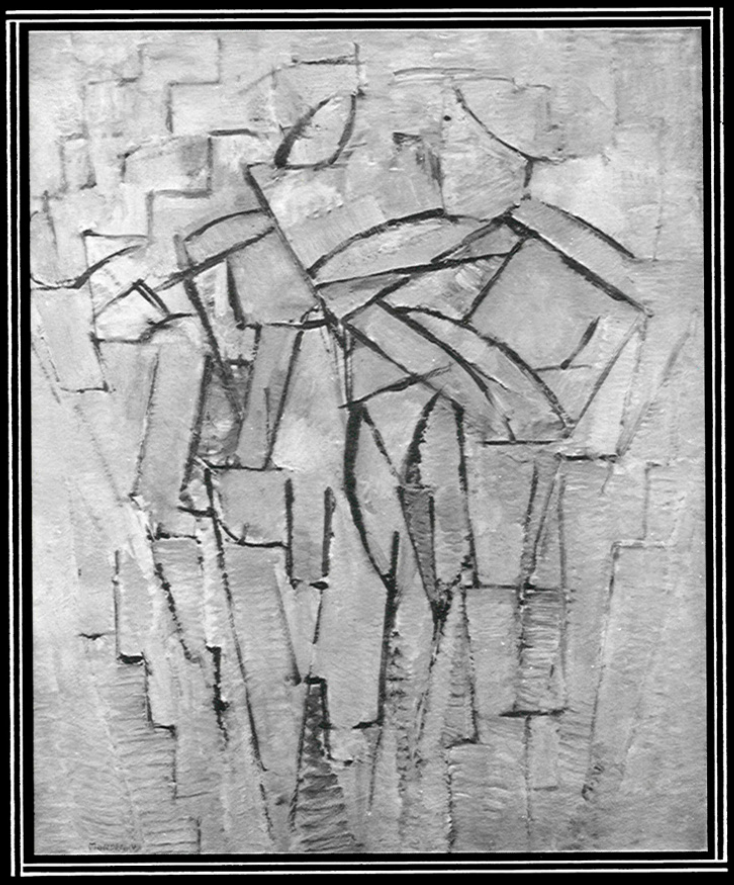
THE PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE OF MODERNITY



Jürgen Habermas

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Twelve Lectures

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translated by
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Introduction

Thomas McCarthy

"In the philosophical discourse of modernity," writes Habermas, "we are still contemporaries of the Young Hegelians." Distancing themselves from Hegel's attempt to replace the subject-centered reason of the Enlightenment with Absolute Knowledge, Marx and the other Left Hegelians already announced the "desublimation of the spirit" and a consequent "disempowering of philosophy." Since that time, these tendencies have continued apace. The overwhelming "impurity" of reason, its unavoidable entanglement in history and tradition, society and power, practice and interest, body and desire, has prompted, among others, Nietzsche's heroic proclamation of the end of philosophy, Wittgenstein's therapeutic farewell, and Heidegger's dramatic overcoming. The current end-of-philosophy debates are largely echoes of and variations upon themes developed in these earlier rounds. For French poststructuralism, which serves as the point of departure for these lectures, it is above all Nietzsche and Heidegger who furnish the inspiration and set the agenda. Habermas is concerned here to respond to the challenge posed by the radical critique of reason in contemporary French thought by reexamining "the philosophical discourse of modernity" from which it issues. His strategy is to return to those historical "crossroads" at which Hegel and the Young Hegelians, Nietzsche, and Heidegger made the fateful decisions that led to this outcome; his aim is to identify and clearly mark out a road indicated but not taken: the *determinate* negation of subject-centered reason by reason understood as *communicative* action.

That strategy and aim define the focus and compass of the lectures. They deal with modernity as a theme of *philosophical*, not aesthetic, discourse. There are, however, some significant overlappings, for the aesthetic critique of modernity has played a crucial role in the philosophical critique — from Schiller and Romanticism to Nietzsche and poststructuralism. In particular, the realm of radical experience — of experience set free from the constraints of morality and utility, religion and science — opened up by avant-garde art has figured prominently in more recent attacks on the egocentric, domineering, objectifying, and repressing "sovereign rational subject." From Nietzsche to Bataille, it has seemed to provide access to the outlawed "other" of reason, which typically furnishes, if often only implicitly, the criteria for that critique. Habermas also discusses earlier accounts of art's potential to reconcile the fragmented moments of reason, as well as Nietzsche's and Heidegger's variations on the theme of an aesthetically renewed mythology (Dionysus as the absent god who is coming).

