

Chapter 1

REASON AND THE PROBLEM OF MODERNITY

Perhaps a new form of systematic philosophy will be found which has nothing whatever to do with epistemology but which nevertheless makes normal philosophical inquiry possible.

—Richard Rorty

The sleep of reason produces monsters.

—Goya

Hegel is back.

—Ian Hacking

At least among those whose philosophical education includes a study of its history, it has long been a commonplace that, in line with his immediate predecessors, Hegel sought to articulate a distinctively modern conception of philosophical rationality or reason in order to address what he regarded as distinctively modern theoretical and practical problems.¹ The problems underlying Hegel's philosophical project can be described as distinctively modern because they concerned two things: on the one hand, theoretical or epistemological issues arising uniquely out of the emergence of modern scientific thought in its break from the prevailing intellectual tradition and, on the other hand, practical issues arising uniquely out of the French Revolution in its break from prevailing social and political traditions.² As I shall suggest in more detail, these two revolutionary events were perceived by their philosophical supporters as standing in need of justification or legitimation. In addition, these philosophical supporters felt that, because of the

nature of the claims being made in and by these revolutions, this legitimation could only be provided by philosophy.

According to this traditional view, Hegel is at one with his predecessors from Descartes through Kant, Fichte, and Schelling in seeking to provide a standpoint of reason which could articulate, justify, and ground the new conception of our place in the cosmos which follows from an endorsement of modern principles of scientific thought and modern principles of action.³ Thus, in broadest terms, the core issue or problem of modernity, when looked at philosophically, is that of justification or legitimation, and modern philosophy's major historical theme is the search for an adequate rational-foundational standpoint from which the tasks of legitimation could be accomplished.⁴

If at least some features of the broader context of modern philosophy and of Hegel's thought which I have noted have long since been a philosophical commonplace, it is fast becoming a commonplace of more recent times that both the pre- and postHegelian traditions of modern foundational philosophy have consistently failed in their efforts to provide the sort of rational legitimation for the norms of cognition and conduct which both supporters and critics of modernity perceive as in need of legitimation. Put simply, and in its most contemporary version, the central core of attacks on the modern philosophical-foundational project seems to arise from the conviction that the philosophical standpoint of reason from out of and upon which modern conceptions of knowledge and conduct could be justified—as legitimate because paradigmatically rational—is unattainable.⁵ It is argued that reason is unable to attain self-transparency concerning its own conditions, and that the contexts of discourse in which problems of knowledge and conduct are to be addressed are inherently and inescapably extra-rational. Claiming that we are embedded in a web of givenness which resists rational penetration in some final sense, critics hold that criteria of knowledge and conduct must always lack an adequately rational foundation.⁶

In fact, the basic program of the philosophical critique of the claim that modern scientific thought and modern society are distinctively rational is by no means a recent invention. To one degree and in one form or another, the three central tenets of this critical view have been with us for quite a long time. To perceive that the epistemic and practical ideals of modernity have continued to stand in need of a philosophical accounting since their inception, to conclude that the various attempts to provide one have failed, and to make the subsequent critical claim of having unmasked these ideals as false idols—these have long since ceased to be original assertions. One might hold that the philosophical critique of

modernity counts as a distinct tradition in its own right. From such a perspective the larger tradition of modern thought can be witnessed as a struggle and a dialectical interplay between those who contend that modern cognitive and social practices have a distinctively rational core, and those who contend that they do not. In this way one may locate the beginning of the antimodernist tradition within modernity with Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche—the holy trinity of the idea that modern bourgeois society is hollow, corrupt, and corrupting, and fraught with a high degree of systematic self-deception which is mirrored in the vain efforts of philosophers to provide this society with rational justification. Insofar as one can place the origins of philosophical critiques of modernity with these thinkers and these notions, then it is easy to see that variations on these antimodernist themes have been a significant feature in philosophy since their time.

Thus one might wonder which is the dominant trend in modern philosophy as a whole, and whether modern philosophy does not, in an important sense, come to an end with Hegel and his perceived failures. For at least when viewed from an anti- or postmodernist position, postHegelian efforts to provide rational, legitimating foundations for the central tenets of modern thought and society—the efforts undertaken by the schools and traditions arising out of phenomenology and logical positivism—begin to appear now as doomed exceptions to a growing consensus of naysayers: in the burgeoning camp of critics of the modern rational-foundational project we certainly find the later Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Gadamer, Foucault, Derrida, Habermas, Feyerabend, MacIntyre, Davidson, Rorty—and if Rorty is correct, Quine, Sellars, Putnam and Kuhn.⁷ Agreement on this seems to be cutting across traditional philosophical boundaries.

