the technical apparatus of industry and, not being a direct means of self-preservation, becomes a mere auxiliary means [*Hilfsmittel*]: 'a universal tool for the fabrication of all other tools' (*DA*: 23/36). Reason submits entirely to utility by limiting itself to the production of useful means. And reason itself is only useful as long as it is needed for this production. As soon as self-preservation is fully 'automated' [*automatisiert*], reason is no longer needed as an (auxiliary) means—is no longer instrumental—but is completely dismissed [*entlassen*] (*DA*: 24/38). Adapted to automatic calculation (*DA*: 18–20/31–33, 24f./38), reason has lost the character of thinking (*DA*: 23/36) and therefore ceased to be reason.[10] The dialectic

of instrumental reason is a dialectic of utility in which reason as a 'universal tool' becomes useless and is replaced. The self-destruction of enlightenment therefore comes about when reason as a means oriented towards utility makes itself expendable. However, enlightenment's self-destruction applies not only to the means, to reason, but also to its end, to self-preservation.

As a result of the division of labour in the modern exchange society, the individual of the industrial age has to be adapted bodily and mentally 'to the technical apparatus', indeed is 'objectified' [*versachlicht*] to a 'technical process' (*DA*: 23/36).[11] This process does not serve the self-preservation of the individual, but of industrial society as the 'true subject' [*reales Subjekt*] (*DA*: 29/44). The unity of this 'subject' is established through 'social coercion', which extinguishes singularity to the point of the 'negation of each individual' (*DA*: 9/19), ultimately enabling mass annihilation in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany (*DA*: xviiif./5–7, 8f./18f., 21f./35). The primacy of the whole in industrial capitalism, Horkheimer and Adorno argue, is thus structurally linked to (and leads to) the physical liquidation of the individual self in fascism (*DA*: 24/37). The self-destruction of enlightenment in terms of its end, individual self-preservation, thus occurs on three different levels: on the economic level, it is the loss of subjectivity through adaptation to the industrial process; on the social level, it is the loss of individuality through the primacy of the collective; and on the political and existential level, it is the loss of life through systematic murderous violence.

These developments are closely linked to the degradation of reason as a means of enlightenment: eradication of thought through science, deformation of experience through the mechanization of labour; exhaustion and deadening of consciousness through mass culture. In its dialectical failure, the means and end of enlightenment—reason and self-preservation—are intertwined: *reason* is realized '[i]n the form of machines' (*DA*: 29/44), a form that eradicates the individual self; *self-preservation* is realized in 'automated' production which dismisses reason (*DA*: 24/38). As an 'all-encompassing economic apparatus' (*DA*: 23/36), instrumental reason is not a subjective faculty, but a social process that revokes both reason as a means and self-preservation as its end.

Is there any way for reason to escape degradation? Horkheimer and Adorno were convinced of this. They believed that socially realized freedom was necessarily bound up with enlightenment thinking (*DA*: xvi/3). In his book, *Hegel: Three Studies*, Adorno calls it the 'legacy of the Enlightenment' that for Hegel reason is 'constelled with freedom', and thus indispensable for liberation (Adorno 1993: 44; Adorno 1963: 57). The history of the Western world from antiquity to the modern catastrophe would then not be inevitable. I propose an interpretation of Horkheimer and Adorno that sees no necessary historical development from ancient myth to modern enlightenment, because enlightenment is not simply the consequence or radicalized continuation of myth, but, with the economic

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principle of utility, takes a step that is not inherent in the myth, a step that is *avoidable*. The question of the avoidability of enlightenment reason's failure is the subject of a long-running debate on *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which I will briefly recall here before responding to it with my analysis of the crucial concept of utility—which I argue is the distinctive feature that separates enlightenment from myth. The point at which a way out is possible, as I suggest, is not within that enlightenment which pursues the mimesis of death and thus orientates itself towards utility in the sense of an application of nature. Rather, enlightenment must begin anew. A different transition from myth to enlightenment is required, and thus a different enlightenment—an enlightenment that actualizes a different form of utility.

The critical debate over Horkheimer and Adorno's diagnosis of a dialectic of enlightenment focused on their thesis of the reduction of reason to a means of self-preservation. Those who were not convinced of a dialectic leading to the self-destruction of reason have objected to the assertion of reason's instrumentality, arguing that reason is more than just a means of self-preservation. Prominently, Jürgen Habermas objected that Horkheimer and Adorno's thesis is based on a reduction of *all* reason to instrumental reason, which not only empirically disregards reason's potential to realize itself positively in science, society and art, but also systematically undermines its own critical claim since a complete compromising of reason excludes any possibility of a reason-based critique (Habermas 1998: 112–14, 119).[12] Hauke Brunkhorst emphasized that what Horkheimer and Adorno hoped for—an escape from the destructive dialectic of reason—requires abandoning their 'negative philosophy of the history of decay' according to which enlightenment necessarily repeats myth and totally destroys itself (Brunkhorst 2000: 138). And Seyla Benhabib criticized Horkheimer and Adorno for excluding the possibility of emancipation by claiming that social labour effects internal 'self-denial' (Benhabib 1986: 167).

More recently, several works have aimed to defend Horkheimer and Adorno against these objections. Holding on to the authors' intention of preparing 'a positive concept of enlightenment' (*DA*: xviii/6), these defences try to prove that the dialectic of instrumental reason does not arise inevitably and/or does not destroy reason entirely. Amy Allen argued that Horkheimer and Adorno see enlightenment's reason in a 'necessary entanglement with', but not in a reducibility to 'power and domination' (Allen 2014: 18–20). In other words, the threat to reason is inevitable but not total. Besides the potential for totalitarianism, reason also contains the reflective potential 'to hold up a mirror to itself, and to break through its own limits' (Allen 2014: 21). Martin Shuster also underlined the role of such reflective potential and suggested that Horkheimer and Adorno uphold that there is a capacity in the human subject to 'nonetheless realize that what's on the outside exceeds our conceptual capacities' (Shuster 2020: 265).