But the enhanced significance of the aesthetic is only one facet of the philosophical discourse of modernity, which turns centrally on the critique of subjectivistic rationalism. The strong conceptions of reason and of the autonomous rational subject developed from Descartes to Kant have, despite the constant pounding given them in the last one hundred and fifty years, continued to exercise a broad and deep — often subterranean — influence. The conception of "man" they define is, according to the radical critics of enlightenment, at the core of Western humanism, which accounts in their view for its long complicity with terror. In proclaiming the end of philosophy — whether in the name of negative dialectics or genealogy, the destruction of metaphysics or deconstruction — they are in fact targeting the self-assertive and self-aggrandizing notion of reason that underlies Western "logocentrism." The critique of subject-centered reason is thus a prologue to the critique of a bankrupt culture.

To the necessity that characterizes reason in the Cartesian-Kantian view, the radical critics typically oppose the contingency and conventionality of the rules, criteria, and products of what counts as rational speech and action at any given time

and place; to its universality, they oppose an irreducible plurality of incommensurable lifeworlds and forms of life, the irremediably "local" character of all truth, argument, and validity; to the apriori, the empirical; to certainty, fallibility; to unity, heterogeneity; to homogeneity, the fragmentary; to self-evident givenness ("presence"), universal mediation by differential systems of signs (Saussure); to the unconditioned, a rejection of ultimate foundations in any form. Interwoven with this critique of reason is a critique of the sovereign rational subject — atomistic and autonomous, disengaged and disembodied, potentially and ideally self-transparent. It is no longer possible, the critics argue, to overlook the influence of the unconscious on the conscious, the role of the preconceptual and nonconceptual in the conceptual, the presence of the irrational — the economy of desire, the will to power — at the very core of the rational. Nor is it possible to ignore the intrinsically social character of "structures of consciousness," the historical and cultural variability of categories of thought and principles of action, their interdependence with the changing forms of social and material reproduction. And it is equally evident that "mind" will be misconceived if it is opposed to "body," as will theory if it is opposed to practice: Subjects of knowledge are embodied and practically engaged with the world, and the products of their thought bear ineradicable traces of their purposes and projects, passions and interests. In short, the epistemological and moral subject has been definitively decentered and the conception of reason linked to it irrevocably desublimated. Subjectivity and intentionality are not prior to, but a function of, forms of life and systems of language; they do not "constitute" the world but are themselves elements of a linguistically disclosed world.

Another important strand in the radical critique of reason can be traced back to Nietzsche's emphasis on the rhetorical and aesthetic dimensions of language. Thus, a number of critics seek to undercut philosophy's traditional self-delimitation from rhetoric and poetics as reflected in the standard oppositions between logos and mythos, logic and rhetoric, literal and figurative, concept and metaphor, argument and narrative, and the like. Pursuing Nietzsche's idea that philosophical texts are

rhetorical constructs, they take aim at philosophy's self-understanding of its discourse in purely logical, literal — that is to say, nonrhetorical — terms. They argue that this is achieved only at the cost of ignoring or suppressing the rhetorical strategies and elements of metaphor and other figurative devices that are nevertheless always at work in its discourse. And they seek actively to dispel the illusion of pure reason by applying modes of literary analysis to philosophical texts, exploiting the tensions between reason and rhetoric within them so as to undermine their logocentric self-understanding.

In reconstructing the philosophical discourse of modernity, Habermas addresses himself to all these themes; he readily agrees with Foucault that reason is a "thing of this world." But for him this does not obviate the distinctions between truth and falsity, right and wrong; nor does it make them simply equivalent to what is de facto acceptable at a given time and place. The undeniable "immanence" of the standards we use to draw these distinctions — their embeddedness in concrete languages, cultures, practices — should not blind us to the equally undeniable "transcendence" of the claims they represent — their openness to critique and revision and their internal relation to intersubjective recognition brought about by the "force" of reasons. The ideas of reason, truth, justice *also* serve as ideals with reference to which we can criticize the traditions we inherit; though never divorced from social practices of justification, they can never be reduced to any given set of such practices. The challenge, then, is to rethink the idea of reason in line with our essential finitude — that is, with the historical, social, embodied, practical, desirous, assertive nature of the knowing and acting subject — and to recast accordingly our received humanistic ideals.