One curious thing about this critical tradition is its relation to Hegel. Leaving aside the more recent critics of modernity who ignore Hegel altogether, such as Wittgenstein, or dismiss him outright, such as Heidegger, the views on Hegel of several others—certainly Foucault, Derrida, Gadamer, Habermas, MacIntyre, and Rorty—are complex and often ambivalent.⁸ We find, for example, an explicit appreciation and endorsement of aspects of Hegel's phenomenological critique of foundational subject-based epistemology and transcendental philosophy in Rorty, Gadamer, and Habermas.⁹ In MacIntyre, and to varying degrees in Habermas, Rorty, and Feyerabend, we find a reiteration of aspects of Hegel's holism: assertions about the contextual embeddedness of knowledge and morality and the irreducibly intersubjective character of cognition and individuality. Broadly, and also in agreement with Hegel, we can

find the increasing endorsement of an historicist perspective. For certainly in Gadamer, MacIntyre, and Rorty, we find agreement with its first serious practitioner, Hegel, about the centrality of the history of philosophy for philosophical understanding. And more generally there is increasing agreement with Hegel—most recently for example in postKuhnian philosophy of science—that ideas and theories are intertwined with and incapable of being adequately understood apart from their historical, social, political, and cultural contexts.¹⁰

On the negative side, though, the relation between Hegel and contemporary critics of modernity is easier to delineate. They all reject in Hegel what they perceive as the character of the philosophical-rational position or standpoint—the system—from which he developed his particular views on knowledge, man, and society. Like others whose rejection of Hegel is complete and unequivocal, they will have nothing to do with Hegel's purported idealistic and metaphysical absolutism, which they identify with his claim to have brought philosophy to the standpoint of an autonomous rational science. What they occasionally wish to do is mine, from the wreckage of his system, those features of it in accordance with their own outlooks.¹¹

Given this state of affairs, a question arises which at first seems to be of interest only to students of the history of philosophy, but which has, I believe, extrahistorical and genuinely philosophical significance. How did a self-acknowledged defender of modernity and a participant in the tradition which seeks to find a legitimation for it, a philosopher who espouses the autonomy and self-sufficiency of reason, anticipate and articulate so many of those critical points noted above? This question may take on added weight when one appreciates that, according to critics of the modern foundational tradition, these 'postmodernist' points—antifoundationalism, holism, and historicism—follow from a rejection of the ideal of autonomous reason and are incompatible with it as well as with modernity's claim to a distinctive legitimacy and rationality.¹² To put my question in a more challenging way, it is possible to disentangle a *whole* Hegel from his perceived commitment to absolute idealism? Can we somehow make sense of a Hegel whose agreement with the postmoderns on antifoundationalism, holism, and historicism can be seen not as an aberration, but rather as a consequence of his conception of philosophical rationality? Are antifoundationalism, holism, and historicism, properly understood, compatible with a claim to autonomous reason and a philosophical

system? And if this can be worked out, will it suggest—as paradoxical as this may sound—that a philosophical legitimation of modernity, rather than being rendered impossible by antifoundationalism, holism, and historicism, is inseparable from them? Is it possible that Hegel saw these things and worked out these connections?

I believe that the answer to all these questions is yes. In an attempt to sketch the reasons for my belief I shall argue three things.

(1) Hegel's position on—his understanding and defense of—modernity is unique. To an extent not usually recognized, Hegel is an anomalous phenomenon when looked at from either the modernist or the antimodernist perspective.

(2) The seeming discord noted previously between many of Hegel's conclusions and his systematic position—with its commitment to a notion of autonomous reason—may be resolved insofar as we understood the manner in which Hegel undertook the project of a rational legitimation of modernity in and through a conception of autonomous reason. This is the question of whether or not, and if so how, we can reconcile the points where Hegel is in agreement with critics of modernity with his commitment to the project of legitimating modernity and with his belief in the autonomy of reason.

In this regard, my aim is to put forth a revisionist scheme. I want to suggest that we need to reassess Hegel's conception of philosophy as a system and that, while Hegel is deeply concerned with the foundationalist project of his predecessors, he nevertheless breaks with central features of it and is *not* a foundationalist in the sense attacked by, amongst others, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, and most recently Richard Rorty, in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

(3) If I am correct about these points, then Hegel needs to be introduced into contemporary debates about knowledge and practice along with Rorty's Dewey and MacIntyre's Aristotle.

So the issues I plan to address are three-fold: (1) What are the problems of modernity from Hegel's perspective and how does he attempt to deal with them? (2) How might Hegel's project as a defense of modernity be perceived as in continuity with, while yet as distinctly different from, that of his predecessors in the foundational tradition? (3) Which features of Hegel's treatment of the problems of modernity are worthy of contemporary consideration and how might Hegel be seen as having provided a legitimation of modernity?

