Hegel POS Lecture #17: Observing Reason: Critique of the Scientific Stance

Okay for those who need syllabi by Rossio has both the the big, master syllabus and the one-pager that we're using for this semester. So I suggested last time that Reason that is certain of itself means that individuals have some certainty — which Hegel here begins with the idea of instinctive or presupposed certainty — that their ways of looking at the world will in fact be confirmed by the world. That there is an integral relationship between mind and world that's presumed to be the case. And for reasons I spelled out, Hegel thinks that looking at the actual efforts to work out that presumed interrelation of mind and world, of finding oneself as rational being with universal powers confirmed by the structure of the world, is best pursued by looking at actual practices of that, rather than the philosophers.

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Rather than looking at history of philosophy from Descartes to Kant, he rather looks first at a series of sciences and then a series of ethical practices that operate on this basis. And I suggested that all these are going to fail, in part because they are going to fail to recognize that their standing as rational beings has been always already made possible by a history and the society that they are in. So my shorthand way of saying it is, the thing that science forgets is the practice of science. That's what science can't account for. Even if it can account for all the causal laws of the world and how it works and everything else, it can't account for science as a social practice that grew up at a time and a place and that its rational confidence in its procedures are in fact thoroughly historical and social.

So the initial attempts to work this out, I thought the best way of thinking about them was to think about what Foucault talks about the transcendental and its doubles. That is, that moment that actually lasted up until now, if truth be told, in which each of the various sciences — physics, biology, psychology, it doesn't matter which, pick any science you wish, even history — takes itself to be the transcendental science. That is, takes itself to be that which can account for the world and itself.

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So, there's a kind of transcendental doubling, that is, a lifting up. The reason Foucault puts it the way he does is you take something that's the empirical practice, say the practice of physics, and you give it transcendental status. That is, you give it a philosophical claim to say that it is not just an account of an object, but an account of the possibility of objects in general. So you give it a kind of overgoing universality.

And, in the case of physics, I suggested that the problem that comes up over and over again is that physics always misses out on the sensuous particularity of objects That, by making them subject to causal law, it loses their concrete particular characteristics, that is, the very thing with which the scientist begins with.

So that science's very universalism — and this can come back to haunt all the sciences in a way. This is indeed what positivism is. Positivism is a generalization of the methodology in physics as applied to all other disciplines, and what that practice involves is a recurrent incapacity or even forgetfulness of particularity. So the very thing it thinks it's getting at, it systematically misses.

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In the case of biology, Hegel begins with the thought, I said, that in fact there's a greater *prima facie* plausibility than in the case of physics, because at least the idea of Reason as purposive gets exemplified in looking at a world that itself is purposive. So that there is really, if you wish, a kind of fitness of the world for a Reason that operates like that. So the great purposes of nature turns out to be at one with the the purposiveness of Reason.

The problem with biology and the way that Hegel spins it out, in fact, is remarkably close to my kind of favorite work of recent years in the philosophy of biology, namely Jean Dupres's *The Disorder of Things*. A terrific work in the philosophy of biology. And the argument is that what goes wrong is the presumption of essentialism, that objects have essences. And where the problem of essentialism — because if you're going to imagine a purely law-like biology, you're going to have to imagine that every single object is fully determined by some law and in order for that to be the case, then it's got to have some determinacy in itself. It has to have some essential features that we can categorize.

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And what screws up essentialism for biology are, as we might put it, ecological issues. So although Hegel is here being very skeptical about the possibility of evolutionary biology, since there was none in his time, his point, the one he's trying to make, carries through to the idea that such a science cannot be a thorough-going, law-like one because ecological habitats are never either spatially or temporally fixed.

In Dupre's way of talking about this, he says, ‘Look, as a matter of fact, biology has to work with two different temporal frameworks. It has to do the long durée of evolution of the species and the short durée of what goes on in an ecological habitat and there's no way of, as it were, squaring those. That they each have their own, as it were, temporal logic. And those logics are simply distinct.’

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So it turns out that there's no unique way of accounting for the behavior of an organism, because on the one hand, an organism needs to be accounted for in terms of the long durée of evolution, and on the other hand needs to be accounted for in terms of its role within a local habitat. And therefore, there's always a moment of, let's call it, looseness of fit. A moment of excess. Again, something, as it were, misses or seeps through the law-like determination.

And that will be in a way something that Hegel surprisingly is wanting to concede. People often think of Hegel as, because of his rationalism, as thinking everything must be determinate, but I take it that the one thing he agrees with Schelling about is that reality is born as 'not I.' Reality is born from the Big Bang, from evolution, from nature, and that that past of Reason is never completely absorbed. That there is always an excess.

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Which is simply to say we do not, to use Hegelian language now, we do not find full satisfaction in seeing ourselves in nature. We do not find ourselves wholly mirrored, in accounting for ourselves as natural beings. That there is some way in which we ourselves as rational creatures and as natural creatures never perfectly lines up.

So at that moment Hegel takes it that we cannot capture or get reassurance about our rationality by looking at the world. And that if Reason is going to get reassurance about itself it might do better through self-examination. That is, it might take itself as its object and see if, in examining itself, that it can find a match between, again, its assumption of its rationality and its conception of its object.

