Two Dialectics of Enlightenment

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I. Introduction

In 1807 Hegel published the *Phenomenology of Spirit* which calmly asserted that philosophy had, at long last, ceased to be merely the love of knowing and had finally consummated its lust for truth, giving birth to '*strenge Wissenschaft*' in logic and the system (Hegel, 1807: 3). In 1944, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno circulated mimeographed copies of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ominously asserting that the same process of reason's self-clarification which Hegel described brings us, not, as he claimed, to truth and freedom, but to barbarism. Somehow critical reflection's efforts to liberate humanity from superstition, darkness, and oppression has lead instead to Auschwitz.

A crucial aspect of Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of enlightenment is the notion that enlightenment and its seeming antithesis, myth, are inextricably linked. In the *Phenomenology* Hegel had already investigated the underlying link between the rationality of the Enlightenment period and faith, its ostensible arational other, in Chapter VI. In various places Horkheimer and Adorno acknowledge the influence of Hegel, and they make suggestive passing references to the *Phenomenology*. Obviously, their connecting of enlightenment and myth bears more than a family resemblance to Hegel's pairing of enlightenment and faith. Just as Hegel disclosed that enlightenment and faith have more in common than usually thought, Horkheimer and Adorno aim to show that there is an important aspect of enlightenment already in myth and further, that enlightenment has itself fallen back into the essential features of myth it purports to be have overcome. Their tantalizing mention of Hegel's 'consign[ing]' of 'enlightenment to positivist decay' suggests specifically that his phenomenological treatment of enlightenment had some bearing on their notion of the self-destruction of critical reason in positivism and the total society (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 18).

While *Dialectic of Enlightenment* makes references to the *Phenomenology,* it does not engage in an analysis of Chapter VI, section II, the Enlightenment section of the *Phenomenology*. In what follows I will not present a detailed analysis of that section either. Instead I will focus more generally on what I see as the larger, complex, and important relationship between Hegel's and Horkheimer and Adorno's critical treatments of enlightenment as they all more broadly understood it: as a phenomenon rooted in the whole endeavor of thought and not restricted to a particular historical period. I will indicate that, despite their disagreements about where the process of enlightenment

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culminates, there are some more fundamental and significant links between Hegel's phenomenological project as a whole, and Horkheimer and Adorno's sweeping critique of enlightenment. My approach is based on the idea that the entire *Phenomenology of Spirit* also can be seen as a comprehensive and thoroughgoing critique of enlightenment. Like Horkheimer and Adorno's, the *Phenomenology*'s critical appraisal of the dialectic of enlightenment is also undertaken in the name of and from the perspective of enlightenment itself, although Hegel's phenomenological account of the negative completion of the dialectic differs significantly from theirs. In making this case I will also address Horkheimer and Adorno's adoption and adaptation of Hegel's notion of determinate negation in what they call negative dialectics, as well as their emphatic critique of Hegel's positive move beyond the negative dialectic of the *Phenomenology*'s 'way of despair' into systematic science (Hegel: 1807, 49). Given the conflicting accounts of the culmination of enlightenment on offer, my aim is to answer the question: where *should* the dialectic of enlightenment end?

Horkheimer and Adorno also acknowledge that the *Phenomenology* parallels their own project in treating enlightenment as a fundamental aspect of thought. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* they wrote '[n]ot only is the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century inexorable, as Hegel confirmed; so, too, as none new better than he, is the movement of thought itself' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 15). And in a letter to Friedrich Pollack about *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer claimed that he and Adorno were trying to lay out a conception of 'the process of enlightenment as it was marked out in the first thought a human being conceived, the same process of which Hegel said that if started it is irresistible' (Schmidt: 1998, 825; Horkheimer 1996: vol. 17, 446). My consideration of the *Phenomenology* as thematising the whole process of enlightenment will indicate that Hegel regards the subjectivist structure of consciousness as the underlying framework for enlightenment, understood as thought's persistent attempt to critically justify its capacity to afford objective truth. I will suggest that, again, like Horkheimer and Adorno, he felt moving beyond *some* features of this framework is the way to truth and freedom. This commonality brings us to what concerned Horkheimer and Adorno about enlightenment and to an unresolved aspect of their critique.

II. The Paradox of Enlightenment

For Horkheimer and Adorno, enlightenment —self-critical thought— is the ground of freedom *and* domination, of progress *and* regression. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* they attribute the West's descent into barbarism under fascism as the very culmination of the self-destruction of enlightenment thought (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: iv – xix; 1 – 34). And yet, enlightenment affords the only conceivable way out of this paradox. According to them enlightenment rationality harbors a fatal ambiguity: promising freedom through

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our emancipation from the domination of nature, the enlightenment unmasked the secret to the operations of nature in instrumental rationality. But, like the sorcerer's apprentice, the nature-controlling power afforded by enlightenment contains within itself and progressively unleashed a drive to domination which has turned back on its masters, ultimately subverting enlightenment's broader emancipatory promise. Domination has been progressively spreading even while instrumental reason provides the means to liberate humanity from nature's domination. So enlightenment presents the paradox of being progressive and regressive at the same time. 'Adaptation to the power of progress furthers the progress of power, constantly renewing the degenerations which prove successful progress, not failed progress, to be its own antithesis. The curse of irresistible progress is irresistible regression' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947:28).