I. The Problems of Modernity

The tasks of Hegel's project as a philosophy of modernity arise from two related sources: first, from a general belief, shared to certain extents by some of his predecessors, that the decisive breaks from past authority heralded by the scientific and French revolutions stand in need of legitimation, and that this legitimation must consist in the discovery, articulation, and clarification of general principles for knowledge and practice in consonance with at least some of the specific core claims of these revolutions. As I shall indicate, for Hegel this need for legitimation will appear not only as a need to reject what the prerevolutionary traditions had regarded as specifically authoritative in matters of cognition and conduct; more generally and radically, the legitimation of modern notions of cognition and conduct will require for Hegel a demonstrative and thoroughgoing rejection of the idea that the past or tradition in their givenness—indeed, that *whatever* we might find given—must and ought to be taken forthwith as authoritative for knowledge and conduct.¹³

Second, Hegel's own project is more specifically shaped by his perception of the inadequacies of his predecessors in successfully legitimating the breaks from past authority announced by the scientific and French revolutions. In general terms, for Hegel the core of this inadequacy stems from what he sees as these modernists' attempts to substitute, for the old, privileged and authoritative givens of the then prevailing intellectual and socio-political traditions, what are new, allegedly *rational* privileged givens as the authoritative modern principles for cognition and conduct. To anticipate, Hegel's disagreement with this approach to the issue of legitimation stems from the fact that he sees the task of philosophical legitimation as resting on a thoroughgoing demonstration of the autonomy of reason from any and all givens, privileged or otherwise.

But first of all, how is it that these revolutions appear as decisive breaks from the past and as in need of a legitimation which will involve a search for new principles of cognition and conduct? How are the modern approaches to knowledge and action distinctive? And why is modernity as the outcome of these two revolutions in need of philosophical legitimation?

As regards the scientific revolution, it constitutes a radical or revolutionary break from past authority because the new truths concerning nature which it asserted were out of consonance both with the teleological tradition of Aristotelian science and with

common sense.¹⁴ Thus, from the point of view of the philosophical supporters of the new science, the legitimacy of its claims seemingly had to rest on the further philosophical or metascientific claim that this approach embodied not simply a new method for arriving at the truth about nature, but rather *the* true and proper method of cognition as such.¹⁵ Hence one major concern of the modern philosophical project becomes defined as an investigation into the foundations of knowledge, an investigation to be conducted in and by the mind, reason, consciousness, understanding—in and by the reflecting subject. For, whether the new method of science was perceived by its inventors and legitimators as rationalist or empiricist in character (whether ideas or sense impressions are its basic foundations), it seemed nonetheless that only an exercise of reason could establish and legitimate this method and its truth claims against the recognized authorities of Aristotle and common sense.¹⁶ Given the deviation of some of the central truth claims of the new science from these traditional authorities, what had to be established in general was that final authority in matters of cognition of nature resides within the mind of the cognizing subject. So, to succeed in this legitimation (a legitimation which would seek to ground the right to freedom of thought in science and the autonomy of science from external authorities), philosophy would have to demonstrate that *all* minds share a common set of cognitive principles sufficient for providing knowledge of the truth. Thus, we have the modern project of foundational epistemology. It sought to show that the ultimate foundations for determining truth lay, not in certain privileged texts or institutions, as the tradition would have it, but rather within the thinking-rational subject, in its possessing access to certain privileged, knowledge-foundational and criteriological givens, be they sense impressions, innate ideas, or *a priori* forms of judgment.¹⁷

Paralleling the rejection of the authority of tradition in matters of cognition announced by the scientific revolution, the French Revolution was witnessed as heralding a rejection of the authority of tradition in matters of action and conduct, both individual and social, and as thus also necessitating the attempt to establish reason, or the autonomous rational subject, as the final authority for practical judgment. For what was perceived by its philosophical supporters as this revolution's combined assertion of an in principle human equality and a universally shared right to individual autonomy or liberty flew in the face both of common sense and of long-standing social and political tradition. In the former case, these modernist assertions conflicted with the evidence that human beings

are by nature unequal, suited for different tasks and responsibilities. In the latter case they conflicted with traditional notions of naturally or divinely ordained hierarchies of rights and privileges, hierarchies seemingly appropriate to the given evidence of human inequality.¹⁸

Thus again, since neither given tradition nor the given evidence of common sense supported the unprecedented revolutionary claims of equality and universal autonomy now being asserted here in the practical domain, it seemed that their only proper articulation and justification could come from reason. Again, and again because of the unprecedented and radical character of the claims in question, philosophy was called upon to find a new authority—now regarding conduct—located within the individual subject. Paralleling its task in regard to science, the philosophical exercise of reason would have to demonstrate the legitimacy of the ideas of equality and freedom by discovering and articulating those universal principles or grounds for judgement on the basis of which all individual wills could constitute a harmonious social and political world, when once freed from the constraints of tradition and despite the seeming diversity of their particular inclinations. And thus, we have the modern philosophical-foundational projects in the areas of morality, politics, and economics, with philosophers seeking to show that the ultimate foundations for right conduct lie within each and every autonomous subject, in its possessing access to certain commonly shared and privileged behavior-legislating givens, be they desires, natural sentiments, or innate rules.¹⁹

In broad terms, then, this is how Hegel understood the efforts of his predecessors. He saw rationalists, empiricists, and transcendental idealists all engaged in the task of seeking to discover some given, universally shared bases for knowledge and action within the individual, either as a rational or a natural sensing being. But what prompted him to pursue the process of articulation and legitimation further, and in a decisively different manner than his predecessors? What pushed Hegel on was the conviction—shared by him with contemporary critics of modernity—that the foundational project as undertaken by empiricists, rationalists, and transcendental philosophers was bankrupt and could succeed neither in the specific task of illuminating concrete principles for knowledge and action nor in the general task of legitimating the ideal of individual autonomy itself.²⁰

