Hegel POS Lecture #16: Observing Reason: Transition from Self-Consciousness

[course mechanics]

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Okay so what I want to do today as the syllabus says, and this may be a shock to some of you who thought you would have an easy holiday, is I actually want to do Observing Reason today, all of it. It is easily the most dissatisfying or unsatisfying chapter in the book, which is not to say that it doesn't have an interesting underlying logic. And I’ll concentrate on the underlying logic, not the details.

The reason why it's unsatisfying in its details, or at least to me, is because Hegel gets involved in a whole variety of technical disputes around his time, especially in the long section on biology, where he considers what Harris calls the various forms of degenerative Schellingianism. You would have thought Schellingianism would be bad enough on its own, but to look at the degenerative forms based on the writings of John Brown's medical theory, you can just see this is just gonna be a nightmare, right? So I don't do any of that stuff.

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This is, as I said, the only section of the book which I worked on and never found the details compelling. So I'm going to try to stay at the at the level of the structure of the argument, which is interesting. For those of you — I mean, of the various accounts of this section, the one I actually like best, or find most compelling as giving a kind of sweep, is one of the commentaries I haven't mentioned until now, but is very interesting. It's *Hegel's Quest for Certainty* by Joe Flay.

And I have problems with the overall structure of Flay’s commentary. Quest for certainty? Is that what we’re questing for? And he has this theory of interest and I have problems with that. And he also has a kind of [inaudible] pragmatist theory going on in the middle of all this. But nonetheless, at least for this whole chapter on Reason, Flay seems to me one of the better commentaries in digging out what, I think, are the deep structures.

Well, let's recall where we left off. And it's where the individual surrenders to the priest — surrenders his will, surrenders his knowledge, to the priest — who, as the mediator between God and him, represents the possibility of Reason, of universality, entering the world. Because the thought is that, in order to have a mediator, a priest, a Pope — the claim is they have, in their possession, God’s knowledge. They are the voice of God on earth.

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So already in the person of the mediator, we have a unification of two things that we thought to be impossible, namely individuality (concrete, finite human being) — Popes are, after all, real people, more or less — and universality. So the very idea of the mediator, as already between the unchangeable and the changeable, shows that these two things really need not be extremes at all.

And in a way, I suggested, that's exactly what Luther recognizes. ‘If fatso there in the Vatican can have direct access to God and he is a mortal being, then so can every other person.’ That is, each individual can be their own priest. That's what the Reformation is about. And hence, each individual can have immediate contact via faith with the unchangeable. And therefore each individual can be aware of themselves, have a conscious certainty of being in possession of the truth.

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So the thought then, as Hegel runs it out, is that whatever a priest can say or do, any human consciousness can say or do. And as I suggested last time this cuts in two directions: both in the direction of modern faith, in the direction of Lutheranism in all its forms (faith, after all is simply a form of certainty of one's relationship to the unchangeable); and, that very certainty can also take on a rational form, that is, the self-certainty of the *Cogito*.

Indeed, necessarily, when Luther says, ‘Here I stand and can do no other,’ he is issuing a kind of *Cogito*. And, as I tried to suggest in earlier lectures, the very activity of faith shows, demonstrates, that belief in God is logically impossible. It's logically impossible, because your self-assertion (I’m in possession) is the denial that the other is the absolute authority. By having self-certainty, whether you call it faith or the *Cogito*, you are disbelieving in any absolute outside yourself.

And as you know, that's how, again to repeat, how I interpret the demon doubt in the *First Meditation*. The demon doubt is an attempt to show that there cannot be — that the antagonism between faith and Reason always ends up as a form of self-assertion. I can’t deny myself. I cannot deny myself. So that moment of the *Cogito —* the impossibility, no matter what God says, in order for me to think about that, I have to assert myself — means that you cannot believe in God, not as an authority outside yourself.

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So, the notion of religion at this moment simply disappears. We’ll have to come back to what it means. We haven’t actually asked what religion means, and that's why there's gonna be a whole section on religion. But the idea that there could be an external authority, that the universal could be absolutely external to me, is simply self-defeating. It’s incoherent. Now, I dearly wish that the inhabitant of the White House believed this, because we could get out of Iraq, but…well maybe we ought to have a philosophical discussion with him. Anyway.

So the thought here is that the self of self-assertion will always displace its object. Which, of course, was what that whole chapter about the Unhappy Consciousness was all about: the self trying to get rid of itself, to undo itself. And every time it did so, it found itself asserting itself. And only that moment of emptying to the mediator, as it were, lets the connection between self and universality come about.