Allen and Shuster both argue that reason is not trapped by the dialectic of enlightenment because subjects recognize the limited and damaged state of their conceptual capacities and thus already transcend that state. Both interpretations focus on specifying Horkheimer and Adorno's claim that enlightenment may avoid 'its own fate' if it 'assimilate[s] reflection' on its 'regressive moment' (*DA*: xvi/3). The possibility, on the part of the subject, of not falling completely prey to the dialectic of reason, does not yet answer the question of how this dialectic can be avoided objectively, at the level of society. Habermas, in a text from 1969, had already left us in no doubt that, according to Adorno, reason is only damaged when society has exchange as its universal principle of organization (Habermas 1978: 46). But how can we overcome the existing form of social organization?

First of all, it should be noted that there are parts of the existing society that are considered to defy its form of organization. This point is not so much in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as it is, in relation to art, in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*: art, as belonging to society, opposes society by 'not qualifying as "socially useful"' (Adorno 2002: 225f.; Adorno 2019 [1970]: 335). Artworks 'serve no aim that is useful for self-preservation and life'; therefore, art has '[i]n the midst of a world dominated by utility […] a utopic aspect as the other of this world, as exempt from the mechanism of the social process of production and reproduction' (Adorno 2002: 152, 311; Adorno 2019 [1970]: 229, 461). Art withdraws from society through a specific mimesis—not of petrified nature, but of itself: artworks are mimetic in that they resemble themselves (Adorno 2002: 104; Adorno 2019 [1970]: 159). Works of art appear in their relation to themselves, even though they are a product of the division of labour, i.e. of social relations. In the sphere of art, therefore, social relations appear as relations of things. This is why artworks have a fetishistic character, according to Adorno (Adorno 2002: 227f.; Adorno 2019 [1970]: 337f.).[13] With the postulate of their self-referential autonomy, works of art seal themselves off from their own (factual) social references; art thus also withdraws from the social principle that governs exchange society (and which, as we shall see, is the motto of bourgeois enlightenment in general): the principle of being for another (*Prinzip des Füranderesseins*; Adorno 2002: 227, see also 226; Adorno 2019 [1970]: 337, see also 335). Unlike the mimesis characteristic of enlightenment, the mimesis of art, which refuses to be for another, is not an adaptation but a non-adaptation to existing society, even though art's claim to be for itself is not fulfilled (Adorno 2002: 104; Adorno 2019 [1970]: 159).

For two reasons, however, art cannot provide a model for a different society, for a positive enlightenment that is resistant to the dialectic. First: art breaks the totalizing claim of exchange society by withdrawing from its principle, but it has no social function whatsoever, not even that of founding a new society; in this sense, art remains asocial (Adorno 2002: 226f.; Adorno 2019 [1970]: 335–37).

Second: art, even in its bourgeois form, remains pre-enlightenment in the sense that it is not bound to the commodity fetish, but rather to a magical fetish of coherence [*Stimmigkeit*] (Adorno 2002: 227f.; Adorno 2019 [1970]: 338). Thus, art is not a model for a different enlightenment because—in short—it preserves a mythical logic that cannot be reactivated as a principle of social organization: there are aspects of rationalization that we cannot reverse. Even though it cannot liberate society, art, for Adorno, holds the promise of freedom because it escapes the society of exchange by being socially useless (and thus stands in for the disregarded use value): 'A liberated society would be […] beyond the ends-means-rationality of utility [*des Nutzens*]' (Adorno 2002: 227; Adorno 2019 [1970]: 338). The utopia of a different society involves, according to Adorno, overcoming the dominance of utility.

I argue, in contrast to Adorno, that utility itself is a constitutive principle, also of positive enlightenment, behind which one cannot and does not need to go back. A different enlightenment would not be an enlightenment beyond the principle of utility—i.e. the principle of being for another—but would practise 'being for another' (and 'for others') in a different way. A different enlightenment would follow a different utility. I will show what steps we can take with Hegel towards such a different concept of utility, and against this background we will see that there are also substantial indications of a positive concept of enlightenment in Horkheimer and Adorno. For this, however, it is first necessary to explain in more detail how they understand utility, the principle of being for another, in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. It is important to make clear in what regard utility does not repeat the principle of myth.

The instrumental character of reason, which has attracted so much attention, is only one aspect of enlightenment's self-destruction as described by Horkheimer and Adorno. The other aspect is that this self-destruction is supposed to take place in enlightenment's struggle with myth as an only seemingly different principle. The dialectical burden of proof hangs on this: only if myth and enlightenment are similar in principle does enlightenment destroy itself *dialectically*, for only then does it fight itself in its opponent. In the debate, it is often overlooked that this is not the case. The failure of enlightenment's reason is not at the same time a dialectic, i.e. an *internal* struggle, between enlightenment and myth.

To be sure, Horkheimer and Adorno have a demanding concept of dialectic: enlightenment not only dialectically leads to the opposite of what it seeks and destroys itself, but it does so by turning against an opponent who is not actually external, so that enlightenment fights itself from the outset. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, enlightenment's opponent, myth, is not external to it, because in the process of opposing myth, enlightenment actually continues the operationality of myth. Myth and enlightenment both seek to dominate

nature by appropriating its otherness: 'Whatever might be different is made the same' (*DA*: 8/18). In Horkheimer and Adorno's account, this levelling is achieved by understanding everything different as a repetition of the same. By turning against myth, enlightenment follows the same principle: 'The principle of immanence, the explanation of every event as repetition, which enlightenment upholds against mythical imagination, is that of myth itself' (*DA*: 8/18). I argue, however, that the enlightenment approach is so different that it hardly seems justified to claim that myth and enlightenment coincide in the principle of repetition. Repetition is something different in each, and so enlightenment does not continue the operationality of myth; rather, enlightenment reason is a means of its own kind, and the struggle against myth is not an internal, and thus not fully dialectical struggle against itself.