How so? First of all, and as was already clear to Kant, the empiricist foundational project had failed, and necessarily so. For what had originated as a search for universal principles for knowl-

edge and conduct within the domain of the autonomous subject as a natural, sensing being had culminated in Hume's thinking through the empiricist position to its ultimate consequences.²¹ These consequences were devastating from a foundationalist and modernist perspective, and not merely because Hume's specific conclusions about knowledge and conduct were antithetical to the modernist outlook. In addition, Hume's skeptical position had been arrived at through the very practice of critical reflection which was seemingly the only possible path to a secure legitimation of the modernist perspective. Through rational-critical reflection Hume had demonstrated that, on strict empiricist principles, matters of knowledge and conduct—of science and morality—are and can only be fundamentally and irreducibly subjective matters of habit and convention, without any ultimate, strictly rational foundations. Consequently he advocated skepticism in knowledge and the hewing to tradition in matters of conduct.²² Thus, if new foundational principles for distinctively new notions of cognition and conduct were to be established, it became all the more clear in light of Hume that they had to be found, if they were to be found at all, in humans as rational, in reason. In opposition to Hume, it had to be shown that reason contains as given universal principles of judgement on the basis of which humans as rational are capable of constructing, from the sensibly given, a common intelligible world of knowledge and experience and a common and harmonious social world. But, more significantly given Hume's negative achievement *vis-à-vis* rationalist metaphysics, this project as a reply to Hume presupposed showing that reason in fact possesses the power and authority to make such discoveries and claims.

That is, it had to be shown before all else that what reason might claim to find within itself as the privileged and given principles for knowledge and conduct are not in fact arbitrary posits in the style of the rationalist metaphysics which Hume had decisively criticized. Thus Kant, having been awoken from his dogmatic slumber by Hume, called for a critique of reason itself as an unavoidable preliminary task for the future of modern philosophy.

For Hegel, then, it is on this issue—the demonstration of reason's autonomy and the consequent demonstration that reason can rightfully lay claim to possessing an authority which can challenge tradition—that the transcendental projects of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling fail. And it is around this issue—the issue of *how* reason might establish its autonomy, and of what follows from such a demonstration—that we can see Hegel parting company with the whole foundationalist endeavor.

Hegel saw that the confrontation between Kant's, Fichte's, and Schelling's foundational-transcendental rationalism and Hume's skeptical empiricism could only be a standoff, and that the only possible way beyond it to establish the autonomy of reason and the legitimacy of its claims to authority would be by rejecting the whole conception of mind or reason which underlies *both* the skeptical and the transcendental-foundationalist positions.²³ In what sense does Hegel see the transcendental-foundational project as a failure and as issuing in a standoff between foundationalism and antifoundationalism, between modernism and antimodernism? How does he attempt to go beyond this *aporia*? This brings me to the second of my three main points and more specifically to my revisionist claim that Hegel rejects foundationalism as a basis for legitimating modernity.

II. The Hegelian Difference

In brief, the failure of Kant and the transcendental endeavor lies in the fact that this elaborate and complex approach cannot finally meet the objections of Humean skepticism, which is ultimately a challenge not merely to certain specific claims of reason but also and more fundamentally a challenge to the very conception of reason as adequate to making *any* legitimate and authoritative claims about matters of fact. From a Humean perspective the Kantian transcendental gambit could show that, *given* Newtonian science and Lutheran morality, we can reason back in a transcendental fashion to the ultimate principles of judgement which are the necessary conditions for the possibility of these modes of cognition and conduct. But that just these purportedly given modes of thinking and acting are the universally necessary and legitimate modes of cognition and conduct *überhaupt*, that they have not been arbitrarily selected or posited, is beyond the power of the transcendental method to establish.²⁴ In the face of Hume's skepticism, which challenges reason's pretension to critical authority, the transcendental-foundational approach can only appear as a mode of argumentation which finally establishes nothing with the certainty which it claims. For just what is at stake here is the *exclusive* legitimacy and universality of those modes of cognition and conduct taken in transcendental thought as the original privileged givens whose foundations are articulated and allegedly grounded in the critical project. Thus, the transcendental gambit of assuming their legitimacy—taking them not as some, but as the givens—and then

finding principles in reason which account for them gets one nowhere,²⁵ at least insofar as one has pursued the more radical self-critique of reason along Hume's lines.

