Hegel POS Lecture #29: Conclusion — Absolute Spirit —The Chapter on Religion: Substance Becomes Subject — 5.9.2007

0:03

So what I need to do today is a schematic reading of religion, absolute knowing and specular proposition. And schematic in the sense that I will be trying to give you a way in which to read it and not obviously provide all the details — details you can find in lots of other places — but I'll give you a framework, which I think is distinctive, and which will carry on, if it's convincing, from the way in which we concluded the section on spirit and the account of forgiveness. So forgiveness is going to be key to absolute knowing.

0:57

But in order to do that, I have to first say something about religion, which I'm going to spend a bit of while on. Those of you who were are at the Taylor Fest will already have some indication of what the argument will look like. Since really the argument the last three days was: Taylor wants to insist that the distinction between immanence and transcendence is non-sublatable. And, of course, Hegel's great accomplishment is to deconstruct the distinction of dualism between immanence and transcendence to make that idea go dead for us. And that's what I want to try to convince you that that idea should go for us. And once it goes dead, then everything changes.

1:55

So, the transition to religion can make one wonder about what Hegel's commitments are, especially his references to absolute spirit. In his mature system, he will distinguish between subjective spirit, objective spirit, and absolute spirit. And although he doesn't quite have those distinctions operative yet, they are implicit in The Phenomenology. Subjective spirit equals roughly the human being as both a natural being — Hegel's idea of the philosophy of mind including sense, imagination, consciousness, even self-consciousness — and as an individual and a human being as possessing reason. Objective spirit is the human being in and as history, and because history for Hegel is fundamentally political history or the history of freedom, then it will include his philosophy of history and his political philosophy.

3:26

Finally, is the notion of absolute spirit. And absolute spirit comes in three forms — religion, art, and philosophy — corresponding roughly to the good, the beautiful, and the true. And those are the three forms in which we become aware of ourselves; that is, they are each reflective comprehensions on the meaning of objective spirit. That is, they're not separate objects. They're about reflection on the meaning of the fact of our life as historical and political beings. So they do not belong to our life in the world, but they are a systematic representation in comprehension of our being in the world. So, spirit becomes conscious — they are all forms in which spirit becomes aware of itself as spirit, although that's not what they think they're doing. I'll say a word about that.

5:02

In the *Phenomenology*, the notion of absolute spirit has not yet been worked out in detail, but what he argues is fairly analogous. Namely, spirit, Hegel wants to argue, is absolute if and only if it is unconditioned. And if it's unconditioned, then it is no longer bounded by any external reality, there are no things-in-themselves outside of it. So there cannot be either things-in-themselves or God or noumena or leprechauns, whatever. Everything belongs within the world of spirit.

And hence, there can no longer be a contrast between the life of spirit and anything else. Or again, going back to our very first lecture, there cannot be a dualism between world and conceptual scheme. That those two things must be seen as different sides of the same coin.

6:21

Now, at the very least, it can be argued that historically, say in 1806, the opposition between something that is sheerly transcendent, namely some notion of God, and something utterly immanent, say the life of human beings in history, still lingered, still remained. And therefore, Hegel has to work at that remnant thought, since it still burdens consciousness. Now, whether or not we feel that a secular philosophy must be answerable to the claims of religious consciousness will depend on whether we feel there are any religious claims remaining.

So Nietzsche, for example, still felt the tug of those claims. He thought about the death of God. It was alive for him. And therefore thought further that the tug of those claims and the tug of the claims of a scientific single truth were the same thing. So he felt rationally required to undo those claims.

7:55

Now, I mention Nietzsche here simply to make the point about answerability, and hence why a philosopher may feel compelled to address religion as such. Hegel's background made the thought of the requirement that an immanent secular philosophy answer those claims feel necessary to him. Furthermore, at least in his case, since his entire philosophy is about all the false forms of consciousness that have been truly formative, educative, for our modern self-consciousness — that is, the necessary historical conditions that allowed us to get here — then of course, he has to include an account of religion.

