

**Victor Béguin, *Fonder la philosophie. Essai sur le système hégélien*,  
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Victor Béguin's recent volume *Fonder la philosophie. Essai sur le système hégélien* examines one of the central issues of Hegelian thought and, more broadly, of classical German philosophy: the question of philosophy's ultimate foundation, that is, how philosophical discourse must be conceived in order to account for the validity of its own claims. The book's main thesis is that the Hegelian system provides a "non-métaphysique" solution to this problem, which Béguin characterizes as a "*fondationnalisme sans fondement*" (p. 9).

According to this interpretation, Hegel does not seek to ground philosophy on a principle understood in the classical sense. Instead, he develops an immanent conceptual exposition through which the truth emerges from the thing itself. Thus, the justification of philosophical discourse can only be achieved within the systematic framework of the concept's self-determination. Moreover, this reconfiguration of philosophy's – circular and totalizing – discursive form entails a "rupture profonde avec le lexique de la fondation" (p. 24).

Hegel develops two different solutions to this problem: the 'phenomenological' approach, which seeks to establish the legitimacy of philosophical science through a critique of alternative perspectives, and the 'systematic' approach, which explicates the process by which the system as a whole accounts for its own truth.

Part I of the volume is devoted to the first foundational model: the "*fondation phénoménologique de la philosophie*" (p. 28).

The first chapter focuses on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and its *Preface*. These works present a central thesis that will later be reframed in systematic terms: the idea that the only foundation of philosophical discourse is a totality which, conceived as subject, immanently develops its own determinations. In 1807, Hegel questions the very possibility of

grounding philosophy on a *Prinzip* or *Grundsatz*, and identifies the solution to the problem of foundation in the self-development of truth. From this perspective, the task is not to identify an ultimate principle, but to grasp that the very possibility of foundation lies in the unfolding of the Absolute. The process through which substance becomes subject constitutes the authentic justification for the standpoint of philosophical science. Consequently, the *Phenomenology* serves as an – already ‘scientific’ – introduction to the system, advancing the thesis that “l’absolu est esprit” and that its highest form of self-knowledge is “science, c’est-à-dire la philosophie” (p. 43).

Through a detailed discussion of the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopedia*, parts II, III, and IV focus on the second foundational model: the “fondation systématique de la philosophie” (p. 49).

Part II shows that Hegelian logic identifies systematicity as the authentic foundation of philosophy. According to Hegel, only by renouncing a classical metaphysical foundation can philosophical discourse be absolutely grounded, that is, through a conceptual method that “n’a pas à conférer la rationalité, mais à la montrer à même ce qui est” (p. 50).

The second chapter focuses on the deconstruction of the concept of foundation within the *Doctrine of Essence*. Hegel develops this analysis through three distinct stages: the *absolute Grund*, the *bestimmte Grund*, and the *Bedingung*. Throughout this process, the foundation does not present itself as an origin to which what exists can be traced back, but rather as a “dispositif, qui se soutient lui-même, de médiation” (p. 69). It must therefore be conceived as a “totalité purement relationnelle”, whose truth “est de s’abolir dans l’existence” (p. 74). Existence, therefore, appears as a mediated immediacy which has acquired a conceptual determination that was lacking in indeterminate being. Through a critical engagement with the legacies of Leibniz and Kant, Hegel immanently deconstructs the metaphysical tradition, formulating a non-foundationalist philosophy. Within this model, intelligibility does not derive from the foundation itself, but from the process of self-negation of being.

The third chapter shows how the demand for rationality – as expressed in the redefinition of foundation in the *Doctrine of Essence* – is adequately fulfilled at the logical level of the

*Concept*. In the transition from objective to subjective logic, a “*théorie de la totalisation de l’idée comme justification ultime*” (p. 78) arises, which articulates the dialectical relation of *Aufhebung* between foundation and self-determination. On the one hand, the standpoint of the concept rejects the foundationalist lexicon’s unilateral nature. On the other hand, this aspect is not abandoned in its scientific claim; rather, it is redefined through a more radical form of rationality. Thus, the foundation reveals itself as a moment within the logical process that culminates in the ‘subjectification’ of the concept and the absolute Idea. The latter, in particular, manifests itself as self-knowledge and self-explication of a content that finds its *Bewährung* through its realization in the realms of nature and spirit. In this way, the Idea “*rend raison d’elle-même dans l’exposition de sa processualité*” (p. 112).

Part III undertakes an analysis of the systematic role of *Realphilosophie*, that is, the sphere wherein the Idea justifies and realizes itself through its absolute self-determination.

The fourth chapter is devoted to the philosophy of nature and spirit. The former is examined from two perspectives. First, it investigates the reasons behind the transition from the logical Idea to nature. After emphasizing the complex structure of this transition, it underscores that nature embodies the immediate and temporal determination of the eternal Idea in its exteriority. This is not a mere “*passage*” or “*réflexion*”, but rather a “*développement de type conceptuel*” (p. 126). Second, it highlights the systematic significance of nature. Hegel distances himself from an extrinsic or non-philosophical conception of nature, instead understanding it as the negative moment within the self-determination of the Idea. Within this dialectical tension, it becomes possible to “*penser la nature dans son ambiguïté même*” (p. 133). The chapter subsequently turns to the philosophy of spirit. First, the transition from nature to spirit is examined to show how the latter comprehends the former as its own internal moment. Second, it emphasizes how – through the notions of activity, negativity, freedom, self-manifestation, actual truth, self-consciousness – spirit achieves the conceptual apprehension of its own identity “*dans et par sa différence à soi*” (p. 148).