So, Hume's challenge could be seen as standing, a challenge echoed in contemporary critiques of modernity and foundationalism such as Heidegger's. Hume's final challenge was to contend that, because reason is always and inescapably conditioned by what are (presumptively) externally given factors, any determinations it might make by way of issuing a challenge to the authority of extra-rational givens in the name of internally given rules of reason are and must be arbitrary. As such, these claims of reason ought to be abandoned in the face of the more primal givens of experience as conditioned by tradition and convention, the extra-rational background on the basis and from out of which all reasoning emerges. This claim for the recognition of the primacy of the other-than-rational might be said to be paralleled in Heidegger's demand that we attune ourselves to the primordial call of Being which is ineluctably resistant to any rational penetration which would challenge its authority over us.²⁶

How might this state of affairs be viewed along Hegelian lines as a standoff, albeit one with which those skeptical of reason's power could be more comfortable? From Hegel's perspective, the notion that a philosophical impasse has been reached can emerge when one begins to consider, from a broader outlook, what can be seen as the *common* assumptions of the anti- and pro-modernists, the antifoundationalists and the foundationalists.²⁷

What are these common assumptions? For one thing, it is not only that the transcendental philosophers and Hume both reach their conclusions through critical reflection on the givens of experience. Both Hume and Kant begin their critical reflection with assumptions about the given nature of human experience, seeking to discover through critical reflection in what respects, and how much of, given experience is philosophically legitimate. At a higher level of generality, they also share, in one respect, a common overview of the nature of reason itself. For both agree, despite their differing views on the specifics, that reason is and always must be conditioned by certain determining factors, certain inescapable givens.²⁸ For Hume these are factors external to reason: in matters of cognition they are the sensible givens which legislate to reason; in matters of conduct they are the passions to which reason is and must be a slave. For Kant and the transcendentalists the factors that condition, limit, and determine reason are its internally and inately given *a priori* rules and principles, which must legislate to

the sensibly given manifold in matters of cognition, and which ought to legislate to the passions in matters of conduct.²⁹ And as Kant concludes the meta-critical lesson of the critical philosophy, although these principles are found in reason they are nonetheless *givens* to which reason must submit itself in any coherent and legitimate exercise of its powers. They are fixed givens beyond which reason must not extend itself no matter how much it may be driven by its very nature to do so.³⁰

And thus to Hegel, the point of contention in his times between foundationalists and antifoundationalists—paralleled perhaps in our own—appears as a standoff. It appears as an *aporia* because both positions are based on conflicting and seemingly irresolvable claims concerning what a property critical reflection on experience indicates as the necessary determining and conditioning factors for knowledge and conduct. Both Hegel's pro- and antimodernist predecessors agreed that the rational subject is conditioned and limited in matters of knowledge and action by certain givens. Yet they disagreed on the source, nature, extent, and consequences of this conditioning, and on its limitations. (Moreover, they particularly disagreed on its practical entailments.) Beyond the points of commonality, they disagreed on these particulars because, while they held similar views on the given character of experience, they parted company in their critical accounts of just what is to be found in the deeper analysis of human subjectivity which finally makes this experience possible and which thus establishes the character and range of its legitimacy. Hence, finally, from Hegel's view, each side was incapable of demonstrating to its opponent that what was being presented as the final and ultimately determining and conditioning factors were in fact finally authoritative and determining. On the issue of what provides individuals with legitimate principles and guidelines for knowledge and action, one side holds that it is what is given to the senses by reason, the other that it is what is given to reason by the senses which constitutes these principles.³¹

So we can see Hegel coming to ask if there is any way to get beyond this impasse. (To which the Habermas-Gadamer debate bears at least a family resemblance.)³² Do the outcomes of the pro- and antimodernist attempts to show specifically what it is that conditions reason in fact show that reason is and must always be conditioned by certain givens? That is, is the only final meta-perspective here something like this: that these conflicting conclusions on just what the determining factors are point to a *general* impotence on the part of reason as regards its ability to ultimately

discover just what always conditions and determines it? Must we reconcile ourselves, in the manner of Nietzsche, to the idea that reason must always arbitrarily posit some determinative foundations, foundations which are then remorselessly unmasked as illusory, and so on, *ad infinitum*? Is the only position beyond foundationalism and skepticism one where the life of the mind—and life by the mind—is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, etc.? Must we resign ourselves to the genial nihilism which regards human existence as pointless positing?³³

Or—and I take this to be Hegel's view—do the conflicting conclusions perhaps indicate instead that it is a mistake to conclude that reason *must* be conditioned by any *given* factors? Might it be that this general negative conclusion (disagreements about the particulars of what conditions reason aside) follows from the fact that these efforts at critical self-examination always began with the conditioned character of reason as an assumption (so that all that needed to be done was to determine its specifics)? Does the fact of the conflicting conclusions arrived at by foundationalists and skeptics perhaps point to or suggest the possibility that the conflict over conclusions, rather than providing the necessary impotence of reason in the face of the given, stems instead from the fact that, in both of these cases, the process of critical reflection began with certain arbitrarily selected givens as the starting points? Might this metacritical discovery about the ruling assumption of prior efforts point to the possibility of a further self-examination of reason? Might not such a further self-consideration have a different outcome just because and insofar as it does not begin, as its predecessors did, with the assumption that reason is inescapably conditioned by certain givens (either external or internal)? Put differently, might a self-consideration of reason arrive at different conclusions if it did not begin with the assumption that the given features of human subjectivity defined, governed, and limited the nature and prospects of reason? And might not this outcome differ radically from both foundationalism and antifoundationalism, at least as regards reason's capacity for autonomy?³⁴

The conventional wisdom, a commonplace going back to Kant and echoed most recently in Gadamer, is that it displays the self-deceptive arrogance of reason to assert its autonomy from the limiting conditions of human finitude and subjectivity. Could not one rather suggest that the deeper arrogance lies in unreflectively presupposing that the conditions of our merely human subjectivity—as they happen to be interpreted at some particular time—delimit the capacities of our (merely human) reason?