As part of their own effort to enlighten enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno trace its flaw to its unclarified relation to myth. Enlightenment's traditional self-understanding sees it as a drive to disenchantment, marshaled against the uncritical dogmatism associated with immediate assertions of the truth, as typically found in faith, myth, superstition, and magic. In this sense enlightenment is rooted in the notion that the thinking subject needs to reflectively establish its capacity to afford truth by demonstrating that and how it provides the correct representation of objectivity. Securing the correctness of representation by means of thought's critical, clarifying reflection on the conditions of knowledge within subjectivity will not only effect liberation from error. In so doing, it will further the positive attaining of freedom by also disclosing the keys to the workings of nature, and bring it under the control of human subjects. Thus, in their conception of enlightenment, it is tied to instrumental, scientific-technological reasoning; the enlightenment conception of truth already links it with power *and* with the freedom associated with human emancipation from nature (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 4 -9). In their eyes, this essential linking of the subject's freedom with its domination of objectivity has proved deeply problematic. The drive to objectify and control has not been able to secure a subject who is capable of freedom. 'What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings. Nothing else counts. Ruthless toward itself, the Enlightenment has eradicated the last remnant of its own self-awareness' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 2), the 'subjugation of everything natural to the sovereign subject culminates in the domination of what is blindly objective and natural' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: xviii). Driven by the impetus to critical self-clarification, enlightenment reduces everything to what the subject can objectify and thereby control. It can neither exempt itself nor the enlightened subject from its own instrumentalising, objectifying gaze, but should do so if it is to remain true to its self-critical and emancipatory promises. In enlightenment, freedom of thought and action both demand and succumb to the necessity to objectify everything. If enlightenment fails to focus objectively on enlightenment thought itself it betrays its claim about what counts

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as justified knowledge, fails to subject itself to criticism, and lapses into the dogmatic assertiveness of myth. But if it does objectify the critical subject, it obliterates at the same time the capacity for critical self-distancing which is basic to the theoretical and practical autonomy which purportedly set enlightenment apart from mythic dogmatism in the first place. In either case enlightenment slips to the pre-critical niveau of myth. Echoing and amplifying Jacobi's and Nietzsche's skepticism concerning enlightenment's pretensions about escaping dogmatism is their famous contention that 'enlightenment reverts to mythology.' They assert: 'Mythology itself sets in motion the endless process of enlightenment by which, with ineluctable necessity, every definite theoretical view is subjected to the annihilating criticism that it is only a belief, until the concepts of mind, truth, and, indeed, enlightenment itself have been reduced to animistic magic.' 'Just as myths already entail enlightenment, with every step enlightenment entangles itself more deeply in mythology. Receiving all subject matter from myths, in order to destroy them, it falls as judge under the spell of myth' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 7, 8). And those who were to be liberated come to be further objects for domination. 'On their way toward modern science human beings have discarded meaning. The concept is replaced by the formula, the cause by rules and probability.' 'For enlightenment, anything which does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility must be viewed with suspicion' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 3). Enlightenment has consequently resulted in the domination of the 'administered world.' 'Enlightenment is totalitarian' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: xi, 4). They also include Hegel in this indictment. Since the system demands completion and finality for the dialectic of determinate negation, it leads to 'totality in the system and history.' While he had an insight into the openness of determinate negation as that 'which distinguishes enlightenment from...positivist decay.... he violated the prohibition' against totalizing 'and himself succumbed to mythology' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 18).

Note that the conundrum enlightenment presents, the seeming inseparability of emancipation and domination, is intensified, since Horkheimer and Adorno are adamant that there is no meaningful alternative to enlightenment. Enlightenment's failure is not to be addressed by abandoning enlightenment altogether. If a solution is to be found, it can only lie in the continuation of enlightenment's self-critique. For them, enlightenment's lapse to myth and it's diversion to regressive domination is attributable, at least in part, to its insufficiency to be critical enough, to its inability heretofore to get fully clear about itself, so any prospect for saving enlightenment will necessitate continuing enlightenment in order to disclose what this clarity consists in. In the 'Preface to the New Edition (1969)' they observe of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that 'as a critique of philosophy it does not seek to abandon philosophy itself' and that the 'critique of enlightenment...is intended to prepare a positive concept of enlightenment which liberates it from its entanglement in blind domination' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: xii, xviii). While speaking

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of 'the self-destruction of enlightenment' to which they bore witness, they immediately note 'we have no doubt —and herein lies our *petitio principii*— that freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking', a point where they surely agree with Hegel. And while enlightenment 'already contains the germ of the regression which is taking place everywhere today' yet '[i]f enlightenment does not assimilate reflection on this regressive movement it seals its own fate' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: xvi).

An important aspect of this ambiguity is whether they can cash out this enlightenment assumption and point to a way out of the dark turn of regressive domination. How is a further critique of enlightenment to be undertaken? Enlightenment lapses to dogmatism (myth) insofar as it fails to subject its own demands and critical principles to critique. But how is a further meta-critique to go forward without – at each subsequent stage of meta-criticism – being dogmatic in having to assume the truth of the meta-critical standpoint? How is 'subjective reason' to become objective? Horkheimer and Adorno appear to be aware of the problem of meta-criticism. In a letter to Lowenthal about *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno wrote:

> The text, particularly in the first chapter, describes the process of formalization and instrumentalisation of reason as a necessary and irresistible one, in the sense in which Hegel dealt with enlightenment in the *Phenomenology*. But after that the book only contains a critique of this form of reason. *The relationship between the critical point of view and the view criticized has not been made clear*' (Wiggershaus 1986: 332, emphasis added).