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And the first way that Hegel does this and does it incredibly briefly, which always surprises people, is a brief consideration of logic. And given that he went on to write this endless book called the *Logic*, the *Science of Logic,* you might think he was more sympathetic with logic than he seems to be here. But at any rate, at least here the thought is that the form of things, the way in which we do observe them, gains its necessity — which is the thing we've been looking for, right? What we want is reassurance, we want something that the way in which we observe things, and the way they are, hook up. So we want some notion of necessity to authorize us.

So here the thought is the form of things gains its necessity through the laws of thought, which are imposed on the material observer. So Reason is here turning to an observation of itself as rational observation, in order to discover the basic Reason, which will ground itself in its observed world.

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In paragraph 299, the very beginning of the paragraph, he says,

“They are indeed, not supposed to be the *entire* truth, but still *formal* truth. But what is purely formal without any reality is a mere figment of thought, or pure abstraction without that internal division which would be nothing else but the content.—On the other hand, however, since they are Laws of pure thought, and pure thought is intrinsically universal, and therefore a knowledge which immediately contains being, and therein all reality, these Laws are absolute Notions, and are inseparably the essential principles both of form and of things.”

Hegel's argument here is at this level at least, there is a dualism within logic itself. Namely, logic is always here — and this is why I said the question is whether his own logic can answer this, his own question — is here caught between the possibility of, let's call it, conventionalism or formalism on the one hand and real validity with respect to reality. And the thought is that logic, on its own, cannot show why the latter should be the case and not the former. That is, logic on its own cannot itself show why it should not be construed in conventionalist or formalist terms rather than as the structure of reality itself, [inaudible] reality.

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You look terribly unhappy with this thought. The thought here is — another way of putting it is to say that without some further argument, let's call it a phenomenology of Spirit, nothing will save logic from being thought of as imposing Reason on the world. That is, we have yet to show why that's not the case. And of course, one of the tasks that Hegel takes to be the basis of *Phenomenology* is just to show why it is not a mere imposition. That is, the thought that there might be something outside our necessary ways of thinking is unintelligible. That's actually the project of this text, which is why this paragraph is so short. He's actually simply dropping it, which is why he makes no reference to his own logical considerations, I think.

Another version of the same problem, but now one that's going to reach into the following considerations, would be psychology. After all, there was indeed, you might say up until [inaudible] Husserl, there remained a confusion between logic and psychology. Whether the laws of thought were pure rational structures or whether they were the necessary impulses of the mind. And then you might want to say that the psychological thought would be, you know, ‘Let's naturalize logic. Let's just say that's the way the mind works.’

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So, because Reason itself demands that there be a connection between thought and reality — that's what logic can't provide — then this itself might license or entail a psychologism with respect to the laws of thought. Flay in his commentary on Page 126 puts it this way, “We have come to find rational activity observing rational activity. Implicitly, human activity has all along been its own object, first abstractly considered as simply physical, then as living, and then as thinking thing in the study of logic. Now the rational observation takes for its observation its own activity, which includes observation itself.”

So, the thought here is the movement to psychology changes what we are observing. For confirmation for our rational activity, we're going to observe rational activity. That psychology is to be construed as just that. And in paragraph 302, Hegel says, “Psychology contains the collection of laws in accordance with which Spirit relates itself in various ways to the various modes of its actuality as an *otherness already given*.”

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He then generates a duality, top of — I won't read it, just Hegel stuff. So let's see what he says. He takes it that a law-like psychology should probably have something like a stimulus and response or behavioristic inner structure. That is, if you imagine a law-like psychology, what you want is some sense in which the reality affecting the mind should automatically, in some sense, generate an appropriate mental response of some kind. And that that response of some kind should have a law-like regularity. Otherwise, of course, there's no way in which psychology is an account of observation or perception.

Now, Hegel's objection to this is that if you view the mind that way, it's not clear in what sense you are talking about the mind as opposed to reality having its reverberating effects on some other object in the world. What makes a fully determined psychological response psychological or human or spiritual? Conversely, if you imagine that — and there's a flip side and this is just the way this structure of this chapter goes — and the flip side would be that, I'm quoting from 302, “Spirit knows itself as spontaneously active in face of them, and in singling out from them something for itself, it follows its own inclinations and desires, making the object conform to *it*…”

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That is, it's not the object telling me how to respond; rather, I pick out which object I want to look at, what features of it I'm interested in, and then go on to do all the various things I do with objects. Now, the problem here is we've got freedom run amok. So what you've got is a dualism between determinism and freedom. That on the one hand, psychology seems to be locked into a deterministic account of mental life. On the other hand, as soon as you allow freedom back in, then you want to ask yourself the question: in what sense do we have a law-like science at all?

And I take this to be a puzzle about the status of psychology. One might say, or this would be my own inclination, that what psychology studies is not human mental life, but rather the animal mechanisms of human mental life that are the presupposition for rational activity. Something like that. I'm not denying, I mean, what you don't want to do is deny the obvious, that there are certain functions of memory, that there are certain structures of learning. So there are all sorts of things you want to acknowledge. What you want to know is what do they say about rational activity? And I'm trying to suggest, perhaps nothing, without denying their [inaudble].