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The certainty of the *Cogito* is just the reflective movement of radical faith. Hence, faith is always faith in self against whatever might trouble it. From this, it follows that consciousness no longer needs to take a negative view of the world to maintain its freedom or independence in opposition to the world. The declaration of Reason is equally to say that ‘what I discovered in my Reason is the world,’ and Hegel says, the new, actual world, the world of Renaissance. So, what remains of the impersonal, creative Father is nothing but the order of the natural world.

So what Reason is going to assert, now, is that everything is rational, or that thought and being are one, or that everything actual is rational. And, of course, this is exactly what we find in Descartes. It is, after all, when I take to be the central moment in the *Meditations*: the piece of wax. Because what the argument concerning the piece of wax concerns is: that the world is not the way it appears to be; is not full of colors and smells and tastes and all that; that intrinsically the world is made up of nothing but primary qualities; that the essence of the world therefore is quantifiable; and that, of course, the truth of Reason, the highest truth of Reason, is mathematics.

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So that there is an internal relationship between the powers of the mind (the capacity to do mathematics) and the nature of the world. So, the notion of Reason is not about ‘that I have Reason in my head’ or ‘that there's something out there in the world.’ The notion of Reason that Hegel is developing here is about the relationship between mind and world.

So, if that's right, then if we think of mathematical thinking or Descartes’ method as rational in this new sense — namely, being at one with reality — then what Reason is going to be doing here is to be seeking self-recognition in the order of nature. Finding itself in the order of nature. So the claim now, that Reason is all truth and all reality, is to be understood firstly as claiming that there is no world other than the one in which finite consciousness actually exists in. That the order of nature is the — I want to be clear out this — the reality, the actuality, of universality. It’s the material embodiment. So, being is the material embodiment of the universal, and hence that order of nature is what must be known in order for Reason to validate itself as being in possession of all truth, all reality.

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Or to put it another way, if nature truly is a rational order, then Reason is its creator. And again, this is — I’ll come back to what happens with this in a moment — but this is just, methodologically, just the way Descartes argues in his *Physics*, right? He begins his *Physics* by saying, ‘Okay, let's pretend,’ he says modestly, ‘that there is no God. And let's ask ourselves, if we were God, how would we order and create and structure nature?’ So, the structure of Reason displaces the creative God and says that there must be this ultimate structure going on.

Or to put it another way, in the language of Fichte, which I will come back to in a second, ‘There can be self-positing, my self-certainty, if and only if I posit the not-self as my rational other, as the resistance to but also the external validation of my subjective standing.’ So, the claim here is that practical reality is no longer about work or desire or enjoyment — all the things that it was in the chapter on the Unhappy Consciousness. It is ‘reality comes about in virtue of knowledge,’ or that ‘the world becomes fully actual by being known.’ That the world is just that place that, in being known, it becomes determinant in itself.

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So, the idea of the self-recognition in the order of nature we get in the end of paragraph 232 in the endless last sentence where he says,

“In thus apprehending itself, after losing the grave of its truth, after the abolition of its actuality is itself abolished, and after the singleness of consciousness is for it in itself Absolute Essence, it discovers the world as its new real world, which in its permanence holds an interest for it which previously lay only in its transiency…”

The new world, the world, material world, now has the kind of interest for us that before we could not find in — that is, as a source of enjoyment, of self-confirmation, before was just a matter of consumption.

“…for the existence of the world becomes for self-consciousness its own truth and presence; it is certain of experiencing only itself therein.”

Great thought of modern rationalism.

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So, rationality now is to be understood as a purposive activity in an appropriate world. So it's a structure of relatedness, of purposive activity in an appropriate world. Which is thought now to be an adequate solution to the problem of an absolute standpoint, which was, of course, what, you know, the unhappy consciousness was looking for. That if I could really show, really demonstrate, really be sure, really be certain, really prove, that mind and world were one, then I’d have inhabited an absolute standpoint, because there'd be nothing else outside of it and I would be assured of my relationship to the world. Which is what I meant when I said the absolute standpoint is about our standing in the world and our relationship to it.

And each version of the absolute standpoint is an attempt to assure ourselves that we have the world that is truly our world, and that it’s fit for our rational purposes. And that all of these are different ways of how we can stand in the world, connect to the world, with rationality and conviction. Or, if you wish, have metaphysical faith in our place in the world. That's what every natural standpoint is looking for.

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Hegel calls Reason instinctive, here, in various places, Instinctive Reason. Simply what he means by this is that it is simply an acceptance, let's call it a naive or spontaneous or even thoughtless acceptance of the correlation of self and world. That, to put it another way, the self here presupposes the fitness of the world to my rational activities, or presupposes that there is a rational structure which links my purposes to the world and to the life in which they are manifest.