A major issue I will take up is whether their *petitio principii* and their acknowledged need to address it, along with the issue of establishing their own critical perspective, is satisfied. Put differently, does the proper enlightenment of enlightenment lead to negative dialectics? Do they fulfill the promise to clarify and secure their own critical standpoint, or is their own position also in danger of reverting to myth?

Albrecht Wellmer discusses just this difficulty in *Critical Theory of Society*: 'a critical societal theory, which would …unite a criticism of instrumental reason with enlightenment regarding the transformed reproductive mechanisms of domination under conditions of organized capitalism, is available at present only in the form of hypotheses and approaches' and continues: '[t]he dilemmas of enlightenment which Adorno and Horkheimer mention in *The Dialectics* [sic] *of Enlightenment* are therefore rooted not only in the 'lack of awareness which allows society's thinking to stultify', but also in a deficiency of illuminating 'discourse,' and in inadequate knowledge in theory. (Wellmer 1969: 136-137). Wellmer goes on to suggest that this remains an unresolved problem for critical theory (Wellmer 1969: 138). In a later work, he returns to the issue, observing that the 'critique of identitary reason is thus also a critique of *legitimizing* reason' (Wellmer 1991:

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61). Echoing Horkheimer and Adorno's critiques of Hegel, he continues: 'what is expressed in the closed nature of philosophical systems, just as in the pursuit of philosophical fundamental groundings, is the almost manic striving of 'identificatory thought' after certainty and domination' (ibid.). Indicating that Horkheimer and Adorno 'cleave to an emphatic concept of enlightenment...' whose goal is 'enlightening identitary reason about its own character as an instrument of domination' (ibid.), Wellmer argues, this leads the later Adorno to the notion of transcending the concept by way of the concept. But the 'critique of identitary reason seems ultimately to result in a choice between cynicism and theology' (Wellmer 1991: 61, 62, 63). In a similar vein, Seyla Benhabib claims that the 'critique of enlightenment becomes as totalizing as the false totality it seeks to criticize.' 'Both emancipation and reason' have to be sought in another instance. The totalizing diagnosis of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* does not tell us where.' Finally, she notes that Horkheimer and Adorno's critical theory is 'aporetic':

> *If the plight of the enlightenment and of cultural rationalization only reveals the culmination of the identity logic, consititutive of reason, then the theory of the dialectic of the Enlightenment, which is carried out with the tools of this very same reason, perpetuates the very structure of domination it condemns'* (Benhabib 1986: 166, 167, 168 italics in original).

The question of whether contemporary critical theorists such as Wellmer and Benhabib have resolved this problem cannot be addressed here. The approach I present below contends, that Hegel 's *Phenomenology*, avoids the problems of reason's effort at self-critical enlightenment just because it is an immanent critique. A corollary of this, which I do address but do not develop in detail here, is and that the enlightenment it affords present a reason which is neither identitary nor dominating.

How does Hegel bear on these issues? I will argue that Hegel's relation to what is positive and negative in enlightenment, in sharp contrast to Horkheimer and Adorno's, is not plagued by a problematic, unresolved ambiguity. More specifically, I will contend that their critique of enlightenment and its problems foreshadows and approximates but does not accomplish Hegel's more radical and thoroughgoing *Aufhebung* of the framework within which enlightenment undertakes its critical endeavor. Hegel's phenomenological analysis of the ultimate basis of subjective enlightenment in the structure of consciousness, and his exposure of its inherent and finally fatal flaws, especially his account of consciousness' entrapment in the subjective self-assertions of being-for-self, gets us to the deep structure of the dialectic of enlightenment. In so doing, it reveals the causal nexus responsible for some of the more particular problematic aspects of enlightenment which Horkheimer and Adorno address. Hegel, going beyond Horkheimer and Adorno, discloses the root difficulty which leads to regressive mis-identification of objective reason with instrumental reason and the consequent collapse of subjective enlightenment into myth. Put differently, while Horkheimer recognises that

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their work has not resolved the tension between 'ineluctable,' 'irresistible, imperious, subjective reason' and objective reason, 'the truth being contrasted with it,' and holds 'that there is no positive "solution" in the sense of providing a philosophy which could simply be contrasted to subjective reason,' Hegel's *Phenomenology* shows how subjective reason self-destructs and points beyond to objective, autonomous reason in the system (Wiggershaus 1986: 332). While they bring out some post-Hegelian configurations and surface effects of enlightenment's entrapment in radical subjectivity, Hegel's more thoroughgoing analysis charts the form of the whole process of radicalization and its final determinate negation. He shows both how and why enlightenment may regress and how it can move beyond this. Thus, I will also contend that a consideration of Hegel on consciousness and being-for-self can help to further illumine and deepen what Horkheimer and Adorno say about myth, power, and instrumental reason. Because of his consideration of the deep structure of enlightenment and its decentering in absolute knowing, I believe that Hegel shows how we can move theoretically beyond the freedom/power-domination dialectic and attain a clear conception of the objective reason which Horkheimer and Adorno gesture at, but admit they have not attained. On a further critical note, I aim to indicate that their own unresolved ambiguity about enlightenment, coupled with their espousal of a strictly negative dialectic itself is reflective of their persistent commitment to the structure of subjective consciousness which Hegel transcended. Nonetheless, on a more positive note, Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of how enlightenment's form of subjective reason increasingly underlies and embodies actual forms of domination provides an important complement to Hegel. Echoing his claim that philosophy is its own age captured in thought, they held that 'enlightenment expresses the real movement of bourgeois society as a whole from the perspective of the idea' it embodies, such that 'truth refers not merely to rational consciousness but equally to the form it takes in reality' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: xvi). Writing about a planned work on dialectics, Horkheimer observed he definition of philosophical concepts is always at the same time a description of human society in its historically given embodiment. In this respect the planned book conceives of logic in a similar way to Hegel in his great work, not as a collection of abstract modes of thought but as a definition of the most important substantial categories of progressive consciousness in the present time' (ibid.). Or, as they put the connection between the ideal and the real more bluntly in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 'things are themselves becoming metaphysics' (Horkheimer, Adorno, 1947: 'Editors Afterword' 226, xviii).