The key to Habermas's approach is his rejection of the "paradigm of consciousness" and its associated "philosophy of the subject" in favor of the through-and-through intersubjectivist paradigm of "communicative action." This is what he sees as the road open but not taken at the crucial junctures in the philosophical discourse of modernity. At one such juncture, Hegel chose instead to overtrump the subjectivism of modern philosophy with a notion of Absolute Knowledge, itself fash-

ioned after the model of self-consciousness. Feeling the need to grasp "reason" in more modest terms, the Left and Right Hegelians also chose paths still marked by the philosophy of the subject — with, as Habermas shows, consequences that continue to reverberate in contemporary praxis philosophy, on the one hand, and in recent vintages of neoconservatism, on the other. While it is his intention in these lectures to resume and renew the "counterdiscourse" that, as a critique of subjectivism and its consequences, has accompanied modernity from the start, his immediate focus is on the "counter-Enlightenment" path hewn by Nietzsche — or, rather, on the two paths that lead out of Nietzsche into the present, one running through Heidegger to Derrida, the other through Bataille to Foucault.

At the heart of Habermas's disagreement with Heidegger and his followers is the putative "ontological difference" between Being and beings, between world-view structures and what appears within these worlds. In Habermas's view, this distinction is deployed so as to uproot propositional truth and devalue discursive, argumentative thought. After hypostatizing the world-disclosive aspect of language and disconnecting it from innerworldly learning processes, Heidegger leaves us with a kind of linguistic historicism, outfitted with the quasi-religious trappings of a "truth-occurrence," a "destining of Being," to which we can only submit in an attitude of "expectant indeterminacy." Habermas argues that this construal misses the dialectical interdependence between a historically shaped understanding of the world and the experience and practice possible within its horizon. Innerworldly practice is indeed informed by general, pregiven structures of world-understanding; but these structures are in turn affected and changed by the cumulative results of experiencing and acting within the world. Social practice submits the background knowledge of the lifeworld to an "ongoing test" across the entire spectrum of validity claims. Meaning cannot be separated from validity; and it is precisely the orientation of actors to validity claims that makes learning processes possible — learning processes that may well cast doubt on the adequacy of the world views informing social practice. Because Heideg-

ger ignores this reciprocal connection between propositional truth and truth-as-disclosure and reduces the former to the latter, his "overcoming of metaphysics" amounts in the end to a "temporalized superfoundationalism."

This has broader implications for the Heideggerian reading of modernity. The "palpable distortions" of a one-sidedly rationalized world get enciphered into an "impalpable *Seinsgeschick* administered by philosophers." This cuts off the possibility of deciphering the pathologies of modern life in social-theoretical terms and frees their critique from the rigors of concrete historical analysis. "Essential thinking" consigns questions that can be decided by empirical investigation or theoretical construction — by any form of argumentative or discursive thought — to the devalued realm of the ontic and leaves us instead with the "empty, formulaic avowal of some indeterminate authority."

In a long excursus on the literary-theoretical reception of Derrida in the United States, Habermas deploys the same views of language and practice to resist the leveling of the genre distinction between philosophy and literature and the reversal of the traditional primacy of logic over rhetoric with which it is linked. Once the impossibility of a Platonic conception of logos is acknowledged and the omnipresence of the rhetorical dimensions of language is recognized, the argument goes, philosophical discourse can no longer be (mis)conceived as logical rather than literary, literal rather than figurative — in short, it can no longer be conceived as philosophical in any emphatic sense of the term. The strategies of rhetorical analysis, which is concerned with the qualities and effects of texts in general, extend to the would-be independent realm of philosophical texts as well. As Habermas reconstructs it, the heart of this argument is whether or not it is possible to draw a viable distinction between everyday speech (as it functions within contexts of communicative action) and poetic discourse. If not, then the aestheticizing of language proposed by Derrida carries, with the consequence that any given discourse can properly be analyzed by rhetorical-literary means. Habermas defends a position that, while not denying the omnipresence and ineradicability of rhetorical and poetic elements in every-

day discourse, insists on distinguishing those contexts in which the poetic function predominates, and thus structurally determines discourse, from those in which it plays a subordinate and supplementary role. We are dealing here with a continuum, no doubt. Toward one end of the spectrum, we find the ordinary communicative uses of language in which illocutionary force serves to coordinate the actions of different participants: normal speech as part of everyday social practice. Toward the other end, we find those uses in which the fictional, narrative, metaphorical elements that pervade ordinary language take on a life of their own; illocutionary force is "bracketed" and language is disengaged from everyday practical routines. In the communicative practice of everyday life, language functions as a medium for dealing with problems that arise within the world. It is thus subject to an ongoing test and tied to processes of learning. In poetic discourse, by contrast, the everyday pressure to decide and to act is lifted, and the way is free for displaying the world-disclosive power of innovative language. In Derrida and his followers, Habermas argues, language's capacity to solve problems disappears behind its world-creating capacity. Thus, they fail to recognize the unique status of specialized discourses differentiated out from communicative action to deal with specific types of problems and validity claims: science and technology, law and morality, economics and political science, and so forth. In these discourses, as in the philosophy that mediates between them and the everyday world, the invariably present rhetorical elements of speech are "bridled," "enlisted for special purposes of problem solving," and "subordinated to distinct forms of argumentation."