9:09

Now, the formative character, or role of religious consciousness, has, at least in part, been dealt with earlier; namely, in the chapter on the unhappy consciousness, for example. It got overcome there when we saw the story of the priest becoming Luther becoming Descartes. And again in the account of faith and pure insight, when we saw those two claims were the same. Hence here the emphasis — so in those accounts, what Hegel says is, what was dealt with was the individual having God as its object. And in those cases, he showed how that object consciousness was sublated.

What we have not dealt with, Hegel thinks, is what I'm going to call religion proper. Religion proper turns out to be something [other] than awareness of the transcendent God. That's what I have to explain: what's the difference between religion proper and awareness of a transcendent God?

10:33

Further, just just to have one more problem to the menu of problems. As Westphal, in his book, notes on page 187, we still don't have a sufficient account of our relation to nature as a whole. That is, the natural world as such. About the natural world, we know it, or spirit knows it, through natural science. And science, we now know that — we know that in science knowing nature, it does not know the absolute. That was the story of observing reason.

11:40

The story of observing reason was trying to claim knowing nature is absolute. We saw that didn't happen. But of course, that was already common knowledge in Hegel's era. That was Kant's great insight. That's Kant's critique of scientism. That however complete the Newtonian worldview is, it's not self-sufficient. For example, it can't make sense of the fact that you have science. So unless you have a wholly naturalized epistemology, etcetera, etcetera, none of that is going to work. So that leaves the question of nature still hanging.

12:22

So, further, while spirit knows itself as spirit — that's what more or less happens at the end of the chapter on spirit — it does not yet know that this knowledge is self-sufficient, that there's nothing outside of it. So spirit as spirit must come to the knowledge — that is, knowledge of nature cannot be absolute knowledge. And further, it must come to a recognition of itself as absolute. That is, only spirit's knowledge of spirit can be absolute knowledge. That's where we're headed.

13:19

Now, from all this is I take it as almost a gimme that when Hegel says that ‘spirit is the I equals we and we that is the I,’ that that's it. He means it. There's nothing else. So, the task is to make the claim of religions in their development accord with that claim. That is, to show how the development of religious forms occurs in a way in which that thesis — namely ‘spirit is the I equals we and the we equals I’ — is determinant of the development of religion itself. Which is roughly what happens in the chapter on religion.

That is, there is a movement from natural religion to art religion to manifest or revealed religion. And in revealed religion, what occurs literally is that God becomes man, that man, Jesus, dies and returns as spirit: the Holy Ghost equals the congregation of believers equals the community of conscientious selves. That, in brief, is the argument.

15:34

Religious knowledge, Hegel says, is self-knowledge that does not know itself to be that. That is, religious knowledge is a form of self-consciousness that mistakes itself about itself. So, religion always conceives of God as absolute, which is to say, it always conceives of God as being-for-substance. So, the path we have followed up to now, we have been tracking the way in which subjective experience — sense certainty — turns out not to have an object it's grounded in, but discovers that it is self-grounding. So that subject becomes substance.

So, the individual subject doesn't know the substance, isn't aware of substance, it becomes aware of itself as the substance of the world, as spirit. Which is why when we began the chapter on spirit, just to remind you, Hegel defined spirit with all the predicates of substance. It's its un-self-sufficient, its unmoving, it's the ground of our life. He gave us all the same predicates that one usually gives substance. So that's the discovery we've made thus far.

17:38

In this chapter, we are in a sense starting again, because we have this — I'm now suggesting — lingering problem. We have this awareness of a sphere in which we seem to be aware of substance that doesn't accord fully with this story. So we need to read again, start from the very beginning — hence Hegel starts with the religions of light — and show how substance — that is, the logical unfolding of the idea of religions — turns out to show that God is not any different than the terminus of the previous story. So he's going to say the history of religion and the history of spirit converge on the very same I, namely ourselves as self-determining historical creatures, as a community of the living and the dead.

19:03

And that's exactly what Hegel says in paragraph 75. In paragraph 761, he says,"God is attainable only in pure speculative knowledge, and he is…” — *he is* — “…only in that knowledge, and he is simply that knowledge itself, for he is spirit." God's esse is conceptumpi. His essence is his concept. And his concept is just the concept of spirit. And God is only in that knowledge, and he is simply that knowledge itself, for he is spirit.