III. Myth and Enlightenment

I will now consider Horkheimer and Adorno on how myth is already enlightenment, and how enlightenment reverts to myth, stressing the Hegelian features of this pairing in

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order to then turn to examining how the *Phenomenology* captures the deep structure of enlightenment, and thereby its connection to myth as well.

Myth is already enlightenment according to them because myth, especially in its view of the natural world and human relations to it, affords the account of nature in-itself which underlies and makes possible magic, as subjectivity's instrument for wresting control. The rituals found in myth are representations of how things happen 'and of the specific process which is to be influenced by magic'; later on we read: '[t]he myths...were marked by the discipline and power which Bacon celebrated as the goal' of Enlightenment' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 5). Invoking the basic subject matter of the *Phenomenology*, consciousness's problematic relation to objectivity, they observe that in myth: '[t]he single distinction between man's own existence and reality swallows up all others. Without regard for differences, the world is made subject to man' (ibid.). Reflecting the progression of the development of consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, and in particular the linking of enlightenment and utility in Chapter VI, they observe that 'The awakening of the subject is bought with the recognition of power as the principle of all relationships' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 5). Of course there is a dark side to this development, as myth is surpassed by enlightenment which radicalizes myth's own enlightening promise of the control of nature. Especially in enlightenment, this control is purchased at a price: the loss of a chthonic oneness between subject and object, man and nature. While nature is terrifying in its dark and mysterious workings which always threaten to subsume the subject into the play of Dionysian forces, *mana* (see their reading of Odysseus and the Sirens), human control of nature comes to threaten *our* nature as well, especially its capacity for pleasure and for the happiness of being in harmony with the cosmos. In Horkheimer and Adorno's naturalistic, romantic vision, we too are natural, and nature, both within and without is what we are driven to dominate but need to find harmony with. In short they seek a relation of subject to objectivity which enables the subject to get access to and control of natural objectivity while yet finding a way to be at peace with this natural objectivity, both internally and externally, by not reducing it everywhere to sheer means: '[h]uman beings have always had to choose between their subjugation to nature and its subjugation to the self... Under the compulsion of power, human labor has always led away from myth, and under power, has always fallen back under its spell' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 25, 19-24). Put in Hegelian terms, what they seem to envision is the identity in and with difference of subjectivity and objectivity, being-for-self and being-in-itself.

But we are far from that state of affairs. Under enlightenment, nature becomes mere objectivity as *means*, stuff to be ordered. Although gaining increasing control over it, we are set in opposition to this externality —it is alien to us. 'Human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted.' That is, until objectification renders and purifies even the self, banishing the ghosts from the

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machine and bringing our natural selves under instrumental analysis and then control. 'Not only is domination paid for with the estrangement of human beings from the dominated objects, but the relationships of human beings, including the relationship of individuals to themselves, have themselves been bewitched by the objectification of mind' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 6, 21). Instrumental rationality is supposed to make us masters of our destiny, but, as the purported truth about all being, the masters must also attain objective truth about themselves, reducing them as well to the status of means, and leaving no self who can be distinguished from instrumentality:

> [H]uman beings expect the world, which is without issue, to be set ablaze by a universal power which they themselves are and over which they are powerless[…]
> finally, the transcendental subject of knowledge, as the last reminder of subjectivity, is itself seemingly abolished and replaced by the operations of the automatic mechanisms of order, which therefore run all the more smoothly. Subjectivity has volatilized itself into the logic of supposedly optional rules, to gain more absolute control […]
> Reason's old ambition to be purely an instrument of purposes has been fulfilled...the fear of unsubdued, threatening nature —a fear resulting from nature's very materialization and objectification— has been belittled as animist superstition, and the control of external and internal nature has been made the absolute purpose of life' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 22, 23, 24).

Horkheimer and Adorno note a point already made by Hegel in the *Phenomenology* and also in his post-phenomenological criticisms of liberal theory's atomistic glorification of self-seeking individualism, myth's and enlightenment's desire for autonomy from the other can lead in the direction of, or remain undistinguished from, subjugation of the other. (Hegel 1827-1831: 219). Indeed, what Horkheimer and Adorno contend is that the tragedy of enlightenment is the inability to conceive of freedom except as the autonomy wrenched from natural and human others by dominating them, although this is a domination which comes to encompass the dominator:

> Human beings believe themselves free of fear when there is no longer anything unknown...Enlightenment is mythical fear radicalised...Nothing is allowed to remain outside, since the mere idea of the 'outside' is the real source of fear (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 11).

As the *Phenomenology* showed, whatever subjective consciousness takes to be 'outside' is

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reduced to a dimension of being-for-self just because of consciousness' enlightenment insistence on establishing its knowing —what always is and must be 'for-it'— as capable of reaching objectivity. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer put it thus:

> The mastery of nature draws the circle in which the critique of pure reason holds thought spellbound...The wisdom he [Kant] imparted is oracular: There is no being in the world that knowledge cannot penetrate, but what can be penetrated by knowledge is not Being (Horkheimer,Adorno 1947: 19).