In myth, repetition has a theoretical and a practical function. The repeated occurrence of natural processes is explained by mythically tracing them back to patterns of human action (*DA*: 5/14). In consequence, natural processes seem open to human influence. The anthropomorphizing theory of repetition is the basis of a practice of repetition in ritual, in which humans reenact nature in order to dominate it (*DA*: 5/14, 7/17). Enlightenment also has a theory and practice of repetition: in theory, it analyses natural processes on the basis of a uniform mathematical system in order to recompose these processes in practice and apply nature in technology and industry (*DA*: 2/10). The industry which applies nature is a practice of repetition, but it does *not* repeat myth's operationality of repetition. There is a difference in theory: analysing natural processes in science is not the same as anthropomorphizing them in narratives. And there is a difference in practice: reenacting nature in ritual (mimesis of living nature) is not the same as applying it in industry (mimesis of nature as dead)—the former duplicates nature's forms, the latter modulates them. In contrast to myth's strategy of imitation (which I called reenactment), the enlightened human does not act as a means to influence nature, but uses nature as a means. Instrumentalizing nature, making it a means, *is* the end: 'What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings' (*DA*: 2/10). What is translated here with *to use* is in the original German text *anwenden*—*to apply*. Enlightenment's approach to mastering nature is to make it applicable as a means. Utility, enlightenment's characteristic, is understood as *applicability*.

Using nature in the sense of applying it does not simply mean collecting and enjoying what natural processes produce (*DA*: 50/71), but appropriating these processes themselves, bending them to one's own will: breeding species, redirecting forces. Horkheimer and Adorno describe this in the same terms— *in-itself* and *for-another*—that Hegel uses to explain the logic of utility:

> The man of science knows things to the extent that he can make them. Their 'in-itself' becomes 'for him'. In their transformation the essence of things is revealed as always the same, a substrate of domination. (*DA*: 6/15)

Whereas myth's repetitive relationship to nature seeks identity with living nature, enlightenment aims for the recomposition of natural processes. Since this is achieved by calculation, calculability and utility (*Nützlichkeit*) are closely linked, as is science with industry (*DA*: 3f./12f.): by calculating natural processes, modern science makes them applicable to industry. While the mythical sacrifice installs the calculability of exchange (giving what is owed to the gods in order to receive what is wanted) that prepares the way for the modern exchange relationship, and while myth and enlightenment both follow the rationality of self-preservation, the adaptation to (and application of) nature as dead that enlightenment undertakes in industry is a fundamental break with the operationality of myth whose calculations are not bound to utility in the modern sense. Thus, in its struggle with myth, enlightenment does not turn against its own operationality, but replaces that of myth externally.[14] Since science and industry are more successful in dominating nature than narrative and reenactment, enlightenment renders myth obsolete as a means: through the principle of utility, enlightenment prevails over myth. Such replacement of something by something else is not a dialectic in which something fights itself in the other. The principle of utility leads to the dialectical self-destruction of enlightenment, but it does so as a non-dialectical break with myth. In Adorno and Horkheimer's account, the primacy of 'utility' is dialectical in that it guides *and* destroys enlightenment. However, based on mimesis to death, enlightenment utility does not continue, but replaces mythical mimesis. The transition to utility therefore marks a point at which the relationship between myth and enlightenment is not dialectical. The dialectic of enlightenment is not in all respects a dialectic with myth.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the primacy of utility determines not only the attitude towards nature, but also social relations: applying nature requires that the labour of others is exploited (*DA*: 2/10, 13/25). This exploitation is achieved through a 'repressive *égalité*' (*DA*: 9/19) in which workers are 'harnessed to the same rhythms' (*DA*: 29/43). For Horkheimer and Adorno, this levelling repression is effective in the factory as well as in the hordes of the Hitler Youth. To describe the social form that emerges from this standardization, they use Hegel's word *Trupp* (troop): '[T]he liberated finally themselves become the "herd" (*Trupp*), which Hegel identified as the outcome of enlightenment' (*DA*: 9/19). Liberation from the constraints of nature leads to new subjugation. Horkheimer and Adorno do not criticize Hegel's concept of the troop, but draw on it for their own account of enlightenment. In contrast to Hegel, they do not

connect the troop directly with the notion of utility, but refer to 'abstraction' as the tool of enlightenment (*DA*: 9/19). This, however, is related to utility in that abstraction makes nature appear rigid, as which it can be made useful (mimesis of death). If we turn to Hegel and try to fathom his concept of utility in its full depth, we can understand his 'troop' in a different way than Horkheimer and Adorno do—in a way that opens up the possibility of an affirmative understanding of enlightenment which they aim at.

In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the 'troop' is the social manifestation of utility. For Hegel, too, utility is at the centre of a dialectic and hence the self-destruction of enlightenment. However, there are two important differences between Hegel's account and that of Horkheimer and Adorno. First, the structure of utility is dialectical in a stronger sense: not only does it lead to self-destruction, but it also arises as an internal struggle of enlightenment with itself. Second, the structure of utility does not reduce cooperation to uniformity: Hegel's 'troop' does not amount to adaptation and domination of otherness, but can be understood as a social realization of utility that connects use with care. This helps to develop a positive concept of enlightenment that is not available to Horkheimer and Adorno (nor to their commentators) because, in their adaptation of Hegel's critique of enlightenment, they reduce utility to mere applicability.