So, again Reason here is neither only purpose or something in the rational individual, nor is it the appropriateness of the world or an external structure. It is here a living, dialectical relation between them. It's the self-world relation that has now become explicitly the theme. In all of this, I always think the background of all of this is Kant’s *Third Critique.* I think of it as Kant’s *Third Critique* because what the *Third Critique* is about, in varieties of ways, is the purposiveness of nature, that is, the fitness of nature for our rational capacities. The very thing that Kant does not show and could not show in the *First Critique*.

So this is adopting the idea of the purposiveness of nature for our rational faculties as an underlying structure of modern rationalism from the get-go, from the beginning. That Descartes and Galileo must be assuming the purposiveness of nature. That Hume and Locke in a way are assuming and then get disappointed by that assumption. They assume it and then — so I want to say that both Locke and Hume, there’s a whole lot of recent scholarship, that they were both scientific realists who then had a skeptical doubt about the plausibility of their realism. That neither of them were empiricists in any strong sense of the word. They both assume reality [imnaudible] nature. Obviously so of Locke and according to Galen Strawson, and a bunch of other people, that's true of Hume as well.

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Reason, one statement or formulation, is the relation of mind and world. Is the relation of mind and world, not one thing or the other. So this is the stronger or more robust notion of Reason that is kind of there, it's obviously kind of there, in rationalism. But rationalism goes kind of wacky and anxious about it, and goes all theological and theoddysies and Cartesian circles and all that sort of stuff. But all they're saying is that Reason is not in the head. Reason must be the relation between mind and world.

So there is a dialectical link between, let's call it, totality and totalization. That purposive activity finds itself in the world as appropriate or inappropriate, and the world in turn is reflected only in the purposive activities of the conscious individual. So, the middle of paragraph 233, just to get this totality-totalization idea going, and you already here — I mean, those of you who are fans of Castoriadis, this whole dialectic here is about ‘constituted’ and ‘constituting’ at various levels.

Totality and totalization, that there’s always — or as sociologists put it, between structure and agency. That we have to have, as it were, both moments going on all the time. And we're going to be moving, by the end of the chapter on Reason altogether, to just that structure. That's just what Spirit itself is going to be when we get there. A thoughtful working out of that relationship, but it's even here.

Hegel says, “But self-consciousness is all reality, not merely for itself but also in itself, only through” — it is is all reality in itself but also through — “becoming this reality, or rather through demonstrating itself” — demonstrating itself — “to be such.” So there's no truth without the detailed demonstration, the becoming, the activity. “It demonstrates itself to be this along the path in which first, in the dialectic movement of ‘meaning’, perceiving and understanding, otherness as an intrinsic being vanishes…” and on it goes.

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Now that said, I think we know this already. After all, isn't this just transcendental idealism? Isn’t this the idea that there is no gap between the synthetic powers of consciousness and the actuality of the world? Isn't the whole purpose of idealism to claim in a non-theological — no theoddesy, no Cartesian circle, none of that kind of stuff — isn't it just to claim that there is a unity of thought and reality? And hence, again, this is kind of unnerving since we began the last chapter — the whole chapter of Self-Consciousness began with Fichte (remember ‘A equals A’), and he seems to be bringing Fichte back again with this ‘A equals A’ stuff.

Well, what are we to make of this claim about the role of idealism here? And what is Hegel arguing about? One of the reasons he's mentioned idealism here is to clue us in to the fact that there's something like the standpoint of the present already. So we're not quite halfway through the book and yet seems to be claiming we’re sort of nearly at the end of the book already, and somehow not. The question is: how are we, how aren't we? I mean, I've already claimed we are in certain way, I’ve already claimed the unity of thought and being. So what's the problem going to be?

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At this point, he introduces a series of criticisms of Fichte and of Kant, which are important for the structure of why he's going to do what he's going to do in this chapter. So, the first thing he says is that what makes Reason, Reason, and not Spirit, is that the whole path we have followed to here conditions the meaning of Reason and this Reason itself does not know. So, the end of Paragraph 233, or toward the end, he says,

"But the two reduced themselves to a single truth, [namely] that what is, or the in-itself, only is in so far as it is for consciousness, and what is for consciousness is also in itself or has intrinsic being.” That's what we've got to now. “The consciousness which is this truth” — the consciousness which is this truth — “has this path behind it and has forgotten it, and comes on the scene immediately as Reason; in other words, this Reason which comes immediately on the scene appears only as the certainty of that truth.”

That's the other reason why Reason is instinctive here: it has this notion of certainty, because it's forgetful. It's forgotten that there's been this whole educative process, the whole toils of the Unhappy Consciousness and everything that went before that, that was necessary to get there.

“Thus it merely asserts that it is all reality, but does not itself comprehend this; for it is along that forgotten path that this immediately expressed assertion is comprehended.”