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So that the uplifted version of psychology, psychology as the true study of mindedness, is the suggestion it’s necessarily caught on the horns of a dilemma. And versions of that dilemma now are going to leak into Hegel's accounts of the two pseudosciences of physiognomy and phrenology. As I suggested last time, the fact that these are pseudosciences in a way only hides the depth of his argument. And I suggested that MacIntyre's article *On Faces and Skulls* really does a wonderful job of digging out exactly how Hegel's argument applies to recent work in neurobiology and the like.

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Well, we're still looking in these accounts for a law-like account of a relationship between mind and body. And that the way in which this schema is at least going to be oriented in both accounts is that the mind-body relationship is going to be taken as some version of the idea that the outer expresses, or is a sign of, or is closely correlated with, the inner. So paragraph 311…let me actually begin with paragraph 310.

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“The individual exists in and for himself; he is *for himself* or is a free activity…” — so here we're acknowledging the possibility of free activity — “…but he has also an *intrinsic* being or has an *original* determinate being of his own—a determinateness which is in principle the same as what psychology thought to find outside of him. In his own self, therefore, there emerges the antithesis, this duality of being the movement of consciousness, and the fixed being of an appearing actuality, an actuality which in the individual is immediately his *own*. This being, the body…”

He then goes on to say, towards two-thirds of the way down paragraph 311, “To the outer whole, therefore, belongs not only the *original being*, the inherited body, but equally” — and here's the new idea, [inaudible] expression — “the formation of the body resulting from the activity of the inner being; the body is the unity of the unshaped and of the shaped being…” So it “*is*, and this *being* is the *expression* of the inner being…”

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Okay, well, what are the candidates we're going to use to think about this? And the first candidates Hegel considers — and it's relevant that he considers them and why, as it were, they get put aside — namely, language and action. They seem obvious cases where we want to talk about the outer as an expression of the inner. They just look like they're made for the job.

So Hegel says, “The speaking mouth, the working hand, and, if you like, the legs too are the organs of performance and actualization which have within them the action *qua* action, or the inner as such.” The inner as such, right there, couldn't ask for a better version. Well, that's the problem, we're not going to talk about action or speech, because speech and action — Hegel’s argument here is wonderful. It's that, he says, they are both too directly connected to the inner and too external.

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How does he manage to say both of those things, that speech and action are both too inner and too outer at the same time, and therefore not an expression of the relationship between inner and outer? Well, the idea of speech and action as too inner is the thought that when I speak and act, the inner is outer immediately, not mediated by anything else. That is, my saying something is an immediate expression of my mind. Or to put it another way, speech is an inner that is always already outer.

Now, this is terribly important. This is part of — and I want to say why this is important. This is something that Hegel inherits from Fichte and it's going to be part of the long and complicated critique of Kantianism. And it's really part of the long and complicated critique of Kantianism because Kant has the thought, as do many contemporary philosophers of action, that the relationship between, lets call it, my will, as an example of the body — as an example of my mind rather — and my body is I need something to, as it were, connect them, And the usual thought now is they are connected by these mysterious things called intentions or willings or volitions, or other such stuff.

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Now, Hegel agrees with Fichte that behind my picking up the cup there is not some shadow activity of intending to pick up the cup. Rather, my picking up the cup is the immediate doing of my will. So that my body is the immediate expression of my actions. Now this is harder — and I'm not gonna try to defend it with respect to action today. It's a theory of basic action that Arthur Danto and Lucy O'Brien have done a lot of interesting work with.

But with speech, it's kind of obvious. With speech it’s kind of obvious, because mostly I don't know what I'm going to say until I say it. That is, I know this, when I say, “I'm looking for the words,” it's not as if I'm magically, you know, what I'm doing is saying words to myself until one sounds right. Basically, right now I'm just speaking. I'm not thinking about it, deliberating, and then telling you something. I’m just doing Hegel talk.

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So that in speech, for Hegel, there's a sense in which, as with action, the inner is immediately there on the outside. That without — so it's not a sign or a token or an example or, I mean, you know, you want it to be a window onto something and there's no window, right? It's the thing! Same with action.

Conversely, and this is obviously going to be important because Hegel is going to say things in a very few paragraphs like, ‘the person is…’ — what is the person? Nothing more than the totality of their deeds. Full stop. There's no beautiful wills, there's no — all that Kantian garbage about, you know, the most wonderful thing in the world is a good will. There aren't any! There are just people who do stuff, right? You know, get a life! Poor Kant just spent too much time on his own in his study.

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Conversely, the meaning of what I say and what I do gets taken up by others immediately. That is, there's a sense in which there's no emphatic ‘mineness,’ not of the kind that we're looking for here, to my sayings and doings, because I do not have — because it's not an intentionalist account — I do not have any ultimate authority about it.

So, to use the kind of same example, it's not as if, when I put up my hand, that there's some ambiguity about what it is and you'll want to ask my intention. Rather, depending on the context, it will be a vote yes, a vote no, an attempt to ask a question, a waving good-bye, a Nazi salute. And it's not up to you, right? We can't go to Germany, and say to all the old fascists, “What were you doing then?” “I'm just asking a question!” It's not up to them. So it's immediately outer.

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So there's a way in which speech and action have an innerness about them that is, again I want to say, direct. It's the inner as outer in an immediate way. ‘I said it!’ And conversely, they have about them an exteriority or outsideness that means that they can't be taken as simple expressions of the inner.