Along the other main path leading from Nietzsche to the contemporary critique of reason, the key points at issue are somewhat different. The critique of metaphysics is not given pride of place in this more "anarchist" strain; there is no "mysticism of Being" conjured up here. The target is still subject-centered reason and the domination of nature, society, and the self that it promotes. But the guiding thread is now Nietzsche's theory of power, and the fundamental premise is that modern reason is nothing more than a perverted and disguised will to

power. The aim of critique is, then, to strip away the veil of reason and to reveal naked the power it serves. In Bataille, this takes the form of an invocation and investigation of "the other of reason" — of what is expelled and excluded from the world of the useful, calculable, and manipulable. In Foucault, it takes the form of a genealogical unmasking that reveals the essential intrication of knowledge with power. Habermas devotes two lectures to Foucault, and readers might justifiably conclude that in his dialogue with French poststructuralism, Foucault is the preferred partner. More than any other of the radical critics of reason, Foucault opens up a field of investigation for social research; there is in his work no "mystification" of social pathologies into the "destinings" of this or that primordial force. Like Horkheimer and Adorno, he is sensitive to the power claims lurking in theoretical and practical reason; and also like them, he attaches to the concept of power both a transcendental-historical and a social-theoretical significance.

Genealogy is, on the one hand, a kind of transcendental historiography. Its aim, as Foucault once put it, is to construct a "history of the objectification of objectivities," a "nominalist critique," by way of historical analysis, of the fundamental ideas in terms of which we constitute ourselves as subjects and objects of knowledge. It treats any such constitution as a historical event, constructing an indefinite number of internal *and* external relations of intelligibility around it. The "theoretical-political" point of this "analytic decomposition," Foucault tells us, is to "show that things weren't as necessary as all that," to replace the unitary, necessary, and invariant with the multiple, contingent, and arbitrary. In particular, Foucault wants to break the hold on our minds of the modern "sciences of man," behind whose facade of universality and objectivity is concealed the ever-spreading operation of modern techniques of domination and of the self. This points to the second aspect of genealogy: It serves also as a historically oriented, more or less functionalist, critical sociology of knowledge, aimed in particular at types of knowledge that, incorporated into therapies and social technologies, serve as the main conduits for the normalizing and disciplinary effects of "truth."

Habermas's disagreements with Foucault certainly do not amount to a blanket rejection of this critical perspective on power-knowledge configurations. It is the "totalization" of critique that he objects to, the transformation of the critique of reason by reason — which from Kant to Marx had taken on the sociohistorical form of a critique of ideology — into a critique of reason tout court in the name of a "rhetorically affirmed other of reason." On his view, the real problem is too little rather than too much enlightenment, a deficiency rather than an excess of reason. And he supports this view with a double-edged critique of Foucault's "totalization," one edge applying to the transcendental-historiographic aspect of genealogy, the other to its social-theoretical aspect. Briefly, he argues that Foucault cannot escape the "performative contradiction" involved in using the tools of reason to criticize reason; this has the serious consequence of landing his genealogical investigations in a situation embarrassingly similar to that of the "sciences of man" he so tellingly criticized. The ideas of meaning, validity, and value that were to be eliminated by genealogical critique come back to haunt it in the spectral forms of "presentism," "relativism," and "cryptonormativism." On the other hand, the social-theoretical reading of modernity inspired by the theory of power turns out to be simply an inversion of the standard humanist reading it is meant to replace. It is, argues Habermas, no less one-sided: The essentially ambiguous phenomena of modern culture and society are "flattened down" onto the plane of power. Thus, for example, the internal development of law and morality, which on his view bears effects of emancipation as well as of domination, disappears from Foucault's account of their normalizing functions. It is precisely the ambiguity of rationalization processes that has to be captured, the undeniable achievements as well as the palpable distortions; and this calls for a reconstructed dialectic of enlightenment rather than a totalized critique of it.

As I mentioned at the outset, Habermas's strategy is to return to the counterdiscourse of modernity — neglected by Nietzsche and his followers — in which the principle of a self-sufficient, self-assertive subjectivity was exposed to telling criticism and a "counterreckoning" of the cost of modernity was drawn up.