The fifth chapter explores philosophy’s relationship with both the socio-political world and the sciences. Specifically, it illustrates that philosophy does not seek to externally validate

these domains but rather elucidates their truth in light of the concept. Initially, it focuses on the philosophy of right. Contrary to interpretations that regard speculative thought as a justification of reality, the author illustrates that Hegel presents the development of objective spirit as oriented toward the realization of freedom. Philosophy, understood as a “travail de *discernement* du concept, de l’effectif, dans la réalité” (p. 173), discloses the normativity inherent in the very idea of right and the spiritual activity embodied in moral, legal, social, and political practices. Then, the chapter examines the relationship between philosophy and the sciences. According to Hegel, philosophical discourse acknowledges the validity of the sciences but simultaneously positions itself as the “*Aufhebung* des autres discours savants” (p. 183). In other words, philosophy systematically recovers, at the conceptual level properly understood as *Wissenschaft*, what remains confined to the realm of reflection in scientific discourse.

Part IV addresses two key issues: first, the relationship between the phenomenological and the systematic foundation, and second, the way in which philosophy accounts for its own truth.

The sixth chapter shows that the ‘phenomenological’ and the ‘systematic’ solutions – that is, the justification of the scientific standpoint and the development of a system that produces its own truth – constitute two distinct foundational theories. Béguin argues that the full articulation of the latter renders the former “sinon caduque, du moins superflue” (p. 194). Therefore, the system reframes the problem posed by *Phenomenology* at another conceptual level, conceiving the 1807 work as an expression of a transition from Hegel’s early period to his maturity, as expressed in the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopedia*. From this standpoint, Hegel acknowledges *Phenomenology* as a pivotal stage of his thought. However, he now downplays its foundational and introductory role for the system. While the phenomenological model initially represented an original solution to the problem of foundation, now, from a systematic perspective, it reveals itself as “un état *antérieur* de sa pensée”, “un faux départ” (pp. 214-215).

The seventh chapter explores the three ways through which philosophy achieves its ultimate justification. First, it investigates the concept of philosophy conceived as a systematic exposition of the self-determination of the Idea.

This self-knowledge, which unifies its moments into a whole, constitutes “*pratiques de production de sens et d’évaluation de la totalité à l’aune de ce sens*” (p. 219). Second, it addresses the role of the history of philosophy. To the extent that the history of philosophy is recovered at the logical level of the concept, it does not reveal itself to be external to philosophical discourse, but belongs fully to the system. Philosophy recognizes itself in its historical unfolding by grasping this history as “*son propre développement*” and “*y être chez elle*” (p. 228). Third, the chapter examines the notion of philosophy through the concluding syllogisms of the *Encyclopaedia*. These represent the pinnacle of the Idea’s self-knowledge, namely, the unity of its concept with and its realization. In this way, philosophy “*ne fonde qu’elle-même*” and defines itself as a free and “*pure activité d’auto-détermination discursive*” (p. 250).

In conclusion, Béguin states that Hegel’s solution to the problem of ultimate foundation must be sought in the relationship between his theory of the Idea and his theory of philosophy – that is, between the absolute self-determination of the former and the logical process through which the latter reveals itself as its adequate exposition. Through this perspective, speculative thought discloses the immanent rationality of totality and discursively restores that dynamism. As the author rightly points out, the fundamental feature of this model lies in its “*plasticité*”, that is, in the living process of the discourse that affirms its own truth “*dans son achèvement même comme système*” (p. 253).

Béguin’s work constitutes an original and rigorous attempt to address the complex problem of foundation within Hegelian thought. The book provides a meticulous historical and conceptual reconstruction of the relevant issues at stake and advances a significant theoretical and systematic proposal. Notable merits include the detailed analysis of the lexicon of foundation, the ‘reconceptualization’ of the Hegelian notion of philosophy, and the emphasis on the central role of the Idea, which emerges as the true keystone of the system. The foundation of philosophy – its capacity to establish its own validity – ultimately lies in its ability to reflect the self-determining movement of the Idea.

A particularly distinctive aspect of this interpretation is its precise reconstruction of the phenomenological and systematic strategies and its demonstration of their incompatibility in

Hegel's mature thought. More specifically, this analysis rearticulates the phenomenological solution in relation to the overarching systematic approach. Considered within the framework of Hegel's system, this problem opens new theoretical paths for examining the potential of his speculative philosophy. This argument is especially significant in relation to the motivations that prompted Hegel to undertake a new edition of the *Phenomenology* in 1831.

Another aspect concerns the pivotal role of the Idea within the systematic exposition of Hegel's philosophical project. By challenging the dichotomy between openness and closure of the system, the distinctiveness of Hegel's perspective should be understood in light of philosophy's ongoing effort to redefine its own discourse. In this respect, this movement of self-justification cannot be reduced to a mere linguistic exercise or a self-enclosed reflection on philosophy's own categories. On the contrary, precisely insofar as it constitutes an adequate exposition of the Idea, philosophy reveals the immanent rationality inherent in all things: it is the very element through which they can be properly comprehended. Finally, the author supports this interpretation of philosophy as an "activité de reprise perpétuelle à même la langue" (p. 254) by offering an original engagement with Hegel's 1818-1819 manuscript notes on the 'Philosophy' section of the 1817 *Encyclopedia*.

Béguin's volume constitutes a significant contribution to Hegelian studies and, more broadly, to a central question that runs throughout the entire post-Kantian framework and continues to shape contemporary debate. Within Hegel's project of systematic self-justification, it is possible to identify the conditions for a radical reconsideration of the form and nature of philosophical inquiry: the ongoing conceptual redefinition of the distinctive discourse that, in the "perpétuel travail de restitution ordonnée du sens" (p. 254), is philosophy itself.