How might such an alternative reaction to the standoff emerge? For one thing, it is possible that these conflicting outcomes and the apparent failure of the rational-foundational project in general indicate that from the start it is a mistake to attempt to establish the right of reason to legislate in knowledge and conduct by seeking *givens* in reason; conditions or principles which allegedly ground "given" experience and which need only to be uncovered and made perspicuous. Perhaps the key to demonstrating the authority of reason over what is given to it lies not, *à la* the critical philosophy, in searching within reason to discover given determinate principles in which modern claims about rational autonomy in thought and action are grounded, but rather in first showing that *no* givens, either internal or to external to reason need necessarily condition or determine it in its operations.

Furthermore, could not one argue that an implicit indication of reason's power to transcend what is given might be found in the very efforts of critical reflection to establish the given, reason-determining conditions? These projects, both foundational and antifoundational, aim to specify what they take to be the conditioning and limiting features of reason's operation. But, as Jacobi had already suggested, if an exercise in philosophical-critical reflection can come to specify and articulate these conditions, does not this very exercise and employment of reason indicate that these allegedly reason-determining and limiting conditions can, in some sense, be gone beyond—that the exercise of reason which establishes them is not and cannot itself be *thoroughly* subject to them?³⁵

But how might such a demonstration of the potential autonomy of reason be effected? How might it be shown that reason need not necessarily be conditioned in its operations by any givens? Perhaps—and I take this to be the argument of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*—by working to show systematically and immanently that any process of critical reflection which attempts to establish that reason *is* governed or determined by certain givens (internal or external) is finally aporetic. Displaying the *aporia* would involve revealing that the very standpoint of critical reflection *from which* the conditioned character of reason could be articulated always *eo ipso* shows itself as a standpoint which transcends the allegedly unconditional reason-determining conditions it aims to establish. And this feature of reason's persistent self-transcendence of the purportedly ultimate transcendental conditions which it posits would be shown to emerge just because of reason's alleged capacity to demonstrate the exclusive legitimacy and rulership of these conditions. To establish ultimate limiting conditions, reason must tran-

scend them; once it has transcended them it can no longer claim that they are ultimate. In this way, one might attempt to show immanently that both foundationalism and antifoundationalism are systematically self-defeating.

To what would such a demonstration lead? This question is vital in terms of seeing how different Hegel's rejection of foundationalism is from contemporary antifoundationalism. It could finally come to indicate not only that no *given* conditions can finally be established once and for all as the unconditional, absolute, fundamental principles of reason—a negative point on which Hegel is in agreement with various contemporary antifoundationalists. In addition—and here is one central point of difference—by proceeding systematically in a consideration of attempts to establish such reason-determining conditions, this consideration might finally come to unmask as arbitrary and unfounded that fundamental meta-assumption about reason's own nature in terms of which its operations must always be viewed as conditioned by certain givens. This immanent critique of foundationalism and antifoundationalism might reveal the illegitimacy of what is, for Hegel, the primal further common assumption at work both in foundationalism and antifoundationalism, an assumption he sees as the ultimate and heretofore hidden, unjustified, given operative in all attempts to demonstrate that reason is necessarily and inescapably conditioned by some given or givens.

For Hegel, the hidden assumption underlying the view of reason as necessarily heteronomous is the notion that reason's operations must always and can only be construed according to the model of conscious awareness. This assumption holds that reason must be construed according to that mode of thinking in terms of which whatever is thought *is* always in some way given and fixed in its determinate character in virtue of being there—given—as an object (*Gegenstand*) for a thinking awareness. As a systematic consideration of the legitimacy of this “natural assumption . . . in philosophy,” the *Phenomenology* works to show that when the process of critical reflection by philosophical consciousness comes finally to the point of defining and grounding its own presupposed structure, the structure of consciousness, as necessarily determinative for thought, this ultimate act of self-legitimation is and must be one in which the fixed and minimal distinction definitive of consciousness—the distinction between awareness and its object—is eliminated or collapses.³⁶ For only when this distinction is suspended can consciousness show that what it takes the object to be—its representation of the given—is the correct representation of the

given as given. Only at the moment of the elimination of the distinction between thought and its object can the "referential skyhook" requisite to complete the project of foundational epistemology be attained.³⁷

This outcome—Chapter VIII of the *Phenomenology*—would show thereby that the view which holds that *all* thought is and *must* necessarily be conditioned by some given cannot critically ground—legitimate *überhaupt*—that very understanding of the nature of thought or reason (the consciousness model) which could finally establish in a philosophically adequate fashion just this allegedly necessary fact. Phrased in a different way, this would constitute subjectivity's immanent, deconstructive discovery that its own constitutive structure—as a structure which seeks to posit foundations—is itself an arbitrary posit.