I take it that sentence is a summary of Hegel. That to comprehend your standpoint is going to be this massive act of memory, by which you comprehend the whole path, the whole history of learning, by means of which you get to your present standpoint. And that idealism is a forgetfulness of that, and hence does not understand itself, and the manifestation of its not understanding itself is called certainty.

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It is not an accident, I think, that one of Fichte’s most interesting things is, you know, the argument against dogmatism or skepticism. And he’s saying, ‘You gotta be dogmatic. right?You've got to simply assert.’ So there is, about self-assertion, a kind of dogmatism. So the word certainty always hides a dogmatic suppression of its own historical coming-to-be.

The deficit in contemporary idealism in Kant and Fichte he is now making explicit is that it has no account of its own coming-to-be, hence the history and genealogy which makes it what it is and gives it its real meaning. Now, of course he's going to have to [inaudible] to show that, so he's offering that as a hypothesis. Hegel then — and this kind of raises a whole bunch of problems, one of which isn't in Hegel but I think we may — no, does it hold?

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One of the questions that Hegel's account here raises is simply this: what is the relationship between genesis and validity? And I raise that question only because he seems here to be saying that there can be no comprehensive validation without an account of genesis. And if that's true, then I would think that his own logic would be impossible. But I take it he's not thinking that thought here.

Here are the actual criticisms he makes of idealism. First, in paragraph 235, Hegel criticizes Kant’s attempt to read off the plurality of categories from the table of judgments. And the argument — it’s a complicated argument and the short version of it is — is that this derivation is obviously, as everyone argued, too immediate, too much shot from a pistol, hence an outrage, a outrage on science.

Second, I think this is the deep, critical moment here. What makes Kant and Fichte subjective idealists as opposed to absolute idealists is that the world is rational for them because anything that appears in it must be mine — must correspond to my ego, to my transcendental subjectivity, to the transcendental unity of apperception — where the mineness of judgmental synthesis is what gives the given this rationality. But, and this is the big but, the problem is that in every single such system there is a remainder, an excess, a given, a something that stands outside of the result of this and operates either as an input into it or as simply a constant remainder. So, of course, it's the problem of things-in-themselves, of the extraneous impulse, of empirical or sensuous reality, of the given, of the transcendental object equals x, some notion of unconditioned otherness.

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And by virtue of this, in fact, all of these theories of idealism actually say something that is perfectly contradictory; namely, ‘I am all of reality, and I'm not.’ That the problem of things-in-themselves is always the acknowledgement of the failure of the fundamental idealist thesis, and it remains in a way — the meaning of that remains inadequately thought. So, the end of paragraph 238:

“Such a knowing is at the same time pronounced by the very principle of this idealism not to be a true knowing, for only in the unity of apperception lies the truth of knowing. The pure Reason of this idealism, in order to reach this ‘other’ which is essential to it, and thus is the in-itself, but which it does not have within it, is therefore thrown back by its own self on to that knowing which is not a knowing of what is true…”

This is just what he says in the *Introduction,* just that problem again that there's always the problem of unity apperception and an external thing.

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“…whether the Thing” — I love the fact, ‘the Thing’ — “is called an extraneous impulse, or an empirical or sensuous entity, or the Thing-in-itself, it still remains in principle the same, i.e. extraneous to that unity. This idealism,” he says, “is involved in this contradiction because it asserts the abstract Notion of Reason to be the True; consequently, reality directly comes to be for it a reality that is just as much not that of Reason, while Reason is at the same time supposed to be all reality. This Reason remains a restless searching and in its very searching declares that the satisfaction of finding is a sheer impossibility.”

The notion of the thing-in-itself, for Hegel is a version of the self-destruction of Reason. Now, this is consequential, shockingly, for the rest of the chapter, because, roughly, Hegel’s argument here is something about philosophical Reason is dumb — let’s get a better word than dumb — is thoughtless about the nature of its own failure. And it's thoughtless because we cannot see exactly why that failure comes about, how it comes about, what does it mean? And Hegel says we can do better here than think about philosophy. That what we ought to really look at is not the bald assertion 'I am all truth and all reality,’ but let's look at the actual scientific practices that try to demonstrate the truth of that proposition.

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That is, one of the things that Hegel wants to argue here is that the actual sciences — in a way, examining those sciences, or, let’s call it, the actual practice of reason in the various sciences, let's call it the work of reason, is higher than philosophy. Because rather than merely positing both completeness and the thing-in-itself, Reason sets to work demonstrating or proving it is at one with reality. And by seeing how Reason does this, and how it fails, we can gain actual insight into the meaning of that failure.