Speech and action, therefore, at least for these purposes, cannot fit into a natural scientific frame. Therefore we'll — when we get there, it comes as no surprise that, in a matter of paragraphs as we launch into the second half of the book, the whole rest of the book is about action. All of it. Because action is the bearer of significant doing in the world and nothing else for Hegel.

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To put it another way, when we get there, Hegel actually doesn't think that there is or could be a theoretical solution to the mind-body problem. After all, that’s in a way what we're looking for. How are the mind and body sutured together? Could there be an account which would satisfy us as rational creatures of how we are intrinsically also embodied creatures? Hegel does think that we are embodied creatures and thinks that an account of us as rational beings must be an account of us as embodied creatures. And he thinks that such an account necessarily is unavailable to theory. That, as it were, we can put it this way, the relationship of mind and body gets worked out in practice. Yeah, now you're upset.

Student: No, I think I know why I was frowning now. I can understand what is going on from the theory of action earlier [inaudible] and thinking about what Kant's trying to do with the Transcendental Deduction, he tries so hard to fit those two things together and kept using the idea of synthesis or a third thing, so is Hegel throwing out all notions of a third thing or any conception of judgment? Like conceptually, epistemologically, the action [inaudible], but if you're talking about epistemological thought and the categories [inaudible], how can you not talk about any kind of [inaudible]?

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Bernstein: It's not that he is going to deny that there are mediations. I mean, he's going to assume that judgment operates, that reflective judgment operates, in pretty much the way that Kant thinks it does. He's a great fan of reflective judgment. What he likes about that, as opposed to the schematism, is it’s the practice of relating ourselves to the world. The problem with the schematism is, the whole point of the schematism is to avoid judgment, right? It’s to get an automatic connection between mind and object via the mediation of the schema.

Our relationship to objects is never that mechanical for Hegel. Or, to the degree it is, it's uninteresting. It's that we work out our relationship to objects exactly by means of reflective judgment, by practices that are going to be socially authorized. So that we get a [inaudible] choice. So, there's a gap between the Kantian account of reflective judgment and the Kantian account of determinant judgment.

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And if I can give a kind of [inaudible] one sentence — the attempts by people like [sounds like Long Burnett], the best of [inaudible], to show that every determinant judgment has underneath it a reflective judgment, is that it's still determinant judgment that, although of a very subsumtive kind, that is doing everything. And that takes knowledge-getting out of a practical setting. So that Hegel wants to pull knowledge back into, as we are here, back into our lives as a moment in agental life, not as a separate capacity.

So knowledge is going to be part of the life of an agent that can get, of course, institutionalized, [inaudible], but nonetheless that's what it is. So there's a sense in which Hegel's philosophy, in the sense of like Wittgenstein, is anti-philosophical. Of all things, of all people, Hegel [inaudible] is anti-philosophical because philosophy — that is, the comprehensive understanding — ain't the point. That is, that isn't going to give us what we think it's going to give us. Only practice can give us what we are looking for. And philosophy is just going to be a certain shadow of certain types of practices.

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So, but the question here, or what's happening here, and this is a kind of turning point in the book, is a question of — and maybe we can understand now why Hegel decided to talk about physics and biology and logic and psychology and phrenology and physiognomy. Because what he wanted to do is push in our face —, what gets hidden, when we talk about Descartes, Locke and Hume and Kant, is how far we can invest in theory. How far can knowledge take us for an understanding of ourselves as rational beings?

And by looking at these accounts the suggestion is that we're not going to understand what philosophy is, and therefore what we are, we’re not going to know who we are, by a theory that thinks that theory itself is the way in which relate to the world. And that should be unsurprising to us because this is, after all, where we started the chapter on consciousness. That's what we already did. Right? When we began with consciousness and tried to relate ourselves, to ground ourselves in the world by knowing the world. Well, that's not gonna work.

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Well, this notion of Reason is a replay of that movement at a higher level, but now, of course, the stakes are more sharply put. And the stakes are more sharply put because, after all, there are some philosophers, Colin McGinn is one and [inaudible] is another, who do argue that the mind-body problem is inherently unsolvable. But it's a surprising thing to say. A surprising thing to say because we just have a view that, well, there's just got to be an account of how these different stratum fit together. How the fact that we have brains, and that we think, fit. And the suggestion is that there's a slippage here.

Okay, let me try a thesis or an hypothesis and then we'll have a break. I think it's one of the things that underlies Hegel although it's certainly not one he thematizes. It's an hypothesis. I gave the [inaudible] — my friend Elijah Millgram always says that all my little ideas have preposterous and useless names, and this is another one of them. It’s ‘the ontological indeterminacy of the mental.’ And I agree, it's not elegant.

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Let me take a shortcut and then try another stab and then another stab, but it will all be quick stabs. Heidegger says that, ‘Dasein is a kind of being for whom its being is a question.’ What does he mean by that? Well one of the things he means by that is that in order for me to be a such and such, say a philosopher, I have to take a stand on myself as philosopher. That is, I have to, as it were, interpret myself in a certain way and follow a certain set of activities, and only in that act of self-interpretation do I make or fashion myself as a philosopher.