Examining the main crossroads in this counterdiscourse, he points to indications of a path opened but not pursued: the construal of reason in terms of a noncoercive intersubjectivity of mutual understanding and reciprocal recognition. Returning to the first major crossroad, he uses this notion to reconstruct Hegel's idea of ethical life and to argue that the other of reason invoked by the post-Nietzscheans is not adequately rendered in their "model of exclusion"; it is better seen as a divided and destroyed ethical totality. Habermas follows Hegel also in viewing reason as a healing power of unification and reconciliation; however, it is not the Absolute that he has in mind, but the unforced intersubjectivity of rational agreement. At the second major crossroad, he follows Marx's indication that philosophy must become practical, that its rational content has to be mobilized in practice. This yields a counterposition to the post-Nietzschean privileging of "the extraordinary" — limit experiences of aesthetic, mystical, or archaic provenance. If situated reason is viewed as social interaction, the potential of reason has to be realized in the communicative practice of ordinary, everyday life. The social practice Habermas has in mind cannot, however, be identified with Marx's conception of labor; in his view, productive activity is too specific and too restricted a notion to serve as a paradigm of rational practice. Furthermore, it harbors an idealist residue — labor as constitutive of a world in alienated form that has to be reappropriated — that needs to be overcome if we are to get definitively beyond the paradigm of subjectivity. The solution he opposes to the simple elimination of the subject is a kind of "determinate negation": If communicative action is our paradigm, the decentered subject remains as a participant in social interaction mediated by language. On this account, there is an internal relation of communicative practice to reason, for language use is oriented to validity claims, and validity claims can in the end be redeemed only through intersubjective recognition brought about by the unforced force of reason. The internal relation of meaning to validity means that communication is not only always "immanent" — that is, situated, conditioned — but also always "transcendent" — that is, geared to validity claims that are meant to hold beyond any local context and thus can be

indefinitely criticized, defended, revised: "Validity claims have a Janus face. As claims, they transcend any local context; at the same time, they have to be raised here and now and be de facto recognized . . . . The transcendent moment of *universal* validity bursts every provinciality asunder; the obligatory moment of accepted validity claims renders them carriers of a *context-bound* everyday practice. . . . a moment of *unconditionality* is built into *factual* processes of mutual understanding — the validity laid claim to is distinguished from the social currency of a de facto established practice and yet serves it as the foundation of an existing consensus." This orientation of communicative action to validity claims admitting of argument and counterargument is precisely what makes possible the learning processes that lead to transformations of our world views and thus of the very conditions and standards of rationality.

In sum, then, Habermas agrees with the radical critics of enlightenment that the paradigm of consciousness is exhausted. Like them, he views reason as inescapably situated, as concretized in history, society, body, and language. Unlike them, however, he holds that the defects of the Enlightenment can only be made good by further enlightenment. The totalized critique of reason undercuts the capacity of reason to be critical. It refuses to acknowledge that modernization bears developments as well as distortions of reason. Among the former, he mentions the "unthawing" and "reflective refraction" of cultural traditions, the universalization of norms and generalization of values, and the growing individuation of personal identities — all prerequisites for that effectively democratic organization of society through which alone reason can, in the end, become practical.

For Rebekka, who brought neostructuralism closer to home

Preface

"Modernity — an Unfinished Project" was the title of a speech I gave in September 1980 upon accepting the Adorno Prize.[1] This theme, disputed and multifaceted as it is, never lost its hold on me. Its philosophical aspects have moved even more starkly into public consciousness in the wake of the reception of French neostructuralism — as has the key term "postmodernity," in connection with a publication by Jean-François Lyotard.[2] The challenge from the neostructuralist critique of reason defines the perspective from which I seek to reconstruct here, step by step, the philosophical discourse of modernity. Since the late eighteenth century modernity has been elevated to a *philosophical* theme in this discourse. The philosophical discourse of modernity touches upon and overlaps with the aesthetic discourse in manifold ways. Nevertheless, I have had to limit the theme; these lectures do not treat modernism in art and literature.[3]

After my return to the University of Frankfurt, I held lecture courses on this subject in the summer semester of 1983 and the winter semester of 1983–1984. Added afterwards, and so fictitious in this sense, are the fifth lecture, which adopts an already published text,[4] as well as the last lecture, only recently worked out. I delivered the first four lectures at the Collège de France in Paris in March 1983. I used other portions for the Messenger Lectures at Cornell University in September 1984. I also dealt with the most important theses in seminars at Boston College. I have received more inspirations from the

lively discussions I was able to hold with colleagues and students on these occasions than could be acknowledged retrospectively in notes.