II. Hegel: utility as absolute freedom

For Hegel, too, the dialectic of utility is the characteristic of enlightenment. As it is for Horkheimer and Adorno, utility is conceptualized as an attitude towards the natural and social world; the larger framework in which the dialectic of utility develops, however, is not a history of the mastery of nature, but a history of consciousness. Unlike in Horkheimer and Adorno's account, utility is not an external standard by which enlightenment judges the applicability of any knowledge,[15] but rather 'utility' is the internal structure of enlightenment's knowledge. This structure is 'dialectical' in the sense formulated by Hegel in his *Encyclopaedia*: as an '*immanent* process of going beyond' (Hegel 2010 [1830]: §81; emphasis in original), a process in which the determinations of thoughts and things reject themselves as one-sided and move into their opposition. 'Utility' is the *Gestalt* that arises in the struggle between the form and content of enlightenment knowledge. Hegel calls this knowledge 'pure insight' and enlightenment its 'diffusion' (*PhG*: ¶314/293). In order to understand the structure of utility, we have to see how it evolves.

Pure insight has no positive content of its own, but is a negative form: the rejection of 'faith' as false. Faith is the content that pure insight—which

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is itself only form—appropriates by discarding it. Because enlightenment as pure insight turns against its (appropriated) content, it is 'struggling with itself' (*PhG:* ¶318/297). And because enlightenment perishes with the content it fights, its form—or rather, it as form—is self-destruction.[16] More importantly, pure insight struggles with itself not only because it depends on faith (which it attacks) as its content, but also because this content, faith, itself has the same form. Pure insight also rejects its own form when it rejects faith; for both are kinds of 'pure consciousness', which does not receive its content from the sensuous world, but produces it itself (*PhG:* ¶318f./297f.). Because enlightenment's pure insight believes itself to be doing 'battle with something *other*' (*PhG:* ¶317/296), it overlooks its internal struggle and is thus not fully self-conscious.[17]

In its critique of faith, however, enlightenment also gives itself a positive content, a '*truth*' whose aspects constitute the structure or movement of utility (*PhG:* ¶314 and 324/294 and 302). Hegel explains this with reference to the French Enlightenment, which attains its positive content by making a separation at faith's content, i.e. at its representation of absolute essence. From this representation, enlightenment's pure insight abstracts all determinateness, seeing in it a merely finite, and therefore merely human idea. As a result, the absolute essence becomes 'a *vacuum*' that cannot be given predicates (*PhG:* ¶325/303): the abstract '*être suprême*, or the *void*' (*PhG:* ¶327/305). This supreme being is the first aspect of enlightenment's truth. Separate from this, its second aspect is the finite actuality of '*sensuous things*', including human beings (*PhG:* ¶325/303). Supreme being, as being-in-itself (a unity in its own right), and the things of sensuous actuality, as being-for-itself (each distinct from and thus defined by others), are not two isolated sides. Rather, their relationship is the third aspect of enlightenment's truth. And utility *is* the structure of this relationship: the relation between supreme being and sensuous world. Because supreme being, as the void, has no determinations and therefore no content, the content of the relationship must come from the sensuous world. As for the form of this relationship, Hegel understands it—somewhat peculiarly—in a strictly logical sense, based on the concept of form: unlike content, form is not something positive, but rather 'the *negative in itself* and for that reason is what is self-opposed' (*PhG:* ¶326/304). Thus, Hegel argues, the form of the relation 'can be construed arbitrarily', which means: the content of the relation, the finite beings of the sensuous world, can be construed—positively—as *congruent with* or—negatively—as *opposed to* supreme being, namely to its only characterization as the in-itself. In the first case, sensuous actuality appears '*in itself*', sensuous beings as beings in their own right; in the second case, it appears '*for an other*', sensuous beings as exposing themselves to others (*PhG:* ¶326/304). In this curious argument, which I can only roughly summarize here, Hegel understands the logical contradiction of 'form' as leading to a practical arbitrariness that defines how people of the Enlightenment relate

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to the world.[18] The 'twofold manner' in which sensuous actuality is conceived (*PhG:* ¶327/305) translates into an alternating way in which this actuality—things and living creatures—are practically approached. It is this theoretical-practical complex of a two-sided attitude to the world that Hegel calls 'utility' [*Nützlichkeit*] as the signum of enlightenment:

> Both ways of viewing the positive and the negative relation of the finite to the in-itself are, however, in fact equally necessary, and everything is thus as much *in itself* as it is *for an other*; in other words, everything is *useful*.—Everything hands itself over to others, now lets itself be used by others and is *for them*, and now, so to speak, stands again on its hind legs, is standoffish [*spröde*] towards the other, is for itself, and uses the other in its turn. […] As everything is useful to man, so is he, and his determination is just as much to make himself a member of the troop [*des Trupps*], useful to the community and universally usable. To the extent that he cares for himself, he must give himself for the others, and to the extent that he gives himself, he cares for himself, the one hand washes the other. But wherever he finds himself, he is in the right place, he makes himself useful to others and is used. (*PhG:* ¶326f./304f.; translation mine)

'Utility' denotes reciprocal interaction in which there is an alternation of being in-itself (withdrawal, unavailability) and being for-another (accessibility, availability)—an alternation through which individuals support each other in turn. Stekeler points out the critical irony of this passage, in which the enlightenment concept of utility appears as such a harmonious symbiosis (Stekeler 2014: 455). The ironic tone suggests that the harmony of mutual benefit is not stable, but will give way to one-sided coercion: appearing at once as something in its own right (in itself) and available at will (for another), the whole world can 'actually [*eigentlich*] be taken as one needs it at the moment' (*PhG:* ¶326/304; translation mine).[19] Utility, which was supposed to be the free interaction of the many, dialectically becomes the rule of the individual. Hegel sets this out in the section 'Absolute Freedom and Terror': the dialectic of utility is the process by which enlightenment turns against itself and collapses in the violence of the French Revolution. In my view, this dialectic develops in three steps. 1) The intersubjective movement of utility petrifies into a mere object in the eyes of the subject: utility is objectified. 2) The subject recognizes in this objectified appearance of utility the structure of its own self: utility is subjectivized. 3) The reciprocity of utility relationships is suspended: utility becomes despotic and takes the form

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of terror. Hegel's argument here is somewhat technical, but important for the question of whether an enlightenment that does not end in violence is possible.