Put in more Hegelian terms, subjugating nature means subjectifying, construing it in subjective terms: conceiving being-in-itself as being-for-self. So in Horkheimer and Adorno's view, the progress of enlightening, scientific-positivistic understanding of nature which strives for a disenchanted, ostensibly objective view of nature by striving to eliminate all human, spiritual, 'subjective' aspects actually theoretically reads and practically imposes a transcendentally criticized, purified, denuded formal-calculative subjectivity on nature. This is a reversion to myth because positivism uncritically believes that it is just disclosing the objective truth of things and is uncritically blind to its own subjectivising of objectivity. Enlightenment held myth to be anthropomorphizing, so it is guilty of indulging in myth according to its own criteria. Like consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, it is persistently blind to its subjectivising. And thus, in Horkheimer and Adorno's view, it lapses to myth:

> Enlightenment has always regarded anthropomorphism, the projection of subjective properties into nature, as the basis of myth... According to enlightenment thinking, the multiplicity of mythical figures can be reduced to a single common denominator, the subject (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947, 4).

Furthermore, this is a subjectivity denuded of all human, individuating features, reduced to the tautology of the 'I think.' This enlightened subject's essence is the capacity for rule-governed construction, the formulation of formal-logical, rule-governed systems. Horkheimer and Adorno even use Hegel's phenomenological terminology to describe it:

> The man of science knows things to the extent he can make them. Their 'in-itself' becomes 'for him.' In their transformation the essence of things is revealed as always the same, a substratum of domination. Their identity constitutes the unity of nature (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 6).

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A key difference separates myth based magic and positivistic instrumental reason, however. Myth does not radically subjectivise objectivity in the direction of a totalizing subsumption which conceptualizes objectivity in radically denatured, thoroughly subjective terms; in myth neither nature nor the subject is what enlightenment finally asserts: a unity without difference, an underlying sameness, everywhere being made identical across and beneath all merely superficial differences:

> Magic is bloody untruth, but in it domination is not yet disclaimed by transforming itself into a pure truth underlying the world in which it enslaves. The magician simply imitates, ... he did not claim to be made in the image of the invisible power, as does civilized man' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 6).

Finally, calculative-instrumental rationality also affirms the supremacy of the immediately given, the tyranny of the factual, and, by banishing 'social, historical and human meaning' reverts in another way to myth by endorsing the authority of scientific, naturalistic necessity (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 20). In this form, enlightenment is again not as different from myth as it thought, and this is one feature of the reversion to myth. 'The more completely the machinery of thought subjugates existence, the more blindly it is satisfied with reproducing it. Enlightenment thereby regresses to the mythology it has never been able to escape. For mythology has reflected in its forms the essence of existing order —cyclical motion, fate, domination of the world as truth— and has renounced hope' (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 20). The instrumental reason that enlightenment has brought us to ends up reducing nature and humanity to identical, interchangeable sameness where necessity, not freedom rules. And they believe also, as we have seen, that Hegel's system is totalizing, authoritarian, and positivistic as reductive of difference and otherness to the identity needed to assure completeness. The promised goal of enlightenment, the justification for the domination of nature, was autonomy. But now instrumentalisation instrumentalises the self —we're just rational calculators of utilities – and thereby installs an necessitarian, rule-governed ordering which takes on the character of necessity and mythic fate: rather than liberating us from natural control, and creating a space for free self-expression, domination has come back to turn the human and social fabric into a second nature of blind instrumentality. Enlightenment reverts to myth because it takes the nature myth feared —power which threatened to control us, and, in the name of liberation from this objectivity, creates the authoritarian totally administered society. It also reverts to myth is that it unreflectively elevates instrumentality into an end in itself, which, according to this version of enlightenment, is a mythic, metaphysical notion which needs to be dispelled. So this version of enlightenment reverts to myth in its inconsistent self-reflectedness and its refusal or

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blindness to subject itself to the same critical analysis which it applies elsewhere, and even to the critically reflecting subject which it has banished, in the name of science, to the abyssal darkness of metaphysical nonsense. The inconsistency and the foreshortening of reflection show that enlightenment has lapsed from the Enlightenment's remorseless demand for criticism.

IV. *Phenomenology* as Enlightenment

What I want to point out is that Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis is, in important respects implicitly underlain by the more fundamental, general structural framework of Hegel's phenomenological consciousness. I think that framework helps illuminate their analysis, provides it with needed explication and support, and ultimately brings to the fore features they did not address.

As we know already from the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, but as it consistently revealed by the different shapes of consciousness, phenomenological consciousness is seeking 'enlightenment,' aiming to distinguish itself from dogmatism, straightforwardly asserted certainty, the sheer unreflective affirmation that what I find for me is the truth (Hegel 1807: 46-57). Phenomenological consciousness seeks to differentiate itself from such dogmatism by critically accounting for its knowledge; by actually showing that what it subjectively takes to be true, what is for it, accurately or correctly represents what is in-itself, objectivity as it is prior to and apart from the subjective apprehension of it (Hegel 1807: 52-55). To demonstrate the coincidence of its subjective view and objectivity, it seeks to show the identity *in content* of its knowledge and the object, while holding fast to the formal or structural *difference* between its knowledge, 'being-for-itself,' and 'being-in-itself.' A successful demonstration obviously requires that both moments, identity and difference, be sustained at one and the same time (Maker 1994: 218-223). As enlightenment involves the general demand that subjective consciousness *prove* its account of object is correct by testing that account to demonstrate its veridicality, as opposed to merely subjectively asserting its truth, phenomenological consciousness embodies enlightenment in the most general and sweeping sense.