20:08

Now, I like Westphal's way of making this claim. Religious knowing is a projection, but it is not an illusion. God is a product of human activity, but that does not mean God is a figment of the imagination as the Enlightenment thought. In cashing out this claim, Westphal follows Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. And it's not an argument that any serious debate about religion just has to go to Durkheim. This is why Taylor kept saying, "I'm a neo-Durkheimian...but neo!" Kept trying to push Durkheim away.

21:03

Taylor knows better than anyone that the Durkheimian thesis was first put forward by Hegel. So that what Durkheim and Hegel agree is that religion is neither superstitious belief nor pseudoscience nor a package of illusions. There is something deep about religion, and what is deep about it is that it has been — and this is what needs to make sense of — it has been an essential element of nearly all human social experience. And it has always been conceived of as the foundation of that experience.

21:59

Indeed, religion has always been — and it says so in the meaning of the word — it has considered the connectedness of human beings. That is, religion has always been the way in which human beings have thought the meaning of the social. So, it is a re-presentation, a representation, of the ground of all human experience. And hence, the old famous dictum: you can tell a people by the gods they keep. That is, the way people think of God is how they think of themselves, because God is their fundamental self-interpretation.

22:56

Here's Durkheim, passage *Ideally Love* from *The Elementary Forms*, this is quoted on page 197 in Westphal. "Religion ceases to be an inexplicable hallucination and takes a foothold in reality. In fact, we can say that the believer is not deceived when he believes in the existence" — and this is the great phrase — "when he believes in the existence of a moral power upon which he depends and from which he receives all that is best in him. This power exists: it is society. It is true that he is wrong in thinking that this increase of vitality is the work of a power in the form of some animal or plant. But this error is merely in regard to the letter of the symbol by which this being is represented, and not in regard to the fact of its existence."

24:16

Not false in regard to its existence. I should remind you that Marx said that the ontological proof of God's existence is true. Same thought. "Behind these figures and metaphors, be they gross or refined, there is a concrete and living reality. Thus, religion is a system of ideas with which individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members, and the obscure but intimate relation which they have with it." Let's simply call this the 'Durkheim Hypothesis.'

25:11

Given what I said about the structure of the chapter on religion, we can now say that the process through which finite spirit becomes — the process is one in which finite spirit becomes more and more aware of its identity with absolute spirit. That is, the distance between the sacred and the profane becomes smaller and smaller. And there is a continuing work of making the transcendent immanent.

And saying all this is equal to saying that as the concept of the whole evolves — and that's what substance is: our concept of the whole. So, the history of religion is the history of the evolution of our thinking about the meaning of the whole. And Hegel takes the history of religion deeply seriously. As this evolves, then the community become more and more aware about its absolute role and status in that concept. So let's say that the notion of congregation becomes more and more emphatic so that the content of the absolute and the being of a certain type of community become almost identical.

27:14

Nonetheless, as long as we think that absolute spirit is causing that advance in some independent way — and that's what the Pope thinks — we have not reached the absolute concept of it. What we need to discover is that the movement of God in the world is our self-movement. From this, it follows that the chapter on religion should not be read as, as is sometimes claimed, the logical biography of the absolute spirit in its otherness. That's the religious reading of Hegel. But rather, it should be read as the community's recollection and repossession of its experience of itself *qua* community, *qua* spirit. So, it is a continual probing, an attempt to come to grips with who we are, and how we are to orient ourselves in the world, given who we are. And this is because spirit cannot subsist at all in simple otherness.

28:57

Again, religious knowledge is spirit's self-knowledge that does not know itself to be that. And there are, I should say, crazy nomological ways for reading that. So, Whitehead in *Process and Reality* has this idea that God needs man in order to know himself. So he — I forget how it's worded — but He kind of deposits Himself and then He gathers Himself back up through human history. So these are the ways — which, is kind of fabulous. And this is what people have to do in order to try to make sense of Hegel and try to hold on to some crazy notion of transcendence. But it's that crazy.

29:56

Well, how does religion fail to know itself? Seems a good question. And Hegel's answer, over and over again, is that religion fails to know itself because religious knowing is picture-thinking or representation. So the crux of the matter for Hegel is — so, one of the things when we think about the whole of the *Phenomenology* is it's a critique of representational thought. And I'll say more about that as we go on.