1) Because the individual, as a member of the utility-troop, is conscious of the reciprocal relations in which it participates, it 'sees through' the structure of utility, which thereby becomes its own object; since what is seen through is for an-other and being for-another is what characterizes an object (*PhG:* ¶339/315f.). In the eyes of the individual, the structure of utility changes internally by being objectified: the aspect of in-itself loses all active effectiveness and appears simply as '*what is devoid of a self*', as merely 'passive' (*PhG:* ¶339/316). Instead of including the alternation between two different aspects, the structure of utility now seems stuck in being for-another (*PhG:* ¶¶337–40/314–17). The consequence of this becomes clear when we look back: in its struggle against faith, pure insight had produced the intersubjective structure of utility, which, in being 'seen through' by insight, becomes its (mere) object. Since pure insight contains or *is* nothing but its object, it recognizes in that object—in utility—its own structure. In this way, utility loses 'the form of an object' (*PhG:* ¶338/315) and is retracted into consciousness.

2) The structure of utility—the movement of using and being used—is no longer considered the 'predicate of the object' (i.e. the external world), but 'the subject itself' (*PhG:* ¶339/ 316). This insight involves a deception: the subject believes that it contains the world within itself, indeed it believes itself to be the (whole) world. Thus, the movement of utility becomes asocial and takes on a solipsistic form:

> This movement is thereby the reciprocation [*Wechselwirkung*] of consciousness with itself in which consciousness lets nothing break loose into a shape that would become a free-standing object confronting it. (*PhG:* ¶342/318)

Hegel calls this self-related consciousness 'absolute freedom' (*PhG:* ¶340f./317f.). This new subjectivized form of utility, to which nothing appears as an external object, is stuck in being *in-itself*. As absolute freedom, the will experiences no resistance from another. In practice, however, this does not mean the withdrawal of the individual from the world, but the uncompromising assertion of his will—and not so much 'her will', because the historical Enlightenment is patriarchal—in the world: 'The world is to it [self-consciousness] quite simply its will, and this will is the universal will' (*PhG:* ¶340/317).[20] The claim of universal equality with which the Enlightenment began gives way to the freedom of the one who, considering himself 'the universal subject' (*PhG:* ¶340/317), tolerates no resistance.

3) With this unilateral enforcement of will, the structure of utility turns into despotism and revolutionary terror, which ends enlightenment. This develops

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along two lines, which I call a) *the unfree life* and b) *the death of freedom.* a) Since the 'universal' will is claimed by *one* revolutionary individual, all others are dominated by him and live the unfree life of the masses. b) Universality, present only in the freedom of a single individual, remains abstract, so that its existence is 'negated', leading to the execution of the revolutionary and the death of the absolute freedom embodied in him (*PhG:* ¶343/319f.). In contrast with Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis, the death of freedom does not occur in mass extermination. Hegel's critique of enlightenment focuses less on the deprivation of freedom (or life) of the many than on the associated excess of freedom of the single individual. By declaring this excess to be the logic of individual freedom itself, Hegel—too completely—denies all its emancipatory potential.

In Hegel's account, utility falls into a dialectic because the consciousness (the individual) participating in the social interaction of utility fundamentally misunderstands its structure. It ignores the fact that it is essential to this structure that the relations in which the subject participates are never fully available to it, i.e. cannot be appropriated. The dialectic of utility proceeds as the semblance of appropriation, in which the formerly reciprocal structure of utility appears only as a for-another. In the first step, as we have seen, the social structure of utility seems to be *epistemologically* appropriated by the subject as its object of cognition. In the second step, this objectified structure of utility seems to be *ontologically* appropriated, since the subject recognizes it as its own self-related structure. In the third step, utility seems *practically* appropriated by the despotic will of the revolutionary. With the execution of the revolutionary, however, it becomes clear that the appropriation of utility was an illusion.[21] The revolutionary subject experiences the friction of the world—the neglected but undeniable aspect of its being in-itself—with fatal consequences.

Is there, drawing on Hegel's argument, any prospect of a concept of utility that does not end in oppression and death, but can provide a normative orientation for living in communities—in other words, could there be an affirmative understanding of enlightenment, post-Hegelian in the sense that it departs from Hegel and at the same time continues one of his lines of thought? We can answer this by first recalling the exact point at which, according to Hegel, enlightenment fails. It does not fail for lack of influence—it certainly succeeds in asserting its truth against faith. Enlightenment fails because, in its struggle against faith, it arrives at the idea of the availability of the world—the world as a mere object. Completely reduced to an object, the world seems to be aligned with the subject, nothing more than a part of subjective agency. Looking at the world, the enlightened subject is only 'seeing-*itself*-as-doubled' (*PhG:* ¶340/317). It is the complete objectification of the world that conceals its difference from the subject. The differentiated unity of subject and object, self and world, sought in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* fails: the enlightened subject cannot recognize itself in the

objective world because it does not recognize this world as objective in the first place. Thus, insight into how the subject actually corresponds to the world is blocked.[22] In the three-step attempt to completely appropriate the structure of utility, the subject mistakes itself for 'the essence of all actuality' (*PhG:*¶340/317) and the world for its will. This deception is dialectically revealed by the violent death of the revolutionary subject—who now experiences the world as a fundamental otherness on which it is dependent and vulnerable. External actuality, denied by the subject, strikes back.

The precondition for an(other) enlightenment that does not end in violence is a different structure of the subject: a subject that experiences itself in relation to the world and understands the effective influence of others as part of its own structure, rather than misunderstanding its isolated self-relation as the world. This presupposes a certain social structure in which the subject does not experience itself as simply mastering (or simply being mastered). It is precisely Hegel's understanding of utility as a form of social interaction that provides a starting point for such a structure.