Historically then, enlightenment would *seem* to be sharply distinct from faith and myth; to the seeker of enlightenment, the latter appear as straightforwardly dogmatic and uncritical since they merely assert, implicitly or explicitly, that what they immediately take to be true *is* objectively true, not taking up the call for justification. By contrast enlightened thinking aims to vindicate its commitment to demonstrated truth by undertaking the demonstration. Both Frederick Beiser (Beiser 1987) and George di Giovanni (di Giovanni 2005) have carefully analysed how Jacobi's sustained criticisms of Kant's Enlightenment project, articulated from out of the Enlightenment's own

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perspective, brought the enterprise to a crisis. While neither address Hegel's response, they agree in regarding his philosophical project as an effort at resolving the crisis. In his *David Hume* and in the second edition of the *Briefe* (*Werke* IV/2; *Werke* II) Jacobi had called into question reason's pretensions to objective self-grounding. The *Phenomenology* takes up the question whether enlightened, critical reflection can actually mark its distinction from dogmatism by attaining access to objectivity which is simultaneously in its possession as knowledge, for-it, *and* at the same time faithful to the object in-itself, as it is given independent of this subjective knowing. *Can* enlightenment avoid being dogmatic in having to presume the validity of its own critical knowing; its seemingly uncritically assumed critical access to the standard of objectivity? Can it avoid what Hegel referred to as wanting to learn how to swim before going in the water? As the phenomenological 'we' repeatedly come to see, the comparison of knowledge and object, being-for-self and being-in-itself, as made in and by consciousness inevitably brings the objective standard, the given other, into consciousness's own domain of immediate knowable access, subjectivising it, as we see, to knowledge 'for consciousness.' This discloses to us that the enlightenment seeking consciousness we're observing is lapsing into dogmatic faith, mythologizing to the second power, as it were, by assuming the validity of its critical knowing just when it claims to be standing universally against such naive assuming.

Furthermore, just by aiming to avoid the dogmatically assertoric subjectivism of faith and myth, enlightened consciousness cannot avoid it, since for its critical examining to succeed what is in-itself must ultimately be construed as already embodying its openness to, its *being for* the enlightened knower as a constitutive component of what it is in-itself. As the path of the dialectic of enlightenment seeking consciousness which constitutes the *Phenomenology* shows, only if subjective consciousness construes the in-itself in this way —as inherently evincing for-itself— can it hope to demonstrate that the in-itself as actually in itself *and* its knowledge of it as for-it, are identical in content. It can get to objectivity without leaving its domain of immediate certainty only insofar as objectivity *is* just 'to be present for subjective awareness'; Enlightenment seeking consciousness is, as it were, fated to make a Copernican revolution. So Hegel helps us to see that enlightenment cannot ultimately escape the immediate, unreflective assertoric subjectivism of faith and myth, which actually already incorporated a reflective dimension (a point made also by Horkheimer and Adorno). He deepens one of their points by indicating, minimally, why myth is *necessarily* already enlightenment: myth already and enlightenment inevitably both hinge on subjectivity's insistence on the primacy of what is for it; both involve reducing what is given to what can be made present for me; albeit, enlightenment consciousness does this at the reflective, critically philosophical level. The *Phenomenology* also points to the more significant possible outcome of enlightenment's dialectic: that enlightenment construed as subjective self-reflection may never escape this

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'mythic' component of its project; that, in fact it may be doomed from the start to finally disclose itself as myth. This is a point I'll return to as its marks a significant difference between how Horkheimer and Adorno and Hegel read and respond to this disclosure.

Hegel's formal and comprehensive analysis of this process better captures and clarifies its inevitability. He shows that the critical endeavor itself as undertaken by subjective consciousness cannot help reducing what is purportedly independently given objectivity to what is for it just in its enlightenment seeking act. Thus, he illuminates what underlies the paradox or conundrum Horkheimer and Adorno address. Worse yet, as the enlightenment process further unfolds it can only move as it progressively corrects its efforts to attain identity in difference of subjective knowledge and given object in the direction of construing objectivity in increasingly subjective terms. It seems to me that this is where Hegel's phenomenological analysis of enlightened consciousness' fundamental problematic, and Horkheimer and Adorno's more specific account of enlightenment's reversion to myth converge. In formal, phenomenological terms Hegel sees that the process of the increasing subjectification of objectivity is inherent in and inextricable from consciousness' striving to validate its access to objectivity (As I argue below, Horkheimer and Adorno, like Hegel, reject the prospect of this validation, but, unlike Hegel, also reject with it the possibility of objective knowledge, philosophical science). In other words, subjectification is, in the final analysis, a matter of uncritically assuming —not being fully enlightened about— certain assumptions about knowledge and how it is arrived at. Such that the negative, regressive outcome of the dialectic, and its human implications, cannot be overcome and cannot be avoided insofar as these assumptions continue to hold sway. As I have explicated in detail elsewhere (Maker 1994: 67-82, 217-237) in the *Phenomenology*'s thought experiment we come to be enlightened to the fact that consciousness is systematically driven *by the very nature of its conception of objectivity and independently of what we might construe as any inescapably given external factors* to construing objectivity in subjective terms, and ultimately most radically as in terms of utility, as *whatever* is 'for me' both as regards its form —as being in the mode of for me, under my control, *and* its content, as malleable raw material, devoid of inherent purpose and value and open to the imposition of subjective willing (Hegel 1807: 21 - 22, 33). Hegel's post-phenomenological consideration of radical subjectivity indicate that the enlightened, purified subjectivity analyzed by Horkheimer and Adorno leaves nothing but the 'arbitrary will' left as the basis for thought and action (Hegel 1832: 452). Enlightenment just as the search for justified truth drives phenomenological consciousness to insist that being in-itself has the inherent property of 'capable of being for me.' For if objectivity, what is as such, is just being-for self, then it seemingly can be made fully present for me, with no loss, no ensuing discover that it is 'just appearance, 'just' for me, just subjective apprehension, since now what is *is* to be nothing more or less than that which is capable of being rendered for me, just 'being for a subject' without