The thing is, what you get if you just go with 'this is the problem with things-in-themselves’ is the debate between Henry Allison and Paul Dwyer: ‘there is a thing-in-itself, there isn’t a thing-in-itself’ and it goes back and forth, and it will go on like that forever. Because it's an abstract philosophical argument without anything to rein it in, to condition it, to try to make sense of the problems. And Hegel is saying you're not gonna get anywhere if you follow that path. That philosophy has to be — and he's gonna say this over and over again in this book — non-philosophy, that is, a comprehension of the world and certain activities in the world, including epistemic and practical activities in order to make sense of itself.

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So rational activity seeks to prove itself through its activity, hence both for it and for us, that is, we philosophers who are looking on. To put it another way, natural consciousness, or the natural attitude, is now itself seeking to demonstrate the thesis that Reason is the absolute standpoint and the standpoint that gives warranted access to reality. And this obviously entails a change. Every time there's a change of chapters, there's a change of method. It’s one of the dizzying things about it.

And there’s a change of method because now rational activity itself, not theory, will work out its own presuppositions, which are given in the actual deeds of the rational individuals as they confront the world in their praxis, scientific practice, and we'll see later ethical praxis. That is, Reason itself in its actual practices — sorry I have a cold, so at some point my voice just may give out altogether. Reason itself is now in the business of constructing the relationship between mind and world. That these practical activities are doing that, and that there are certain versions of them that are self-evident.

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Which again, I think, it’s important when you think of Descartes and the piece of wax, that you realize this is an addendum to his scientific practice, that it just is Galileo's attempt to explain the mathematizability of nature. Both Galileo and Descartes were trying to work out the fitness between mind and world and to show that mind, in its mathematical reach, fitted a wholly mathematizable world.

I'm not gonna finish today, I can feel that. That was just an introduction. Any questions about that introduction, before I lay out the structure of the chapter, and then we'll have a little break?

Student: I’m kind of confused about the claims you made earlier about the Kantian and Fichtean program being one in which the transcendental subject and transcendental object relationship is what we want to keep and what we’ve forgotten is the history towards that combination. I think that's what's you said, but am I mistaken?

Bernstein: Not transcendental object.

Student: I mean, the concept of the object properly being delivered to us by way of the powers of transcendental subjects, but that’s just what transcendental objects are. Now I was trying to figure out what it would mean to try to do science and include the history to that point, to try to do mathematics as one who was aware of the history of mathematics and try to come up with a result.

Bernstein: No, the thought is this. What we're going to be looking at, to anticipate, is scientism. That is, what Foucault called, you know, the transcendental doublets. That each of the various sciences we want to look at — physics, biology, logic, psychology, physiognomy and then phrenology, that’s the structure of the chapter — each of them are themselves various attempts to give a totalizing account of the world. And Hegel’s thought is, that is, each of them — remember its Instinctive Reason — they’re not doing the history. The history is our tracing their attempts. That's where the history comes in.

So it's not that math should do its history. It's that we comprehend the meaning of Reason by charting the various attempts by the various sciences to demonstrate their rational adequacy, that is, to demonstrate in their own scientific practices that they are at one with reality. That’s the argument. So it’s that history. So what I have to show you, what I have to demonstrate for this chapter to work, is while following this path of sciences, we suddenly discover that we cannot make sense of the world as Reason by observing the world, that we can only make sense of the world through action.

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So the structure in this chapter is about the relationship between — again, so we’re right back to the problem of consciousness. So Observing Reason is the problem of consciousness, but now souped up into a structure of Reason. So, Observing Reason is souped-up consciousness. Why is it souped up? Because now its activity is now going to be the attempt, the explicit attempt — as we know all scientific reductionism is — to show that it is the truth of everything.

And it is in the nature of, let's call it, all the major sciences that at some moment one wants to say, ‘Yeah, the whole world is like that. We can understand everything through physics. We can understand everything through biology. We can understand everything through logic. We can understand everything through psychology.’ That each science wants to be the queen of all sciences, that is, the transcendental regulator of the meaning of being in general.

So what we're going to be doing is tracking the path — that’s the history that he's interested in — of those sciences in order to see why there is, let's call it, a remainder, where the remainder comes from. And he’s going to say, roughly, part of the Reason there is a remainder is because Reason here is contemplative or spectatorial, theoretical, and you cannot grasp your place in the world by observation. Reason cannot be truly observation. And then we'll move to a structure of activity, of making the world. It turns out we can’t make the world either. And then we’ll get to Spirit. And that will give us another problem of history.

So the history here is the history of the sciences. And so the history of Reason is the history of the sciences in their rational pursuits. And, Hegel’s claim is that's the history. Look, there's two histories: the history that we've already been through in the book — so on the one hand, there's a whole story about how we got where we are, and Fichte and Kant know nothing of that — and furthermore, they make nothing of this history of Reason. Does that help?