According to Hegel, the two-sided utility structure—alternating between being in-itself and being for-another—is realized in the 'troop'. Horkheimer and Adorno interpreted this Hegelian troop as standardization, even uniformity: to be its 'universally usable member' (*PhG:* ¶327/305) is to perform monotonous industrial labour (*DA*: 9/19). Hegel also described such an economic logic in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*: in the modern exchange society, everyone satisfies his interests by standardizing them according to what is universally recognized. Each makes himself 'a *link* [*Gliede*] in the chain' (Hegel 2009 [1820]: §187; emphasis in original, translation mine), which requires 'making oneself equal' [*Sich-gleich-machen*] to the others (Hegel 2009 [1820]: §193; translation mine). The 'troop' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, however, does not amount to such standardization; and the utility realized by this troop does not appear as a mere exchange ratio or as the disciplining monotony of factory work.

I suggest that we take Hegel's description of the troop (*Trupp*) seriously, and not be swayed by its ironic tone. The *Deutsches Wörterbuch* provides an etymology of this term, which we are accustomed to associate with a disciplined, uniform organization governed by orders (an association also found in *DA*: 9/19). In Hegel's time, however, especially in the German dialects, *Trupp* did not have a primarily military meaning. Originally referring to a 'pack' or 'herd', *Trupp* meant 'a group [*eine Schar*] of animals or people', 'without the military connotation being prominent' (Grimm and Grimm 1952: column 1413; translation mine). A 'group' in this sense is not determined by uniformity, but denotes a heterogeneous association. In Hegel's troop of utility relations, this heterogeneity corresponds to the aspect of being recalcitrant, standoffish or, as Terry Pinkard translates the word *spröde*, 'unaccommodating' to others (*PhG:*¶326/304). Crucially, this aspect

of resistance to adaptation is, in Hegel's account, a structural component of utility itself. Hegelian utility characterizes a structure of collective satisfaction of needs that should not be confused with the familiar. Firstly, utility has nothing in common with the disciplining logic of the factory described by Adorno and Horkheimer: adaptation to the machine and the same working rhythm as others ('repressive *égalité*'; *DA*: 9/19) is not the logic of the troop association. Secondly, utility is not an instantiation of the exchange ratio that Hegel later describes in his *Elements*: the individuals of the troop do not co-operate by making themselves equal, and nor—more importantly—is the universal or common good promoted by each one caring only for himself, ultimately isolated from the others. The universal—utility as reciprocal interaction—is not strengthened by everyone simply pursuing their own ends (and using the universal as a 'means' [*Mittel*] (Hegel 2009 [1820]: §187)) as in modern exchange society. Rather, Hegelian utility is a structure in which individuals realize *care for themselves* by being *useful to others*: 'To the extent that he cares [*sorgt*] for himself, he must give himself for the others, and to the extent that he gives himself, he cares for himself, the one hand washes the other' (*PhG:* ¶327/305; translation mine). Self-care and being useful to concrete others (and not just to a 'system' of needs) are constitutively connected. After all, utility is a structure in which individuals do not experience themselves as insulated from others.

Georg Lukács is wrong in seeing in Hegel's concept of utility only a renewal of the 'exploitation theory of the Enlightenment' (Lukács 1967 [1948]: 612; translation mine). On the one hand, the individuals of Hegel's utility troop also give themselves for the benefit of others, rather than exploiting them. On the other hand, utility does not force adaptation to and domination by others, but encompasses nonconformity. In contrast to familiar models of utility, the individuals in Hegel's troop are at once more related to others and more related to themselves. In Hegel's unusual model of utility, withdrawing into oneself and being useful to concrete others are not contradictory precisely because they both appear to be constitutive of caring for oneself in a non-atomistic way. In contrast with Hegel's conclusion in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, such utility does not necessarily result in the illusionary absorption of everything within the self (*PhG:*¶337/314); nor does it mean the reduction of all things to their applicability, as Horkheimer and Adorno imply.

III. Conclusion: recalcitrant utility

For Hegel, as for Horkheimer and Adorno, the end of enlightenment is accompanied by the failure of utility. In Hegel's account: utility, a social structure in which

withdrawal and care are mutually dependent, turns into unilateral domination. In Horkheimer and Adorno's account: as utility is identified with applicability, the self-preservation of the individual is replaced by the self-preservation of the economic apparatus. In both descriptions, enlightenment destroys itself by denying the aspect of in-itself (of the world and of others) that eludes any appropriation.

We learn from Hegel that unavailability, withdrawal—i.e. being in-itself—is part of a functioning social utility structure: something or someone is only useful to others when it is not entirely for-another, not entirely appropriated, but remains recalcitrant. Utility, this is the Hegelian insight, exists only as a structure with two sides: for-another and in-itself; and thus it requires the *coexistence* of being for-another and in-itself. In Hegel's dialectic of the (French) Enlightenment, the aspect of in-itself, as we have seen, dissolves into passivity and thus becomes for-another: a mere object for others (*PhG:* ¶339/316). This dissolution into passivity is at the centre of the dialectical self-destruction of enlightenment.

However, the aspect of in-itself only appears as completely passive from the perspective of a self-exalting individual who illusorily believes that his will is the effective 'essence' of the whole world. Beyond this misguided perspective, being in-itself appears to be a negative or resistant activity: actively saying 'no' to the demands of others. Conversely, being for-another can be described as an affirmative passivity: giving oneself away to others and allowing oneself to be *used*; saying 'yes' to serving as an instrument, to contributing, to *making* oneself useful.

A post-Hegelian understanding of utility can draw on such a social interplay between negative activity and affirmative passivity. Utility then appears neither as the loss of the self in total objectification (as in Horkheimer and Adorno's account), nor as the necessary dissolution of the objective world in the self (as in Hegel's account). Rather, utility is framed as an attitude of refusing *and* being useful by letting oneself be used. 'Utility' means an attitude of commitment 'for another' that does not neglect the recalcitrance of either the self or the world. Such a concept of utility does not only entail taking recalcitrance into account, the aspect of the in-itself, alongside the aspect of the for-another, but it also requires a different understanding of the for-another.