This metacritical discovery—this critique of critical philosophy, of the unchallengeable primacy of subjectivity, and of the correspondence model of truth—would then reveal that to engage in reasoning with the assumption that reason's operations are and must be conditioned by some given is, at least at this juncture, an arbitrary assumption. And coming to an awareness of the arbitrary character of this fundamental assumption common to foundationalists and antifoundationalists alike would thus open the way to or point to the possibility of, an exercise of reason which possesses at least the potential for genuine autonomy.³⁸ For insofar as we come to see the arbitrary character of assuming in philosophy that whatever reason conceives must be founded in some given determinacy—something always taken for granted in that process of critical reflection which presumably took nothing for granted—then perhaps a self-consideration of reason can take place which *is* autonomous. This self-consideration of reason may be autonomous in the sense that neither any given determinacy, nor the very structure according to which determinacy is construed as always to some extent given, is illicitly appealed to in reason's constitution of its own domain.

My claim at this juncture is only that the *Phenomenology*, through its immanently critical deconstruction of the standpoint which assumes the impossibility of such autonomy, reveals the possibility for such an autonomous self-constitution of reason. The existence of such a possibility does not, of course, amount to anything like a demonstration that Hegel, or anyone else, has succeeded in creating a system of reason whose concepts are exclusively generated in an autonomous fashion. Nor have I indicated how reason might go about engaging in a procedure of autonomous

self-constitution which, even in being autonomous, is not at the same time arbitrary in the determinations it constitutes. These are matters which cannot be gone into here.³⁹ But, assuming for the sake of argument that Hegel has at least offered a system which can make a plausible, *prima facie* claim to being a system whose determinacies are those of autonomous reason, I will now turn to my third question. What features of Hegel's treatment of the problem of modernity are of contemporary relevance? I will address this question in two parts. Assuming Hegel's systematic philosophy, or parts of it, is a system of autonomous reason. (1) where does this place him in the contemporary spectrum, and (2) in what sense has he presented a legitimation of modernity?

III. Legitimizing Modernity

(1) For one thing, and as I have suggested in my remarks about Hegel's assessment of the inadequacies of his predecessors, his position puts him in agreement with those contemporary philosophers such as Rorty who have argued against the foundational epistemological project with its commitment to the primacy of reflective consciousness and the representational or correspondence model of truth. Unlike such contemporary critics of foundationalism however, and as I have also suggested, Hegel's rejection of the adequacy of consciousness as a paradigm in philosophy does not lead him to skeptical, relativistic, nihilistic, pragmatic, religious, or quasi-mystical conclusions which devalue reason and explicitly or implicitly suggest that we must subordinate reason to some other authority. Hegel's systematic philosophy acknowledges no such ultimate authority over reason, be this authority the passions or nature, tradition or convention, the material and economic conditions for the reproduction of the species, the hermeneutic consciousness, the (allegedly) necessary conditions for the possibility of linguistic communication, the will as will to power, God, or the Being of beings. Hegel's systematic philosophy rejects all such foundations, and his critique of foundationalism opens the way for the creation of an alternative conception and system of reason, one whose claim to authority rests solely on its character as having articulated concepts and principles which can be seen to be the exclusive determinations of autonomous reason.

The following should be stressed at this point, for it is a key feature of this revisionist account of Hegel. Any authority such a system of autonomous reason might command does not rest on any

claim to be an account of reality as we find it or as it is given. Hegel's systematic philosophy is not; in fact, it is anything *but* a metaphysics, either idealist, materialist, realist, descriptive, or critical. It is none of these simply because the very beginning of the system—following upon the *Phenomenology's* critique—lies in its severing, in and for this system, of all connections with that model of reason (the consciousness or subjectivistic model) which underlies all possible metaphysics. This system rejects at its start that model for philosophical thought which must be presupposed in order to postulate either a contrast (as in realist metaphysics) or an identity (as in idealist or materialist metaphysics) of thought and object or mind and nature.⁴⁰

Hence, and in sharp contrast with Marx, the dialectical generation of categories or concepts in Hegel's system, and the necessity which pertains to this process and to conceptual relations is exclusively intra-systemic. (And hence, for Hegel, even the system of pure reason is limited, although its limitations are strictly self-constituted.) What this means is that dialectical reasoning as a philosophical science and dialectical necessity as a feature of it are exclusively matters of the constitution and relation of thought determinations. Thus the system contains neither an explicit nor an implicit claim as to whether 'reality as we find it'—reality construed according to the model of consciousness—either is or is not dialectical *in re*.⁴¹ In addition, this system is not a transcendental system of categories, principles, or rules in terms of which a thinking subject allegedly must cognize reality construed as what is in some manner given to consciousness.⁴² For—and once again as in the case of metaphysics—such a transcendental philosophy presupposes the model of consciousness which takes as paradigmatically and irreducibly given the distinction between subject and object, the exact presupposition which this system rejects as primal and as exclusively and irreducibly authoritative for philosophy at its start.⁴³