Well, we take this thought to be kind of naively true because we know there are certain possibilities with certain types of social roles that are historically provincial. You cannot be a witch doctor in 2007 in New York City, except in little pockets, but generally there are no witch doctors.

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Now my thought is what holds for, let's call it, identity, holds for all the other elements of conscious mental life. That is, that no mental item is naturally or essentially the mental item it is, until it is subject to interpretation. And I mean by that, that even when I have a feeling, until I actually do a lot of work very often, let's call it analysis — so, after I see my shrink I may know that that feeling, which was felt like maybe rage, was actually a desire to kill my father.

But now here's the point: if I was in a different form of analysis, that same rage could then get interpreted in another way. And I want to suggest that while there are false interpretations, there is no one true interpretation. That mental life is subject — and this is what it means for human beings to be self-interpreting creatures, and I want to say we're self-interpreting creatures all the way down. That’s — what Hegel is trying to figure out here is the degree in which we are self-fashioning and self-determining. And the degree, I want to say, is massive, so massive that the fundamental items of mental life — namely emotions, feelings, ideas, beliefs, thoughts, all of them — are fundamentally indeterminate even in terms of their, as it were, status, until I do a work of interpretation.

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Now, it follows — if this is right, then this gives us all the reason in the world to suppose that the fact that when I have this feeling, which I'm going to call rag, rage — you call it rag, I call it rage — we interpret it different! The fact that there's some neuron firing and we know exactly which one is never going to be anything more than a correlation. I'm not saying there won't be correlations. Eventually we'll get really good at doing correlations.

I want to say, they'll tell us nothing. I mean, they will tell us some things. You want to stop your rage? We can zap that one! There will be — but we already do that. I mean, you'll have this uninteresting sort of stuff. But they won't tell us about the very thing we're asking about here. Namely, how are we, as as mind and bodies, soldered together? And that's because — and what's important here, and what's really important in all these theories, is in looking at the brain or looking at the skull, in looking at those objects and thinking we must get those right, in order to get right the material basis of human life, we actually do something terrible. Namely, we deprive ourselves of the actual material basis of human life.

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That is, the problem is not that human life doesn't have a material basis. What these theories do is point us in the wrong direction for looking at the material character of human life. And it's just clear as daylight — and this is where we'll get to when we come back to talk about physiognomy and phrenology — but Hegel is going to say that the material basis of our life together is physical actions.

If you want to look at where we are completely material beings, we are completely material beings in — and now that inner-outer thing begins to haunt us — in the fact that we speak and act. And that these doings are material because they're done by fully, wholly, embodied beings, etcetera.

Student: So he's not trying to eliminate the mind-body problem? I guess what I'm saying is, for example...

Bernstein: He's eliminating a certain version of what the problem is and what would look like a solution.

Student: I guess you know, when I read some of these neuroscience texts, some, you know, not the extreme stuff but someone like [inaudible], they always come up with this problem. You know, it’s: we can have very robust explanation, even to this point where we stimulate this and there you are, [inaudible] but they can't get behind that. But it seems kind of unsatisfactory. It just seems like he's flipping the noumenon and the phenomena, now the noumenon becomes that we can't ever get to that. So there's still this dualism that he's trying to exploit [inaudible].

Other student: Wouldn't Hegel say, there's nothing there, there's nothing back there?

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Bernstein: Hegel is trying to get rid of that idea that there's a deep inside. And the whole way which I was trying to talk about action as both immediately inner and outer is that it’s my solution to the mind-body problem, if you wish. Of course there are other problems. What I want to say is, those problems we work out in action. That is, how we relate to certain feelings and emotions, how we relate to our inner life — what inner life? — the inner life of condition.

I want to say that the big problem — the one which Descartes solved with the pineal gland. He thought, well — and it's interesting the way his mind works. Because he was so — I think he thought that, ‘the pineal gland is small, if the vibrations are small enough, it will be almost as if they're invisible.’ Spiritual! He's wanted to go from tiny vibrations to spirituality. It was a wonderful idea: ‘smallness is the spiritual.’

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Student: Is this just another version of the private language argument, or is there some way in which what Wittgenstein is denying the ultimate [inaudible]...it's the same thing.

Bernstein: Right. They have analogous projects at certain levels. One of the differences is that, because of the way in which Hegel is setting his up, he really is trying to remove not just a private language argument that's a bad philosophical theory, he’s trying to deconstruct what appears to be a standard philosophical problem. And he thinks that the philosophical problem emerges from — and this is why it's not the private language argument — wrong stance. That is, viewing our relationship to the world as contemplative rather than praxical.

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So, what Hegel is trying to ask is what happens — and this is why he is the father of pragmatism. What happens if you make a massive — and he's trying to make us do it, he's trying to make us do it in these chapters — do a massive praxial shift? That is, begin to really see that we must understand ourselves as agents and not as contemplative knowers. It's not that we don't know anything. We know everything we thought we knew before. It just that knowing now has to take on a different stance and meaning.

Okay, let's have a break. I'm surprised, given I was going to start with physiognomy, that I haven't got there. We'll get there. But we can go now. This is really the point I want to make about [inaudible].