And then we have to figure out what is representational thought, and why are they saying such nasty things about it. But at any rate, and that's going to be the ultimate stakes in the shift from religion to absolute knowing. The shift is going to be from representational thinking to conceptual. Those are Hegel's ways of describing the difference, what's at stake here. And I'll have to convince you that there's a way of thinking about conceptual thinking that is not the same as representational thinking. And that turns out to be a bit tricky, but doable, so I claim.

31:31

Okay, let me skip the history of religion. Or at least get right down to the emergence of Christianity. Here's a puzzle that every reader of Hegel has. The section on art religion is really the history of Greek religious thought. And Greek religious thought, as we know, starts out by portraying the gods looking pretty much like you and me with little extra powers. And they behave badly like we do, and so on and so forth. And then the history of Greek thought really devolves until finally in Greek comedy, as it were, is looks like the game is over. That is, there is no difference between God and man. That's Aristophanes' kind of endless comic point. The actor is just like ourselves, and God becomes man, full stop, end of religion.

31:51

Well if religion died in ancient Greece why do we have another 100 pages or so to go? And and why do we need Christianity? What went wrong there, and what's the extra content in Christianity that didn't come out of, let's call it, Greek humanism that became Roman humanism? Put it another way, we already as Westerners already achieved a fully secular world at the end of the Hellenic era, and that got transmitted in various forms into the Roman world — unsteadily, but it did. Hence, the great Roman philosophies that have so influenced us like stoicism. Why do we need another story? What's missing? And doesn't the fact, one could argue, that Hegel turns back to Christianity show that he's really a theist after all? That's the real worry.

34:14

Well, Stern, in his commentary, seems to me to state the issue nicely. In the chapter on religion, what we see happening is the thought that absolute being is substance. And via the unfolding of natural religion and art religion, we actually do see the claim emerge that the self is absolute being, which gives priority to humanity as having the kind of subjectivity that God was seen to lack. Well, what's wrong with the thesis 'the self is absolute being'? Let's call the thesis, 'the self is absolute being,' the secularization hypothesis. God becomes man. The problem with it is that the substance of religion itself disappears. That is, the claim that says there is a content to religion and to religious thought that the secularization hypothesis in the form in which it comes down to us in Greek humanism belies.

36:16

Well, this can take a lot of different forms. One of which is the crazy form, and the one that even Stern seems to suggest is the crazy form I just suggested; namely, God achieving self-consciousness through humanity. And the idea of God achieving self-consciousness through humanity, you may say, balances the idea of transcendence with the idea of immanence. But that idea, I think, is question-begging, since it still leaves ambiguous what the word God is doing here. Therefore, I think Hegel's thought is that there is an excess to religion. And the excess to religion that is not thought in the Greek humanism is exactly the Durkheim hypothesis. Namely, that we are absolutely dependent on a moral power from which we receive all that is best in us. Namely, our society, which is both free and self-determining, and simultaneously, a community of the living and the dead.

37:59

So I construe the account of manifest religion as the attempt to reveal, first, the need or necessity for seeking out that excess generally. And then to show that, correctly understood, that the correct interpretation of Christianity is its own implicit announcement and vindication of the Durkheim hypothesis. That is, Hegel really thinks that Christianity did everything but become a sociological account of itself. It couldn't have done more and remained a religion. It announced the Durkheim hypothesis itself. It just didn't quite recognize that it had done so.

39:04

And the reason why, again, is that in religion, the recognition remains only implicit. Because, *qua* religion, it remains bound to picture-thinking. Hence, to comprehend religion philosophically is to make explicit religion's implicit self-recognition and hence to pass beyond the picture-thinking that keeps it back. So to overcome religion is a matter of making the implicit explicit, and it is to translate religious thought into conceptual thought. So what I want to do in the next 25 minutes or so is say something about that. That is: the need for an excess; Christianity's own recognition of the Durkheim hypothesis; and then say something about picture-thinking.