Student: Sort of. My confusion stems from the fact that it's not clear to me how Hegel helps himself to the assertion that particular science understands itself as a unifying of subject and object. Right? I mean, I take it they might say that this is a privileged manner of explaining everything, but that seems like a far step from saying that identifies subject and object as mathematical.

Bernstein: His claim would be, when they say ‘this explains everything,’ that’s what the identity of subject and object is. That’s one version of the thesis. Just like if you’re reading — it can drive you nuts — Davidson, and you’d think that first-order predicate calculus is the meaning of being. Otherwise he can't use Tarski in the way he does. Well, that's the section on logic. Why would someone say that?

So, the idea that Reason and reality are one is an indeterminate expression. We don't know what it means. It just means, at the moment, a certain confidence of what I’m calling an internal relation between rational activity, purposive activity, and some conception of the world. That there's a natural fitness. And how you articulate the fitness is your account of what the identity of thought and being is. So fitness itself is a kind of dummy term for all the various accounts.

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Okay, well that actually really says most of what I want to say, so I’ll be quick about the rest. The structure of the chapter has just three parts. The first part of Reason is this stuff on science, on Observing Reason, so I call that ‘discovering Reason in the world.’ The second part of the chapter is called, by Hegel, the actualization of rational self-consciousness through its own activity. And the claim here is that rational self-consciousness is constituted by the activity of individuals, not merely observing the world but by setting forth ideologies which are to guide their lives and to shape the world in accordance with Reason. That these ideologies are an attempt to make the world rational.

So, part one is about finding the Reason in the world through rational inquiry. The other is about making the world rational through acting on various principles. And the third part of the chapter is that individuality which takes itself to be real, in and for itself, is to be given now by social individuals in an already established order of society, fulfilling theirs and others’ needs and trying to devise or define a theoretical basis on which to make and test the laws of that society and that existence. So, in the last one, there is a society in which we're already in, we’re already in a interactive, cooperative set of arrangements, and what we're seeking for is finding out what laws we can use to regulate or test the laws that regulate our existence together.

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So roughly, the scientific view is going to be discovered as too passive. It’s the idea that we can merely discover the truth through rational inquiry. The second part of the chapter is going to be discovered to be too active. It's all about world-making. And Hegel is going to argue that Reason can neither be found (cannot be discovered) nor made (created), but it is given as an already existing framework and constructed through the determinant acts of a community of individuals. And that will be just the transition to Spirit itself.

[course mechanics]

[BREAK]

Let's see if I have enough voice left. As I indicated before, the first half of the chapter is on Observing Reason. It has six parts. First, nature and [inaudible]. Second, organic nature or biology. Third, logic — logic here is a purely formal inquiry into the forms of thought. Fourth, psychology, as an inquiry into active consciousness insofar as it shapes the world and is shaped by the world. Fifth, physiognomy. And finally, phrenology.

When I get to talk about physiognomy and phrenology, I am still in love with a short essay by Alasdair MacIntyre that's collected in the Stewart *Phenomenology of Spirit Reader*, called *Hegel on Faces and Skulls*. It's a terrific little essay.

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So the first half of the chapter on Observing Reason concerns Reason's attempt to intuit itself as actuality and find itself presently out there, as shaped in the thing. Which is to say that Reason cannot be satisfied with the mere mechanisms of the understanding. It wants to see that understanding exemplified in the structure of the world. And that finding itself everywhere in the world in accordance with pure reason is we would now think of as the project, to have a wholly naturalistic conception of man and world.

So in a way, all of these are a kind of version of a kind of generalized naturalism — you can think of it as a Columbian version of of what philosophy should be. In general, the idea is that Reason can come to feel at home in the world through the successful pursuit of scientific knowledge, by which the behavior of individuals is subsumed under categories and universal laws. So it holds generally to a mechanistic, law-like conception of reality, although the laws operate at various levels and for various types of objects and that will make a difference as we’ll see.

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In paragraph 241, Hegel anticipates an obvious problem, which is also going to be the conclusion of the chapter of Observing Reason, namely, that in mastering nature Reason meets itself as thing and not as self. And indeed as a static non-historical, non-spiritual thing, hence, as a skull. Phrenology is holding the truth between the relation between mind and the world just as nowadays people would say neuroscience. And it's not an accident that we should have disciplines now like neurophilosophy, which takes the science of the brain as the way of doing philosophy. Which is what makes the section on — and MacIntyre’s aware of this — the chapters on physiognomy, phrenology, although clearly dated in one way, absolutely relevant in another. And I'll say more about that when we get there. That he was really attacking those reductions programs.

Or, as I'll want to put the point when we get there, that when Reason treats itself as thing, it meets itself as already dead. But this is no accident, since what will finally be at issue here is the inadequacy of theoretical reason for comprehending us as practical and socio-historical beings.