[BREAK]

So it is not an accident — some sentence that follows on from, I know the sentence it follows on from — because both speech and action are too outer, it is not an accident that we look at more, less call it 'medial cases,' like the face, like handwriting, physiognomy.  My argument here is just going to follow McIntyre's.  So the plausible intuition that lies behind Lavater's physiognomy is that character is composed of a set of determinate traits, on the one hand, and the face, a set of determinate features.  And what we're going to get, what physiognomy is going to explore, is the relationship between traits of character and determinate features of the face.

And we do think that at some level we can and do indeed construe people's character from their facial expressions.  No matter what Dick Nixon did, he looked untrustworthy, right? Nothing he could do — you know, he'd smile and you'd think, 'That's a crook smiling!'  Nothing he could do.

[00:01:58]

And of course with Bush, it [laughter] — you knew it was coming, right?  It's that grimace, right?  He can't help offering that little smile. Even when he's saying, ‘Lots of people have died today.’  So we can't help but regard him as smug.  There's a self-satisfaction that just — that's the intuition behind which this entire science gets going.  And it's probably right that there is some sort of statistical, indeed inductive, correlation we make between the two.  And again, all this talk about ectomorphs and endomorphs.  So we do think that there's a correlation.

And therefore, ideally, the science wants to propose to think that the inner and outer are causally related. The face is the expression of human character.  What a man is appears in his face.  Now if this is to be a science, however — a body of laws — then there need to be law-like relations between inner and outer.  And it's that presumption that Hegel wants to unpick.  And he does so — he has a number of arguments. I think there are four that I'll focus on.

[00:03:42]

First, although we do read people's faces, the expression of sadness is not a sign of an inner state anymore — the argument I just gave — than waving my hand is a sign of my intention to say hello or vote.  Expressions, I want to say, are parts of actions, hence are themselves actional, that is, to be understood in light of the logic of action rather than in an inner-outer correlation. Secondly, as actions, they are particulars that are subjects too.  What the face does is its expression, not how it is. That is, I want to say that facial expressions are doings and not states.

And that's necessary if we're going to think of them as particulars. So, in this way, you may say that what the physiognomist does is try to assimilate facial expressions to non-voluntary actions, like blushing, while Hegel is going the other way and assimilating them to more fully robust actions, perfect doings like waving or the like.  And therefore making them therefore particulars, and therefore particularly adjusted to a particular situation and the like. Action, not structure, is what's fundamental.

[00:06:14]

But then it follows that for Hegel a person's character is determined by the sum total of what they do.  That a human being is finally what he or she does, and not — or character therefore is not —merely a disposition to behave in a certain way.  So just first two little moments.  One I just can't help bringing, paragraph 315, where he says, "Now, to find out what this particular individuality is in itself, the palmist, like the physiognomist, takes a shorter cut than, e.g., Solon, who thought he could only know this” — what an individual was —“from and after the course of the whole life..."  Just thinking about, 'Let no one say a life was happy until the person is dead.'  That kind of thought.  "...he examined the manifestation, but the former examines the unexplicated in-itself."

Paragraph 322.  And there are — he's obviously getting in a lot of his criticisms.  The structure of his criticisms are around aphorisms from Lichtenberg, which are all very cute.  And after, you know, so he first gives the Lichtenberg, "‘You certainly act like an honest man, but I see from your face that you are forcing yourself to do so and are a rogue at heart;’ without a doubt, every honest fellow to the end of time, when thus addressed, will retort with a box around the ear."  That is, the thought that the physiognomist knows my true self better than what I do.

[00:08:40]

And then one wants to say, ‘Well, why pick one rather than the other?’ And Hegel is going to press that "The *true being* of a man is rather his deed; in this the individual is *actual*” — let me finish reading this paragraph — “and it is the deed that does away with both aspects of what is merely ‘meant’ to be: in the one aspect where what is ‘meant’ has the form of a corporeal passive being, the individuality, in the deed, exhibits itself rather as the *negative essence*, which only *is* in so far as it supersedes the *being*."  And then a sentence down, "The deed is something *simply* determined, universal, to be grasped in an abstraction; it is murder, theft, or a good action, a brave deed, and so on, and what it *is* can be *said* of it. It *is* this, and its being is not merely a sign, but the fact itself. It *is* this, and the individual human being *is* what the *deed* is."

Now all of this, all those italicized is's, this is really Hegel's anti-Platonism. This is the priority of actuality over possibility.  Dispositional theories of character say, 'the shape of your soul is such-and-such,'  assume that indeed the outer is a mere expression of some deep inner state and that your true self is the possibilities stored up in the structure of your soul to behave in one way rather than another.  And Hegel wants to say, in doing that, that you do indeed detach meaning from material embodiment, therefore reduce to ideal potentialities and leave the true nature of the self disembodied.

By taking it that a human being is their deeds, rather than their dispositions, the argument then is to suggest that the idea of possibility or disposition here, the 'I see you are a rogue in your heart,' is a form of metaphysical apologetics. So the thesis that someone has a courageous disposition that they are a courageous human being even though they led the entire life as a bank clerk and the most daring thing they've ever done is eat double chocolate cake, one wants to say that there's something idle about this.

[00:12:40]

Now those same arguments, I should say, are there in Wittgensteinian philosophy of mathematics. There's a whole bunch of literature by Michael Dummet on constructivism that makes a similar argument about the meaning of mathematical items.  Why you can only know the meaning of a theorem by the proof.  Same thought.