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residue. One thing that is significant about the Hegelian account of this process is the revelation that the inevitability of radical subjectification is disclosed as a philosophical necessity, given certain assumptions about truth, and not as an inevitable and inherently determining factor of human nature or human history. This is one aspect of how Hegel's critique of enlightenment points a positive way towards escaping from enlightenment's regressive features: by indicating that a change in thinking about truth and objectivity may resolve the paradox of enlightenment by enlightening us concerning the uncritical assumptions which have remained unexamined so far. This brings us to the completion of the *Phenomenology*'s dialectic of enlightenment in absolute knowing and marks a fundamental divergence between Hegel and Horkheimer and Adorno on where a proper critique of enlightenment leads.

When attained finally, in absolute knowing, the identity in difference of knowledge and object needed for certified knowledge is arrived at in the being-for-self of being-for-self. But as we see, the simultaneous identification in differentiation and differentiation in identification of identification in differentiation –for consciousness mode' of relating to identity in difference of knowledge and object *as* its object must also be of the same form to be valid —no longer sustains an identifiable subject or object (Maker 1994: 90). Subjective knowing, as Hegel shows, is, at last, only capable of self-legitimation in its self-transcendence into indeterminacy (Hegel 1807: 49-50, 54). Discussing how science begins in logic from out of the collapse of consciousness, Hegel observes that it commences in the 'pure knowing' which is the result of the *Phenomenology*, and notes that this pure knowing is 'concentrated into' a 'unity' which 'has sublated all reference to an other and to mediation; it is without any distinction and as thus distinctionless, ceases to be knowledge', adding that this 'knowing has vanished in that unity leaving behind no difference from the unity and hence nothing by which the latter could be determined. Hegel 1812: 68-69, 73). The assumptions definitive of subjective enlightenment, the fixed determinate difference between a given subject and a given object must come to be suspended in order for this construal of knowledge to be vindicated. Enlightenment, as a process of critical reflection by the subject, succeeds at the price of suspending its root assumptions. In Hegel's version of the dialectic of enlightenment, enlightenment thus discloses itself as myth, as mere belief. But unlike Horkheimer and Adorno's, Hegel's critique as culminating in the *self*-suspension of certain assumptions about knowledge taken to be necessary for enlightenment, does not involve a lapse into dogmatism arising from the vexing need to further assume the validity of an independent 'meta-critical theory ' in order to effect the critique. Sidestepping the difficulties discussed by Wellmer and Benhabib, it opens the way for the possibility of an alternative conception of objective reason.

Culminating in consciousness's own collapse into the indeterminacy with which the *Logic* begins, the *Phenomenology*'s critical consummation of enlightenment parallels and

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yet radicalizes Horkheimer and Adorno on enlightenment's reversion to myth in that indeterminacy limns the mythic vision of a Dionysian flux where no discernible subject or object remains. More generally, the *Phenomenology* also helps to reveal how domination is built into enlightened, subjective thinking: Sheer rendering of subject and object to what is 'for me' captures the ideal of power and control, as naked assertive willfulness which regards what is as nothing more than raw material for the demonstration of the power of will, an exercise whose socio-economic parallel is captured in Schumpeter's vision of the essence of capitalism as ceaseless creative destruction. Unconstrained late capitalism is the triumph of a notion of the subject and of subjective self-realization which, as the *Phenomenology* already shows, is philosophically incoherent and doomed to practical self-destruction. The *Phenomenology* indicates that the self-sublation of enlightenment that Horkheimer and Adorno regard as the result of seemingly inescapable, human, historical, socio-political and economic forces is in fact neither inevitable nor inescapable but the outcome of persistent commitment to a 'natural assumption' about subjects in their relation to objectivity. At this deeper level, Hegel would agree with them that metaphysics has become reality.

Some concluding points. As noted, Horkheimer and Adorno persistently accuse Hegel of lapsing into bad metaphysics and myth because of his totalizing philosophy of identity; for them, it is another instance of authoritarian, subjectivist reduction to sameness, conceptually and politically, of the irreducible other they seek to respect. As my brief description of absolute knowing intimates, this is an error. As the self-destruction of enlightenment subjectivity in its moment of self-vindication, absolute knowing as the collapse into indeterminacy is, as Hegel clearly indicates at the opening of the logic, not an identity at all (Hegel 1812: 67-78). The collapse to indeterminacy is the enlightening disclosure that enlightenment's last remaining unjustified assumptions about the nature of cognition are arbitrary and cannot be justified. Thus we may (in the system) proceed 'simply to take up, *what is there before us'* and consider it just as it is, since we have been enlightened concerning what has illicitly prevented thought from considering the nature of what is without preconceptions (Hegel 1812: 69). Since the fixed oppositional distinction between subject and object requires regarding the determinacy of subject and object as always already given, the now suspended structure of consciousness may be regarded as *the* structure of presupposing (Maker 1994: 91). Having seen why it cannot ground itself —having shown why *subjective* enlightenment is doomed— moving beyond it in logic opens the way to the possibility of presuppositionless, self-determining, autonomous thinking synonymous with objective reason. Thus, through the consummation of one stage of determinate negation, the collapse of consciousness indicates how subjective enlightenment opens the way to objective enlightenment. From Hegel's perspective, Horkheimer and Adorno would be correct in holding that the only response to the regressions and failures of (subjective) enlightenment is a continuation of