Adorno's writings implicitly contain some important starting points for this, and thus for a positive concept of enlightenment. In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno criticizes the untruth of the dominant form of for-another: what is supposedly done for man deceives him (Adorno 2002: 310; Adorno 2019 [1970]: 459f.), because the principle of for-another is identical here with the principle of exchange, which in modernity involves fraud (even more so than the mythical sacrifice that does not give the gods the good meat). Against this background, Adorno is for the useless when it comes to art (Adorno 2002: 227;

Adorno 2019 [1970]: 337). But it is not quite that simple. For at the same time, he makes it clear that the alternative between 'What do I get out of it?' (for-another) and doing a thing for its own sake (for-itself) is abhorrent (*widerwärtig*; Adorno 2002: 310; Adorno 2019 [1970]: 460). This seems to imply not useless-ness *instead* of utility, not in-itself *instead* of for-another. Rather, I would argue that what is required is a different form of utility, based on a different under-standing of for-another: a principle of for-another that is not tied to the modern principle of exchange. Extending this idea from art to the social sphere, utility would not be linked to calculability, as it is in the existing enlightenment society of exchange (*DA*: 3/12): I do not give in order to directly receive something (and if possible—that is the fraud—more than I give). In such a perspective, utility does not appear as a relationship of supply and return. It is not a dyadic relationship at all: I am not useful to someone in order to get something from that particular activity and person. Instead, utility appears as a social structure in which I participate, in which everyone's requirements are taken into account and, importantly, in which not everyone needs the same thing or the same amount of support. Against this background, utility can be understood as linking use and care in a specific way. I want to highlight three aspects which are crucial for this.

Firstly, utility is reciprocal but not symmetrical. It is neither the logic of exploitation nor the logic of the exchange of equivalents, rather it leaves the sphere of constant commensurability set by the existing enlightenment. It is not simply a mutual being for each other, but contains being in-itself, indicating that one does not always have to perform in order to get something. Due to the aspect of not always being even—an aspect of inequality—utility is a structure of care that takes into account its ambivalent character as described by Joan Tronto: 'Any given act of care is unequal' (2015: 14). Utility, however—and *secondly*—does not only include those who can contribute less, because they are 'weaker' and in this sense more 'passive'. It also involves the negative activity of refusal: partially withdrawing from time to time—actively being *in-itself*—is part of utility. This withdrawal, also a mode of self-care, does not reject the social interactions from which it withdraws, but affirms its constitutive dependence on them. *Thirdly*, care relations in the sense of such utility are not limited to me-you relationships, but should be understood as a social structure. We can give in one direction without receiving, and receive in another direction without giving. Utility is realized multi-directionally in the relationships between members of a community, who are members by not only caring for and in dyadic, two-person relationships, but by becoming 'universally usable' (*gemeinnützlich; PhG:* ¶326f./304f.). Being *for-others* is not reduced to taking care of someone close. It involves an openness to letting oneself be used by others beyond the framework of individualized responsibility in emotional or kinship relations.[23]

Of course, there are limits to such a positive reinterpretation of utility in Hegel: first, he describes the relationship of enlightened people to nature as one-sidedly exploitative. Second, regarding the relationship between human individuals, care for oneself and usability for others seem to alternate only contingently instead of entering into a meaningful connection (*PhG:* ¶326f./304f.). Third, a normative concept of utility, which furthermore takes into account caring relationships between human and non-human beings, cannot be gained directly from Hegel. However, Hegel is stimulating by allowing us to rethink a concept of utility in which *care* and *use* are not mutually exclusive (since self-care and use-for-others are not strictly separated, nor does self-care simply obey the need to fit into an economic system of needs), and in which at the same time the necessity of withdrawing is an integral part of the social structure (and not just its externalized precondition (Cooper 2017: 63)). 'Utility' conceived in this way is not a relation of exploitation or 'application' of others for one's own benefit, as Adorno and Horkheimer understand the concept. Nor is it a utilitarian position, since it does not give primacy to an abstract universal good, but to relations in which concern for oneself and being of use to concrete others are co-emergent. If this concept of utility prevailed, enlightenment would not have to turn dialectically into domination. But is it an instantiation of Hegelian social *freedom*? Practical freedom, as outlined in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, means 'the different ways a [rational] subject's activity within the world can be its *own*, proceeding from its *own* will rather than from an external source'; free subjects are thus 'with-themselves-in-an-other' (Neuhouser 2000: 21; emphasis in original). The experience of utility is different. It is not the experience of appropriating what first seems external and separate, but the experience of being inseparable from the unappropriable: the aspect of unavailable being in-itself—one's own and that of others. Taking Hegel as our starting point, we can think of how this recalcitrant utility is liberating.[24]

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Notes

₁ Abbreviations used:

[1] Abbreviations used:

PhG = Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. T. Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)/*Phänomenologie des Geistes, Gesammelte Werke* 9 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1980).

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DA = Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, trans. E. Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002)/*Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2008).

[2] Adorno and Horkheimer objected that the primacy of utility negated the rights of the individual (*DA*: 3/12). A further influential critique was formulated by Bernard Williams (Smart and Williams 1973).

[3] On Hegel's influence on *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, see Kreis (2017); however, the topos of utility is only mentioned, but not elaborated here (Kreis 2017: 131, 141). Besides Horkheimer and Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Georg Lukács also expanded on Hegel's dialectic of enlightenment; on this, see Habermas (1971: 63). According to Lukács, Hegel's depiction of utility represents the highest level of the alienation of the spirit: self-interest objectivized to a social organizational principle forming the essence of capitalism (Lukács 1967 [1948]: 612).

[4] Hegel's account of enlightenment's struggle with faith is discussed in the context of his other writings by Lewis P. Hinchman (1984). However, the breadth of Hinchman's synoptic reconstruction leads to misconstructions and inaccuracies; on this, see the review by Westphal (1990).