If this system claims to be neither a descriptive account of reality as it is given nor an account of the forms of thought according to which reality must be cognized, if it is founded neither on a purported—foundational—insight into the fundamental nature of being nor on a purported—foundational—insight into the conditions for the possibility of conscious cognition, what then is this system? Hegel's philosophical system is, I would suggest, *sui generis*. In its fully developed form it is simply the conceiving of reality from the standpoint of autonomous reason, which, more specifically, is that standpoint which rejects the authority both of any

specific given and of the framework of givenness itself as demonstrably determinative for reason. Alternatively, it is what we might call *Realphilosophie*, using Hegel's term to describe the system beyond the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic*. And as such—and this is a further feature of its self-constituted limitedness—this system does not deny the reality of anything 'given' external to reason, or to itself as the system of reason. In strict terms, questions of what can be actually established by modes of cognition which assume givenness and which take account of the given in their actual employment fall outside of the system.

So this system does not deny *überhaupt* the factuality of the given or the possibility of modes of cognition appropriate to it. For, as a final, metaphysical conclusion, such a denial would require cognitive reference from within the system to the allegedly given, just in order to establish an idealistic rejection of its ontological ultimacy, and that reference would entail a lapse into the mode of consciousness whose suspension is a precondition for this system's autonomy. Rather, what this system *does* deny is simply that the determinative primacy *for reason* of any such givens can be demonstrated.⁴⁴ So this system does not 'absolutize' reason in the sense of denying that there are any limits to it. As noted above in regard to Marx, who from the point of view of Hegel lapses into idealism in postulating reality and history as literally dialectical in character, this system does acknowledge its limits, and it must do so for the sake of its own claim to autonomy. The price of the claim to reason's autonomous self-constitution, as based on a rejection of the given as foundational in and for it, is an appreciation of the self-closure of the system. Insofar as the autonomy of the system rests on a rejection of the philosophical authority of the given, a rejection of the foundational standpoint which assumes the possibility of a referential skyhook, self-closure is entailed in the sense that the completed system of reason cannot return to the framework of descriptive reference which was abjured as operative in and for it at its start. (This is, in part, my revisionist account of the notorious "circularity" of Hegel's system.)

Nonetheless, those features of the system which comprise its autonomy and its self-limitedness are at the same time just those features of it which give it a certain normative force *vis-à-vis* the given. Rejecting the given as a basis for the system does not, as I shall argue, entail a rejection of reason's claim on or against the given. But, it should be stressed once again, systematic philosophy's normative force rests neither on the basis of any descriptive claims concerning the nature of given reality, nor on any descriptive or

prescriptive claims concerning what are allegedly those necessary principles according to which reality must be known or cognized. Hegel's is a nonfoundational while still a *critical* philosophy. What I am suggesting is that he avoids the current dilemma of rejecting foundationalism only to fall into uncritical relativism.

What does this mean and how does he do this? It means, amongst other things, that this system of reason, to the extent to which various domains of reality do come to be conceived within it, has critical authority *solely* insofar as we seek to discover what can be conceived from a standpoint which is not founded on arbitrarily selected or postulated givens. That is, it has critical authority solely insofar as we choose to seek to determine what is rational about the real when it is conceived from the standpoint of autonomous reason, *i.e.*, as a category of systematic philosophy. And this means the following, then, for us as human subjects, as conscious awareness who live, think, and act in the domain of the given: the critical question of the extent to which some aspect or feature of what we take to be the world as given to us does or does not accord with the demands of reason is an extra-systemic question.⁴⁵ In a moment I shall have more to say on this, and on how this system can play a critical role in regard to the given, despite its severance from the given.

In addition, and more specifically as regards the location of this systematic philosophy in the contemporary spectrum, Hegel's rejection of the primacy of subjectivity in and for this system puts him in general agreement not only with those holists who reject the model of isolated subjectivity as adequate for understanding cognition; additionally, in the arena of social and political philosophy, he would agree with those critics of modern society who attack what they see as its roots in unfounded conceptions of liberal individualism.⁴⁶ Based as it is on a standpoint of reason which rejects the exclusive primacy of givenness and of the subject. Hegel's conception of the rational character of society and its institutions is derived from the notion that individuality and freedom are not givens. In this manner, Hegel parts company with traditional liberal theory. For Hegel, individual freedom and individuality itself, when systematically conceived, are seen to originate from and be dependent upon a network of various institutions whose definitive character is more properly thought of as intersubjectively constituted. Thus, Hegel's social and political philosophy does not reject the ultimate worth or legitimacy of individual freedom, as MacIntyre's does.⁴⁷ What it does reject is the adequacy of properly understanding the nature and conditions for the actualization of