[00:06:13]

Let me indulge myself. I’ve just been thinking about this but I’ve decided I’ll indulge myself earlier rather than later, and give an anticipation of that conclusion, not by looking at Hegel — and you’ll just have to tolerate this — but by looking at what's been obsessing me recently, namely W. G. Sebald's novel, *The Rings of Saturn*. And the opening section of *The Rings of Saturn* is exactly the problem that we are examining. And I want to say a word about that, because if I was forced to it, or one of the things I'm tempted to say is, Sebald is trying to write a post-Holocaust phenomenology of mind. That’s certainly one way of reading Sebald. A natural history of destruction, right, that’s one of the titles of one of his books.

Well, I won't go through the complicated series of things that have happened in the first four or five pages, except that Sebald is interested for various reasons in Sir Thomas Brown, and had been told that the skull of Thomas Brown was in the very hospital where he had been taken after having a nervous breakdown. And after recording this fact, Sebald suddenly says that in January 1632, while Brown was in Amsterdam pursuing his own studies of the human body, there took place the public dissection of one Adriaan Adriaanszoon, also known as Aris Kindt, who was a petty thief of the City of Amsterdam who had been hanged for misdemeanors an hour or so earlier.

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Now, this sounds puzzling but you actually all know about this already, because this is the dissection that is recorded in Rembrandt's great painting *The Anatomy Lesson*. You all know that painting? So, Dr. Tulp dissecting the arm of Aris Kindt. Now Sebald draws our attention to two features of the painting. First, that Dr. Tulp's colleagues are looking not at the dissected arm of Kindt's, but rather — if you can remember, the observers, they're not looking at, they're looking out. What they're looking at, at the end of Kindt's feet, is, I think we're meant to assume, an open anatomical atlas, “in which,” I’m quoting Sebald now, “the appalling facts are reduced to a diagram.” A schematic plan of a human being, such as envisaged by the enthusiastic amateur atomist Rene Descartes, who, there is reasonable evidence to assume, was actually there in the De Waag that morning attending that dissection. I won’t tell you how I know that.

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Second, after notting the oddity of the fact that the dissection is beginning with the offending hand, which is an odd place to begin a dissection. Usually you begin a dissection by taking out the intestines, getting rid of all the sloppy stuff, and only getting to the musculature and stuff later. Ignoring that, Sebald notes how grotesquely out of proportion the dissected hand is compared to the closed one, compared to the un-dissected one closer to us, and further, how anatomically the wrong way around it is. He says, ‘the exposed tendons, which ought to be those of the left palm, given the position of the thumb, are in fact those of the back of the right hand.’ Which leads to the inference that Rembrandt had transposed a diagram from presumably that same anatomical atlas. Sebald finds it inconceivable that this flaw was not intended.

He says, “the unshapely hand signifies the violence that has been done to Aris Kindt. It is with him, the victim, and not the Guild that gave Rembrandt his commission, that the painter identifies. His gaze alone is free of Cartesian rigidity. He alone sees the greenish annihilated body, and he alone sees the shadow in the half-open mouth over the dead man's eyes.” Sebald places Decartes in the operating theatre and hypothesizes that the anatomical atlas is of the kind that Decartes had envisaged.

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And I take it he does so for the sake of contrasting, let's say, the realism of science and the realism of art. That there is a more than a categorical or casual fierceness to Sebald's critique of Cartesianism. He says the following, “In his philosophical investigations, which form one of the principal chapters in the history of subjection, Descartes teaches that one should disregard the flesh, which is beyond our comprehension and attend to the machine within, to what can be fully understood, be made wholly useful for work, and in the event of any fault, either repaired or discarded. Though the body is open to contemplation, it is in a sense excluded.”

Sebald is placing his narrative in the context of the tradition of Dutch Realism, which he construes as determined not by verisimilitude, but by the quest for, let's call it, fidelity to the victim. Such realism must locate itself at the level of the flesh, at the level of actual bodies in their life and death. That is, not in the domain of the understanding, in which things can be mechanically grasped, controlled, subjected, repaired or discarded.

[00:14:27]

Doctor Tulp — and this is me not Sebald — is probing the flexor digitorum muscles, the muscles here, of Kindt’s left hand. Now, the thing about these muscles is he's trying to demonstrate that if you pull them, the dead fingers of the hand may be made to curl. And if you remember the painting, with his own hand Tulp is actually imitating that curl. And he's actually imitating what would happen,if he pulled the flexor digitorum muscles.