Supplements to the philosophical discourse of modernity, with a political accent, are contained in a volume of *edition suhrkamp* being published simultaneously.[5]

I

Modernity's Consciousness of Time and Its Need for Self-Reassurance

I

In his famous introduction to the collection of his studies on the sociology of religion, Max Weber takes up the "problem of universal history" to which his scholarly life was dedicated, namely, the question why, outside Europe, "the scientific, the artistic, the political, or the economic development . . . did not enter upon that path of rationalization which is peculiar to the Occident?"[1] For Weber, the intrinsic (that is, not merely contingent) relationship between modernity and what he called "Occidental rationalism" was still self-evident.[2] He described as "rational" the process of disenchantment which led in Europe to a disintegration of religious world views that issued in a secular culture. With the modern empirical sciences, autonomous arts, and theories of morality and law grounded on principles, cultural spheres of value took shape which made possible learning processes in accord with the respective inner logics of theoretical, aesthetic, and moral-practical problems.

What Weber depicted was not only the secularization of Western *culture*, but also and especially the development of modern *societies* from the viewpoint of rationalization. The new structures of society were marked by the differentiation of the two functionally intermeshing systems that had taken shape around the organizational cores of the capitalist enterprise and the bureaucratic state apparatus. Weber understood this process as the institutionalization of purposive-rational economic

and administrative action. To the degree that everyday life was affected by this cultural and societal rationalization, traditional forms of life — which in the early modern period were differentiated primarily according to one's trade — were dissolved. The modernization of the lifeworld is not determined only by structures of purposive rationality. Emile Durkheim and George Herbert Mead saw rationalized lifeworlds as characterized by the reflective treatment of traditions that have lost their quasinatural status; by the universalization of norms of action and the generalization of values, which set communicative action free from narrowly restricted contexts and enlarge the field of options; and finally, by patterns of socialization that are oriented to the formation of abstract ego-identities and force the individuation of the growing child. This is, in broad strokes, how the classical social theorists drew the picture of modernity.

Today Max Weber's theme appears in another light; this is as much the result of the labors of those who invoke him as of the work of his critics. "Modernization" was introduced as a technical term only in the 1950s. It is the mark of a theoretical approach that takes up Weber's problem but elaborates it with the tools of social-scientific functionalism. The concept of modernization refers to a bundle of processes that are cumulative and mutually reinforcing: to the formation of capital and the mobilization of resources; to the development of the forces of production and the increase in the productivity of labor; to the establishment of centralized political power and the formation of national identities; to the proliferation of rights of political participation, of urban forms of life, and of formal schooling; to the secularization of values and norms; and so on. The theory of modernization performs two abstractions on Weber's concept of "modernity." It dissociates "modernity" from its modern European origins and stylizes it into a spatiotemporally neutral model for processes of social development in general. Furthermore, it breaks the internal connections between modernity and the historical context of Western rationalism, so that processes of modernization can no longer be conceived of as rationalization, as the historical objectification of rational structures. James Coleman sees in this the advantage

that a concept of modernization generalized in terms of a theory of evolution is no longer burdened with the idea of a completion of modernity, that is to say, of a goal state after which "postmodern" developments would have to set in.[3]

Indeed it is precisely modernization research that has contributed to the currency of the expression "postmodern" even among social scientists. For in view of an evolutionarily autonomous, self-promoting modernization, social-scientific observers can all the more easily take leave of the conceptual horizon of Western rationalism in which modernity arose. But as soon as the internal links between the concept of modernity and the self-understanding of modernity gained within the horizon of Western reason have been dissolved, we can relativize the, as it were, automatically continuing processes of modernization from the distantiated standpoint of a postmodern observer. Arnold Gehlen brought this down to the formula: The premises of the Enlightenment are dead; only their consequences continue on. From this perspective, a self-sufficiently advancing modernization of society has separated itself from the impulses of a cultural modernity that has seemingly become obsolete in the meantime; it only carries out the functional laws of economy and state, technology and science, which are supposed to have amalgamated into a system that cannot be influenced. The relentless acceleration of social processes appears as the reverse side of a culture that is exhausted and has passed into a crystalline state. Gehlen calls modern culture "crystallized" because "the possibilities implanted in it have all been developed in their basic elements. Even the counterpossibilities and antitheses have been uncovered and assimilated, so that henceforth changes in the premises have become increasingly unlikely. . . . If you have this impression, you will perceive crystallization . . . even in a realm as astonishingly dynamic and full of variety as that of modern painting."[4] Because "the history of ideas has concluded," Gehlen can observe with a sigh of relief that "we have arrived at *posthistoire*." With Gottfried Benn he imparts the advice: "Count up your supplies." This *neoconservative* leave-taking from modernity is directed, then, not to the unchecked dynamism of societal modernization but

to the husk of a cultural self-understanding of modernity that appears to have been overtaken.[5]