40:22

In paragraph 750, Hegel argues that previously we saw that we advanced from *sittlichkeit* — that is, the Greek polis — to the abstract legal person of Roman law. Moving from class Greece to the emergence of the Roman person. That's the same transition as the transition from — that he is making here — from the end of Greek religion to the emergence of Christianity. It's another version, a different version, of that story. So the individual of comedy we know becomes the Roman legal person. That's the fate of that comic individual.

41:30

Now, the problem is this. The formal recognition of the person as having rights lacks the substance of the Greek polis. So, the problem of the polis, what the whole deal about Antigone was all about, is that it was community without individuality. Poor Antigone was trapped in her role. And, that in order to solve the problem of the reduction of the self to its role, it had to be freed from its natural determination. So, we needed an account of individuals that was non-natural, hence the notion of the Roman legal person. So, we move out of this notion, this ideal notion of community and move — are going to move — to Roman right, where the notion of Roman right is individuality without community.

42:56

It is therefore not an accident that Rome could only think the notion of community in the notion of [inaudible], another individual. It could not, as it were, wrap its mind — having a notion of right going, it never could really think of Rome in other than individualistic terms. Now, what Hegel says here is this. That in this movement, from community without individuality to individuality without community, he says, the reality of the ethical spirit of *sittlichkeit* is lost. Reality of *sittlichkeit* is lost, entailing nihilism and disenchantment, even the unhappy consciousness. He tells roughly that story in paragraphs 751 through 753.

44:14

Now, I can't underline enough the phrase 'the reality of the ethical spirit is lost.' Since it is exactly that which Hegel sees as the task of Christianity. It must restore the reality of ethical spirit. So the difficulty — so this is how the two sides of Western history, the Greco-Roman side and the Christian side, really require one another. For out of the Greco-Roman inside we get the strong conception of individuality and rights and Republicanism, all of which are fundamental. But those ideas, Hegel thinks, are done in a nihilistic vein because they do not have an adequate theory, conception, of community. And we saw that they lacked adequate sense of community in the French Terror. That's exactly what they led to when not buoyed by their Christian other. So it's not an accident that Hegel thinks that Christianity has a role to play in the formation of an adequate, secular humanism.

45:50

Now, in order for this to happen, religion must unfold internally, so to speak — that is, of its own accord — in such a way that absolute being itself takes itself to recognize that substance is subject. That is, Hegel thinks that there must be an internal logic of religious development in which religion's own self-rationalization — that is, its own account of rationalizing its own beliefs internally, for which you can read the 20-odd volumes of Max Weber. That's all he wrote about. That was his theory of everything. Namely, how religious rationalization is Western rationalization. Hegel doesn't disagree with that thought. How religion refines itself to recognize that substance is subject.

47:30

So — and why that matters is exactly because it cannot come out of a wholly external criticism. That is, religion cannot, as it were, disappear because people outside of it think it's incoherent, that it's superstition. It has to be part of its own logical unfolding that, as Nietzsche would put it, our highest values devalue themselves. That is, trans-value themselves into something else.

48:10

So, step 2 in the argument, Hegel has to eventually unlock the spiritual and ethical content of Christianity. And we kind of know in [inaudible] schematic way I've already suggested, it's going to be God the Father equals the universal; God the Son is going to be the particular; and the Holy Spirit is going to be the synthesis of those two. So, for Hegel, the crucial elements of the Christian story — the incarnation of God himself dispossessing himself of his universality and depositing himself in the world in a living and mortal being who will suffer and die on the cross, and that there be a death and a resurrection and that resurrection will be, after descending back and returning, as the Holy Spirit. That logic, Hegel thinks, unpacks into the whole immanence of subject becoming collective subject, spirit.

50:15

We can dig out the structure in Hegel's interpretive program by looking at — and I just want to look at a few passages. Paragraph 780 to 784 is where most of the fascinating stuff happens, although the whole passage on revealed religion I find thrilling. But I wouldn't use me as a Geiger counter for thrillingness.

50:50

So what he's going to do in these paragraphs, among other things, is: deny the fall, posit an overcoming of good and evil and claim that that overcoming of good and evil recalls explicitly the relationship between judging and acting consciousness. So, Paragraph 780, which is an endless paragraph, and it's about halfway through on page 472, he says: "In the picture thought, there is depicted the reconciliation of the divine being with its other in general, specifically with the thought of it, evil. If this reconciliation is notionally expressed by saying that it consists in the fact that evil is in itself the same as goodness, or again, that the divine being is the same as nature...."