[5] Adorno's critique is particularly famous here; see Ferro (2020) and Baumann (2011).

[6] Both approaches argue that enlightenment threatens the fundamental value of modernity by transforming individual freedom into its opposite. On individual freedom as the most impactful ethical value of modernity, see for instance Honneth (2014: 15).

[7] An explicit relationship between instrumental reason and the notion of 'use' is established before *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Horkheimer claimed in 1942 that reason in bourgeois society serves—without being limited to—the self-preservation of the individual by striving for 'Nutzen' (benefit/use; Horkheimer 1987 [1942]: 323–26); later he argued—more pessimistically—that reason is limited to its socially determined function of preserving the individual by dominating others and nature (Horkheimer 1991 [1946]: 42).

[8] The influential account of instrumental reason in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* has been criticized, particularly from a feminist perspective, for perpetuating the rejected logic of identification, since women and workers appear only as non-individualized groups; see Becker-Schmidt (1989: 53–54).

[9] Marx, along with Hegel, is particularly central to the first chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which is the focus here; see Brunkhorst (2017: 186). The claim that individual self-preservation, the maxim of Western enlightenment, is rooted not in the nature of the individual but in the social division of labour also goes back to Marx (Christ 2017: 50). On the connection Lukács made between Marx and Weber, which influenced Horkheimer and Adorno, see Lukács (2013 [1923]: 271–74) and cf. Brunkhorst (2017: 179, 182). Lukács's interpretation of Marx was also a starting point for Horkheimer and Adorno's description of the seeming immutability of society, which they attributed to 'a social context which induces blindness' (*gesellschaftlicher Verblendungszusammenhang; DA*: 33/48); cf. Hindrichs (2017: 2).

[10] Against Horkheimer and Adorno it can be objected that calculation, in so far as it makes a claim to correctness and contains its contestability, is still reason in the form of thought. The

loss of reason, as they see it, occurs as follows: through the integration of cognition and power within an apparatus for dominating nature (*DA*: 2/10), *act, object* and *subject* of cognition are reduced and damaged. The *act* of cognition narrows to 'effective procedure' (*DA*: 2/10f.), the *object* of cognition to submission (*DA*: 6/15, 9/19), and the *subject* of cognition to a position of detached sovereignty (*DA*: 5f./15).

[11] The idea of a loss of subjectivity in industrial society also guides Adorno's *Minima Moralia* (Adorno 2005 [1951]: 15–18).

[12] Habermas (1998: 112–14, 119). In a similar vein, Albrecht Wellmer argued that every path to a positive actualization of reason is blocked in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* since the logic of self-preservation does not only, as in Marx, affect people externally through their oppression in class society, but damages their reason, their being a subject, to the point that any emancipatory action leads to its opposite; see Wellmer (1969: 139–40).

[13] Cf. Marx's description of the fetish character (Marx 1968: 86f.).

[14] According to Alison Stone, the reversion of enlightenment to myth occurs precisely at the point of external replacement, so that in this dialectic there is an oscillation between 'the moments of abstraction, in which enlightenment tries to posit itself separately from myth and magic, and that of dialectic proper, in which myth and magic reassert their inextricability from enlightenment' (Stone 2014: 1126–27). However, Stone links the reversion to myth with the reversion to being ruled by nature, which appear to me to be two different things. Whilst it is true that escaping the dialectic is only possible by 'admitting our dependency on nature' (2014: 1128), this cannot mean admitting our dependency on myth.

[15] I understand 'utility' in Hegel, unlike Terry Pinkard, not as a 'putatively universalistic criterion' which serves 'the greatest happiness of all', but rather as a particular-situational practice between individuals. See Pinkard (1997: 34, 32).

[16] On how Hegel conceives of the relation between form and content differently from Kant (against Kant's separation between the subjective forms of intuition and the form of extra-conceptual objects), see Pippin (2019: Chapter 2, particularly 40–48, 59–60).

[17] As Pippin puts it, it is about 'conflicts of Spirit *with itself*' (Pippin 1997: 4; emphasis in original). Regarding spirit's failure to recognize its 'formal identity' with faith, see also Stolzenberg (2009: 201–02).

[18] On the connection between the eminently practical character of enlightenment and its concept of utility as a social norm, see Pippin (1997: 7, 2). Besides Pippin, and in contrast to many other interpreters mentioned here, Daniel Brauer also points to the practical dimension of utility in Hegel (Brauer 2008). Dieter Hüning considers enlightenment's practical dimension, while neglecting its connection with (theoretical) knowledge (Hüning 2012: 93–94).

[19] This arbitrariness contains a non-harmonic, suppressive aspect: the in-itself of the object seems to be at the mercy of subjective disposal. This may explain the tendency of some interpreters to reduce the structure of utility to the side of for-another and to neglect the side of in-itself, as for instance in Hüning (2012: 94). William Maker argues in a similar vein (Maker 2012: 67). In contrast, I consider it crucial that for Hegel the illusionary appropriation of the

objective world by the subject does not coincide with utility in general, but only occurs in utility's last *Gestalt* of 'absolute freedom' in the French Revolution.

[20] In this critique of Rousseau's concept of 'universal will', Hegel does not acknowledge how Rousseau's idea of the community transcends the arbitrary will of the individual; see Wokler (1997: 84, 86).

[21] Even in contemporary analyses, modernity is sometimes seen as an illusionary appropriation. Eva von Redecker argues that an illusionary, albeit practically effective power of disposal and destruction, which she calls 'phantom possession', determines the modern concept of freedom (Redecker 2020: 49–51).

[22] See Angelica Nuzzo, who argues with regard to Hegel's *Logic* that progress emerges dialectically from a 'blocked development' (Nuzzo 2018: 215, 238).

[23] On the question of personal responsibility, see also Tronto (2015: 23–25).

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