In a completely different political form, namely an anarchist one, the idea of postmodernity appears among theoreticians who do not see that any uncoupling of modernity and rationality has set in. They, too, advertise the end of the Enlightenment; they, too, move beyond the horizon of the tradition of reason in which European modernity once understood itself; and they plant their feet in *posthistoire*. But unlike the neoconservative, the anarchist farewell to modernity is meant for society and culture in the same degree. As that continent of basic concepts bearing Weber's Occidental rationalism sinks down, reason makes known its true identity — it becomes unmasked as the subordinating and at the same time itself subjugated subjectivity, as the will to instrumental mastery. The subversive force of this critique, which pulls away the veil of reason from before the sheer will to power, is at the same time supposed to shake the iron cage in which the spirit of modernity has been objectified in societal form. From this point of view, the modernization of society cannot survive the end of the cultural modernity from which it arose. It cannot hold its own against the "primordial" anarchism under whose sign postmodernity marches.

However distinct these two readings of the theory of postmodernity are, both reject the basic conceptual horizon within which the self-understanding of European modernity has been formed. Both theories of postmodernity pretend to have gone beyond this horizon, to have left it behind as the horizon of a past epoch. Hegel was the first philosopher to develop a clear concept of modernity. We have to go back to him if we want to understand the internal relationship between modernity and rationality, which, until Max Weber, remained self-evident and which today is being called into question. We have to get clear on the Hegelian concept of modernity to be able to judge whether the claim of those who base their analyses on other premises is legitimate. At any rate, we cannot dismiss a priori the suspicion that postmodern thought merely claims a transcendent status, while it remains in fact dependent on presuppositions of the modern self-understanding that were brought

to light by Hegel. We cannot exclude from the outset the possibility that neoconservatism and aesthetically inspired anarchism, in the name of a farewell to modernity, are merely trying to revolt against it once again. It could be that they are merely cloaking their complicity with the venerable tradition of counter-Enlightenment in the garb of post-Enlightenment.

II

Hegel used the concept of modernity first of all in historical contexts, as an epochal concept: The "new age" is the "modern age." This corresponded to contemporary usage in English and French: "modern times" or *temps moderns* denoted around 1800 the three centuries just preceding. The discovery of the "new world," the Renaissance, and the Reformation — these three monumental events around the year 1500 constituted the epochal threshold between modern times and the middle ages. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel used these expressions to classify the German Christian world that had issued from Roman and Greek antiquity. The division still usual today (e.g., for the designation of chairs in history departments) into the Modern Period, the Middle Ages, and Antiquity (or modern, medieval, and ancient history) could take shape only after the expression "new" or "modern" age ("new" or "modern" world) lost its merely chronological meaning and took on the oppositional significance of an emphatically "new" age. Whereas in the Christian West the "new world" had meant the still-to-come age of the world of the future, which was to dawn only on the last day — and it still retains this meaning in Schelling's *Philosophy of the Ages of the World* — the secular concept of modernity expresses the conviction that the future has already begun: It is the epoch that lives for the future, that opens itself up to the novelty of the future. In this way, the caesura defined by the new beginning has been shifted into the past, precisely to the start of modern times. Only in the course of the eighteenth century did the epochal threshold around 1500 become conceptualized as this beginning. To test this, Reinhart Koselleck uses the question of when *nostrum aevum*, our own age, was renamed *nova aetas*, the new age.[6]

Koselleck shows how the historical consciousness that expressed itself in the concept of the "modern age" or the "new age" constituted a historical-philosophical perspective: One's own standpoint was to be brought to reflective awareness within the horizon of history as a whole. Even the collective singular *Geschichte* [history], which Hegel already uses in a way that is taken for granted, was a coinage of the eighteenth century: "The 'new age' lent the whole of the past a world-historical quality. . . . Diagnosis of the new age and analysis of the past ages corresponded to each other."[7] The new experience of an advancing and accelerating of historical events corresponds to this, as does the insight into the chronological simultaneity of historically nonsynchronous developments.[8] At this time the image of history as a uniform process that generates problems is formed, and time becomes experienced as a scarce resource for the mastery of problems that arise — that is, as the pressure of time. The *Zeitgeist*, or spirit of the age, one of the new words that inspired Hegel, characterizes the present as a transition that is consumed in the consciousness of a speeding up and in the expectation of the differentness of the future. As Hegel puts it in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Mind*:

> It is surely not difficult to see that our time is a birth and transition to a new period. The Spirit has broken with what was hitherto the world of its existence and imagination and is about to submerge all this in the past; it is at work giving itself a new form. . . . [F]rivolity as well as the boredom that open up in the establishment and the indeterminate apprehension of something unknown are harbingers of a forthcoming change. This gradual crumbling . . . is interrupted by the break of day, that like lightning, all at once reveals the edifice of the new world.[9]

Because the new, the modern world is distinguished from the old by the fact that it opens itself to the future, the epochal new beginning is rendered constant with each moment that gives birth to the new. Thus, it is characteristic of the historical consciousness of modernity to set off "the most recent [*neuesten*] period" from the modern [*neu*] age: Within the horizon of the modern age, the present enjoys a prominent position as contemporary history. Even Hegel understands "our age" as "the most recent period." He dates the beginning of the present

from the break that the Enlightenment and the French Revolution signified for the more thoughtful contemporaries at the close of the eighteenth and the start of the nineteenth century. With this "glorious sunrise" we come, as the old Hegel still thought, "to the last stage in History, our world, our own time."[10] A present that understands itself from the horizon of the modern age as the actuality of the most recent period has to recapitulate the break brought about with the past as a *continuous renewal.*

The dynamic concepts that either emerged together with the expression "modern age" or "new age" in the eighteenth century or acquired then a new meaning that remains valid down to our day are adapted to this — words such as revolution, progress, emancipation, development, crisis, and *Zeitgeist.*[11] These expressions also became key terms for Hegelian philosophy. They cast conceptual-historical light on the problem posed for the modern historical consciousness of Western culture that had developed in connection with the oppositional concept of a "new age": Modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; *it has to create its normativity out of itself.* Modernity sees itself cast back upon itself without any possibility of escape. This explains the sensitiveness of its self-understanding, the dynamism of the attempt, carried forward incessantly down to our time, to "pin itself down." Just a few years ago, Hans Blumenberg felt himself obliged to defend with a grand historical display the legitimacy or the *proper right* of modernity against constructions that tried to make a case for its cultural debt to the testators of Christianity and antiquity. "It is not self-evident that an epoch poses itself the problem of its historical legitimacy; just as little is it self-evident that it understands itself as an epoch at all. For modernity, the problem is latent in the claim of accomplishing, and of being able to accomplish, a radical break, and in the incongruity of this claim with the reality of history, which is never capable of starting anew from the ground up."[12] Blumenberg adduces as evidence a statement by the young Hegel: "Apart from some earlier attempts, it has been reserved in the main for our epoch to vindicate, at least in theory, the human ownership of trea-

sures formerly squandered on heaven; but what age will have the strength to validate this right in practice and make itself their possessor?"[13]

The problem of grounding modernity out of itself first comes to consciousness in the realm of aesthetic criticism. This becomes clear when one traces the history of the concept "modern."[14] The process of detachment from the models of ancient art was set going in the early eighteenth century by the famous *querelle des anciens et des modernes*.[15] The party of the moderns rebelled against the self-understanding of French classicism by assimilating the aesthetic concept of perfection to that of progress as it was suggested by modern natural science. The "moderns," using historical-critical arguments, called into question the meaning of imitating the ancient models; in opposition to the norms of an apparently timeless and absolute beauty, they elaborated the criteria of a relative or time-conditioned beauty and thus articulated the self-understanding of the French Enlightenment as an epochal new beginning. Although the substantive *modernitas*, along with the pair of adjectival opposites, *antiqui/moderni*, had already been used since late antiquity in a chronological sense, in the European languages of the modern age the adjective "modern" only came to be used in a substantive form in the middle of the nineteenth century, once again at first in the realm of the fine arts. This explains why *Moderne* and *Modernität*, *modernité* and *modernity* have until our own day a core aesthetic meaning fashioned by the self-understanding of avant-garde art.[16]

For Baudelaire, the aesthetic experience of modernity fuses with the historical. In the fundamental experience of aesthetic modernity, the problem of self-grounding becomes acute, because here the horizon of temporal experience contracts to the decentered subjectivity that splits away from the conventions of everyday life. For this reason, he assigns to the modern work of art a strange place at the intersection of the axes of the actual and the eternal: "Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one-half of art, the other being the eternal and immovable."[17] A self-consuming actuality, which forfeits the *extension* of a transition period, of a most recent period constituted at the center of the new age (and lasting several