So, what Hegel then argues, paragraphs 318, 320, is that law-like correlations leave out of account the fact that we can monitor our actions, become aware of them, become aware of our traits of character — 'I am inclined to be short-tempered when people mention Kant' — and learn to be patient.  That is, we again have the power of transforming ourselves.  So that our traits are, as it were, only as deep as — and we knew this — as we are, as it were, unreflective.

From these two thoughts, MacIntyre argues that the outer is not best understood as the expression of the inner.  It is not [inaudible] Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty when they think about language and all that kind of stuff.  The interpreting of a set of purely physical items. Rather, expressions of character — that traits of character should be understood as reflections of the actions themselves.

[00:15:40]

Third, one good reason for thinking the relation between trait and expression cannot be law-like is: interpreting facial expressions is a highly fallible business.  It just goes wrong. And there's again no ways in which we seem to be able to make those interpretations tighter. And that's because the rules of interpretation are context bound, therefore they are temporally and spatially provincial and are not reflections of permanent structures.

Finally, expressions have meaning only in a context.  It's precisely because they have meaning only in a context and we use context — I want to be very clear about, when I say they only have meaning in context, I mean that context has a justificatory role in the interpretation and meaning of items. And remember the example I gave about the Nazi salute and the wave.  It's the context that provides all the justificatory force that's going to say it was a salute and not a wave.  And therefore it's that which imposes, if you wish, the meaning, constrains it.

And it's not as if, given the context, we can use that as a clue.  Rather, some contexts are constituted.  Hence making a bid by mistake. Thinking 'I'm just leaving the room,' well you just bought a million dollar car. I mean, you know, certain acts have meanings.

[00:18:24]

Gall's phrenology is closer to modern brain theory, but the same sorts of problems and therefore Hegel's arguments here are really going to fit in very closely with all sorts of modern debates.  And indeed if you want an example of a contemporary Gall, take a look at Steven Pinker's book *The Blank Slate.* And if you want to read a perfectly Hegelian critique of it, take a look at a review of the book by Luke Menand in the New Yorker, November 22, 2002. Menand of course is a pragmatist.  As such, he's just going to retail certain standard Hegelian criticisms.

Well, what's becoming clearer here as we move into the discussion of phrenology is that what is at stake in the chapter on Observing Reason is the way in which the disenchantment of nature leads to the disenchantment of the human being.  In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno quips that, “Animism is treating the inanimate as animate. Enlightenment,” he says, “reverses the trick. It treats animate as inanimate.” Or, to use the phrase I used, last week, we provide a mimetic adaptation to death.

[00:20:30]

I don't know if Adorno was thinking of Hegel when he said that, but it is patently the thesis of the chapter.  So paragraph 343, "For this reason, observation finally goes back again from this inconstant language to the *fixed being*" — fixed being is dead being — "and declares, in accordance with its Notion, that externality is the outer and immediate reality of Spirit, not as an organ, and not as a language or a sign, but as a *dead* Thing."  And he goes on in similar language.

Earlier he comments, paragraph 328.  At the very end of the paragraph, he says, "If one had the Notion, then one would also have the right word. What has been determined here in the first instance is only that just as the brain is the living head, the skull is the *caput mortuum*."

And then he begins the very next paragraph, "It is in this dead being, then, that the mental processes and specific functions of the brain would have to display their outer reality, a reality, however, which is still in the individual himself."

[00:22:41]

That's the kind of Sebald argument I gave last week. Well the kind of arguments that Hegel brings forward here are just more complicated versions of his arguments against physiognomy. First, that traits are not fixed and determinate.  And they're not fixed and determinate because the same dispositions can yield different actions depending on context.  So for example the disposition that, say, my disposition to jealousy might lead me to murder Desdemona, or to shower her with rooms full of flowers. There's nothing about the disposition, the jealousy, or even the disposition to jealousy, that necessarily leads to murder rather than the opposite.  And indeed if you go through Proust, he goes through all the possibilities of actions.  The jealousies takes on all those various forms.

Secondly, and the explanation for that fact, and this is the important point, is that properties as generals — so disposition is a certain property of the self — can never yield to particularity, but at least some of our actions are uniquely particular.  A murderer sometimes is just killing anyone, has a disposition to rage and kills; but, sometimes, I murder that very bastard.  And that is, it's particular.  If it wasn't that person, there would not have been the murder.  And we know in fact that roughly eighty percent of all murders are domestic. Nothing like family life.

[00:25:04]

Third. So, and of course the plausible reason why science will always then miss this fact, as I've been arguing, is because occurrence at a particular time and a particular place is not a property.  Third, this is underlined by the fact that the specificity of actions are of course determined by our interpretation of situations, while our interpretation of situations is in part determined by historical location of the situation. That is, our memory of what has led up to it and hence what we bring to it.  This person who I'm about to murder is the son of the man who stole my father's farm.  My father didn't really have a farm, but anyway.  Memory. I'm going to come back to memory in a second because memory is — this is, after all, a memory book.