Now, the thought here is not only is it the case that Tulp is substituting his will for that of Kindt, but the movement of the living is being understood, his own movement is being understood, on the basis of the movement of the dead. So many, to use our Cartesian language, strings, and pulleys, and wires. So, the will — and this is the thought that I think Hegel's going to be getting at — the will of science here that moves the dead hand, and hence the will of science that tells us how the hand moves, is a mimesis of the dead.

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So science takes its model of the living human being from the dead human being, and then transposes it back onto the living human being. This is Adorno's thought that Enlightenment Rationalism is the mimesis of the dead. That is, you begin with the model of the thing, the dead thing, and use that as a way of modeling all reality. So that, what makes scientism, naturalism, inappropriate, is it begins with beings who are already dead, finds them comprehensible in their structure, and then projects it back onto the living. This is just the movement that leads Hegel to end the section on Observing Reason with a discussion of a skull as the true house, or the thing, that is, the true correspondence of the scientific way of understanding rational beings.

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Let me try to to look at least two or three of Hegel's arguments about how this is going to work out in his account. So the first section is on classification. And the thought that particulars can be understood by classifying them, by bringing them under natural laws. And that finally classification and experimentation, on their own, prove themselves to be inadequate. And Reason posits law-like relations and, as such, laws are again taken to be fundamentally rational, empirical. Hence, knowledge of at least physical nature — and here's the thought that Hegel is driving at — stands at some remove, indeed some massive remove, from empirical, sensuous reality.

That is, the problem of classification is it's an abstraction from concrete particulars and their sensuous character, and a bringing them under those laws, and therefore turns out to be at a great distance from their concrete, physical reality. Now, what drives this is that — what Hegel is interested in here in making this argument is that the observer is moving through these various stages from classification into abstract laws, because he is in search of an internal necessity to his practice. He wants to know, not just that we can classify, but that it's rational to classify the world this way. Not the mere fact of it, but we want to see the internal necessity of our practices of science.

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And the problem is that physics does not and cannot demonstrate the actual of existence of Reason as warranted, because — and here's the way I want to put it. Because physics, whether in Hegel's time or in our own, can never demonstrate the internal necessity of its mode of explaining reality, it is always possible to offer a nominalist, or instrumentalist, or operational, conception of physics. That is, for every claim that physics grasps reality how it truly is, there's someone else who's going to say, ‘No, no, physics is just the instrument we use to to manipulate reality,’ or ‘Laws belong to the understanding and the only thing that's really real are the entities themselves.’ Kind of Nancy Cartwright's view. [inaudible] will say, ‘It's just correlations at the instrumental level.’

Put another way, physics always needs philosophy to demonstrate not that it works — it obviously works, we send people to the moon — but that it's fully rational. And internal to that philosophical reflection on physics, it always empties out into a debate between various schools of the understanding of science: some rationalist, some empiricist, some realist, and then some wildly nominalist ones.

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The reason this occurs, Hegel argues, is that — the reason why physics will always be in this position is that physics will always be conditioned by the observer's approach to the world. That is, in some way, science always constitutes its object in a certain way, say as mathematizable. And secondly, that it will always be faced by the presence of variables or matters and their relations. So physics is always going to, to put it again in a simple way, physics can always account for the world but can never account for its relation to the world. That is, can never account for its own truthfulness. And therefore, in a certain sense, there is always the rationality of physics is overshadowed by a kind of irrationality.

Student: So Heisenberg kind of put Hegel into practice.

Bernstein: Absolutely. Absolutely. [indaudible]. That relation of conditionality show that there's no particular notion of observation, but yeah by observing we constitute and therefore fracture it, and therefore don't rationally comprehend it in itself. That's certainly one version of it.

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Student: But isn't that just the same underlying, you know, genesis and validity never coincide?

Bernstein: Right. Well, in physics. I mean, it's not gonna be an accident — remember the question is: how do we best understand ourselves and our practices? And the claim here is, not that there's anything wrong with science, it's that science — physics in this case — cannot be used as a transcendental, right, for understanding the world in itself. That the very nature of physics, as it were, makes it always a local phenomena and never a transcendental.

So of course, if you're a crazy naturalist, you're gonna try to get around this by various theories about reductionism. Reductionism is trying to, as it were, squeeze out all those remainders. But that's what's at stake in those practices. So his claim here is simply — and of course it makes, you know, it's interesting that both in the 17th century and then in our own, that physics was used as the universal science.

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After all, think about how Locke even begins the inquiry. ‘There have been these master builders, Newtons, and so on.’ And what are we doing, underlabor? What's underlabor mean? We make the intelligibility accord with the results of physics. That’s exactly Locke's project. We have to translate what knowledge means, everything, perception means, so it is compatible with [inaudible] and the laws of physics. So it will not be a surprise that physics fails. And he's gonna say something similar about biology. So, let me say a word about biology we'll stop there.