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enlightenment. Unlike Horkheimer and Adorno, Hegel argues that enlightenment, as a conceptual, philosophical process, can come to completion and, by doing so, point the way to the historical task of the practical realisation of its truths about freedom and the just society. Furthermore, as I have argued elsewhere, in the system, as emerging out of indeterminacy, every move forward requires and involves a non-reductive thinking of otherness in and as other, since neither identity nor difference are privileged in the beginning of the system in indeterminacy, stable determinacy is always attained in and through a relation to an other that persists as other (see Maker 1994, 1998, 2007, 2009). If anything, Hegel's systematic philosophy is a philosophy of difference and otherness, rather than of identity and sameness. Because of this, as it moves into the social and political arena, it conceptualises subjective freedom and indeed subjectivity itself as irreducibly relational, and intersubjective (hence Hegel's persistent critiques of atomistic subjectivity and liberty). In this way, Hegel brings the philosophical consideration of the dialectic of enlightenment to a final and positive conclusion, he identifies determinate negation as the key to enlightenment, but holds that, properly construed, enlightenment does not lead to totalising closure.

Unlike Hegel, Horkheimer and Adorno reject the possibility of the completion of determinate negation, even as a conceptual process, and remain suspicious of any objective reason which would, like Hegel's, claim finality and completeness for the articulation of its concepts. Agreeing with most other critics of Hegel, they hold that the systematic finality and completeness needed for conceptual self-grounding are inseparable from a totalizing closure which collapses everything into the concept and is destructive of the openness need for autonomy and for the respect of all forms of diversity and difference. I argued that this is a misreading of Hegel's systematic philosophy. The closure of his system, as I have argued in detail elsewhere, necessitates the recognition of a reality that lies outside of and is irreducible to the conceptual. For Hegel, philosophical, conceptual completeness is inseparable from and indeed leads to acknowledgment of that which is non-conceptual, since only through that move can the domain of the conceptual demonstrate its completeness. It also affords a way to proceed with making the non-conceptual intelligible in a non-reductive manner (Maker 1998: 1-22; 2009: 15-34). This is directly contrary to Horkheimer and Adorno, whose espousal of a process of determinate negation without end or closure, negative dialectics, is rooted in their conviction that all conceptual thought is unavoidably distortive and reductive, always in need of being de-centered or problematised, to use current the terminology of the postmodernist proponents of 'the jargon of authenticity' Adorno famously criticised (see Adorno 1964). I have suggested that Hegel has shown through the *Phenomenology* that it is fact subjective thinking, which begins and remains committed to the assumption of a fixed and irreducible distinction between subject and object, which cannot avoid being distortive and reductive. In finally affirming the inability of the subject to conceptualize

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what is without reductive distortion they agree with Hegel's phenomenological critique and yet affirm subjectivity as *absolute in its finitude* and part company with Hegel, by denying that we have any alternative to accepting our inability to know. It is this which leads them to advocate negative dialectics, where the possibility of final enlightenment is precluded *a priori*: the best we can do is to continually subject what we have conceived as the truth to the myth acknowledging process of critical negation, consigning it to the status of belief in our acknowledgment that no truth claim be thoroughly justified. Negative dialectics is a recognition that there is no escaping, no determinate negation of the negative dialectical oscillation between myth and enlightenment: we cannot get beyond belief and must thus again and again stand back from what we have (subjectively) claim to be true and critically examine it, even while knowing in advance that this process is Sisyphian and can produce no positive outcome not in need of further critique. So for them subjective enlightenment, even seen as inherently problematic, must continue. Yet, since we are never in a position to finally escape from myth, it is difficult to see how nihilism can be avoided. If negative dialectics cannot ground itself, its own critical commitment requires problematising its claims, in the manner of Hume's recognition of being unable to avoid the self-suspension of his philosophy (see Hume 1739: 263-264).

In his *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno comes to a position not unlike that of Heidegger's own concerning philosophy's need to acknowledge that which is always beyond human grasp:

> Disenchantment of the concept is the antidote of philosophy. It keeps it from growing rampant and becoming an absolute to itself …
> A philosophy that lets us know this, that extinguishes the autarky of the concept, strips the blindfold from our eyes. That the concept is a concept even when dealing with things in being does not change the fact that on its part it is entwined with non-conceptual whole…
> Insight into the constitutive character of the non-conceptual in the concept would end the compulsive identification which the concept brings unless halted by such reflection…
> To change this direction of conceptuality, to give it a turn toward non-identity, is the hinge of negative dialectics (Adorno: 1966: 12-13).

And in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* we read that:

> [D]eterminate negation does not simply reject imperfect representations of the absolute, idols, by confronting them with the idea they are unable to match. Rather, dialectic discloses each image as script. It teaches us to read from its features the admission of falseness which cancels its power and

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hands it over to truth (Horkheimer, Adorno 1947: 18).

A theoretical process of continual criticism of criticism may then unfold without foreseeable end, indeed negative dialectics seems to insist on this. But if so, in the domain of real politics and action, this leaves us, ironically, with a Heideggerian decisionism.

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