Fourth, in all of this, what we are saying is that actions, what actions are and what action we perform is not itself temporally localizable. That is, what counts as the beginning of an action and what counts as the end of an action are not given by a mere physical movement.  That actions are things that necessarily have consequences that are integral to the meaning of the action and those consequences, as it were, can reverberate.  And we can legitimately say, for example, to use the most tired old example, that Luther putting up the Theses on the wall led to universal toleration.  The last thing he intended in the world.  Luther did not want religious toleration. He wanted everyone to be Protestant.  He wanted the Church to die.

But the way of that action picked up.  We cannot understand that action unless we understand it as 'that which.'  And of course, this is something that Hegel got from Greek tragedy.  Greek tragedy is behind, as we'll see a lot more next week and thereafter, behind a lot of what he thinks about action. Indeed, he thinks of tragedies as about the logic of action.

[00:28:33]

Well Harris, not implausibly, thinks that this moment in the text, this looking at skulls and the like, is the turning point in the whole text. He says that what motivates 'skull theories,' he calls it, is the thought that there must be a causal correlation between the outer material thing and the psychological life. 'But what actually occurs, and that all the skull theorist provides, is a naive set of correlations of observed psychological types with merely observational mappings of the contours of the skull. Ultimately, skull theory is forced to depend upon the arbitrary and irrational interpretation of what is observable.'

But what is important here is the lesson to be learned, and the lesson to be learned is that skull theory is a category mistake. A bone — the passages I just been reading to you — is not the kind of thing Spirit (rational person) can be. Hegel insinuates the complexity of the mistake by contrasting the phrenologist's observation of the skull with Hamlet's summing up of the spirit of Yorick as he pointedly names the skull in his hand.

So he uses that — so the phrenologist is looking at the bumps. First of all, the skull for us, is always about death.  Not life but death. And then what fills the skull, what makes the skull — 'Alas poor Yorick, I knew him well' — is memory. So it's the memorial elaboration around the skull that, as it were, yields its relationship to a living being. So what is real of Yorick now is the memory of the living being of which the skull is only the occasion, albeit a unique one.  Compared to say a thigh bone. No one ever seems to wax lyrical about thigh bones.

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And it's that, that's where we house the mind.  The phrenologist is looking for the living being in the dead thing and therefore does not realize that finally the skull bone is a marker for our mortality and hence a symbol of death as it so clearly is for Hamlet.  Harris comments, “The skull place of the Spirit (Golgotha or cavalry), the place where the divine man who rose from the empty tomb died, is the last image that the book will leave us with.”  The final end of the book will actually do this whole Christ thing. "And the way that that recalling in the final chapter begins from phrenology shows that the echo is deliberate."

So this really is — the thought is this is really the turning point in the book. 'It is the shift from the observing perspective of the phrenologist Gall to the recollective approach of Hamlet, the recollecting perspective of Hamlet, that makes this moment a fulcrum — rather than observation, recollection of action — upon which the whole book turns.  And it is a perfectly natural and proper shift since the whole context of the observation of self-consciousness, including the aims and purposes of Gall's own science, is ethical.'

It seems to me that Harris is just right about wanting to locate this moment. This is, as it were, the zero-point of observational theory.  The perfect reduction of the living spirit to the dead thing. So there, where the greatest danger is.  And this requires, since there is no further reduction possible, it's what's going to require this shift in perspective. And the shift in perspective is going to be a way of, as I mentioned at the beginning of the hour, from observational understanding of the human to a praxial one. That is, that we are going to ground ourselves in the world as agents rather than as spectators.

[00:34:11]

That's what I meant to do in the first five minutes today, so I don't think I want to start the next run. So I guess we have time for questions?

Student:  [inaudible]

Bernstein: The answer is going to be as, [inaudible] for Hegel, we're going to need a much more complicated account of individuals in a certain kind of world with a certain type of standing. So that our ability to make these distinctions is not like mind-reading, it's about the ways in which we hold people accountable or not. And that's about a way of treating individuals. So it's only once we have a far more recognitive account of our accounting of action. Once we move away from, we have to move away from where we're going — in the next chapter we're going to start with action as series of inner moving out, of trying to impose oneself on the world. And we have to actually go past that to get the right kind of setup in order to make those accounts. So it's, for example, the chapter on conscience is going to be the obvious place where treating some act as conscientious is a complicated social accomplishment.   For example one that the Greeks could not do.  The problem of Antigone.  If they'd had a conscience, there would have been no tragedy.

[00:36:47]

So it's social. My claim is that it’s social, not anything else.

Student: [inaudlble]

Bernstein:  Well actually, Hegel says not.  He says it was intentional. He says she did the act required of her station.  So the whole point of it is, 'it's my station and its duties.'  The very idea of intention is itself a social accomplishment.  Intention is not a given psychological item, it's a way of giving people a certain kind of social space. So these are exactly things that look to us naive, are very important.  I'm saying that stuff that looks to us as if they should be obviously mental stuff: 'I intend to do this. I want to do that.' These are social inventions of complicated kinds.

And you see Aristotle moving from one form of responsibility to another in his account of tragedy.  This is crucial to [inaudible] whole story about what he's doing is adding the notion of wish and so on in order to get a different theory of responsibility from the one that was probably operative in religious world.  It's a social construction of a kind.

People are restless.  Okay, let people go to dinner or breakfast or whatever you're up to.  Really next week, we'll talk about action.