So let's be clear that — so let's get all the equivalence that this [writing on board] is going to be judging consciousness, of course, by now, and this is supposed to be good, and this is going to be acting consciousness. So Christ and Antigone are the same and they are evil, and evil equals nature as a whole. What else is the fall? That's what it is to deny that we have to go to heaven after all. But there's supposed to be the day of judgment where all this is gathered back up and made good. Hence Hegel taking this story very literally.

52:44

"If this reconciliation is notionally…” — blah, blah, blah — “…Being is the same as Nature in its whole extent, or that Nature separated from the divine Being is simply nothing—we must regard this as an unspiritual way of talking and one that is necessarily bound to give rise to misunderstandings. If Evil is the same as Goodness, then Evil is just not Evil, nor Goodness Good: on the contrary, both are suspended moments—Evil in general is self-centered being-for-self, and Goodness is what is simple and without a self." That's the translation into judging and acting consciousness. "When thus expressed in terms of their Notion, their unity is at once evident..." And it goes on in obvious ways.

53:39

So that this way of taking the burden out of the fall — and this argument carries through to paragraph 784 where we actually find Hegel hammering home his version of the Durkheim hypothesis. So, right at the beginning of paragraph 784, he says, "The knowledge of Nature as the untrue existence of Spirit, and this immanently developed universality of the Self is in itself the reconciliation of Spirit with itself." And then dropping down several sentences. "The death of the divine Man, as death, is abstract negativity, the immediate result of the movement which ends only in natural universality. Death loses this natural meaning in spiritual self-consciousness, i.e. it comes to be its just stated Notion; death becomes transfigured from its immediate meaning, *viz*. the non-being of this particular individual, into the universality of the Spirit who dwells in His community, dies in it every day, and is daily resurrected."

55:22

So, Hegel's claim here is that Christianity, understood — moving very quickly now — in this way, leads to the idea that the coming into existence of God's individual self-consciousness as a universal self-consciousness is the same as religious community. So, when Hegel claims that God the Father and God the Son are abstract moments — neither are actual until the emergence of spiritual community — he's thus claiming that religion is seeking the thought that community is, Hegelianly, the truth of those two moments. So, this notion of Holy Spirit is that something about religious thought needed to make those internal developments in order to be coherent for itself.

56:48

Essentially, then, Hegel is arguing that the divine being is a form akin to judging consciousness, that the Christ is akin to acting consciousness and that the mutual recognition between them is, his phrase now, ‘intuitively apprehended’ by religious consciousness as the coming of the Holy Spirit, which, in fact, is what Hegel says explicitly in paragraph 786.

57:34

In paragraph 787, although there is a return out of picture-thinking, in principle, and communal self-recognition, Hegel goes on to say that the community is not yet perfected in this, its self-consciousness. And that picture-thinking still burdens communal spirituality, because it is yet to achieve pure thought. About this Hegel is emphatic.

He says, "The community does not possess the consciousness of what it is...substance has here succeeded in becoming absolute self-consciousness, [but this remains] an 'other' for the devotional consciousness." So Christian consciousness is simply literally confused about its own fundamental commitments. And it's confused not in the sense of having contradictory beliefs, but confused because it expresses those beliefs in a representational way.

59:02

And the crux of that representational way is sometimes said, by people like Steve Houlgate, that the content of religion and the content of — Christian religion and the content of the Hegelian philosophy are the same but simply expressed differently. And I am resisting that. And I'm resisting it because the idea that religious expression of it is true except for its form, namely representational form rather than conceptual form — that's the argument: same content, different form, one is representational, the other conceptual — is an utterly anti-Hegelian claim, because it assumes that we can have the same content, different form. That the content is indifferent to its form — it can be expressed in this way expressed in that way — and it just doesn't matter.

But of course, Hegel's thought is exactly the opposite. That what matters most of all is that you can't get the content right, until you've got, as it were, the form right. And hence, the drive here — so form cannot be mere form, for Hegel. That's his critique of Kant, over and over again. We're gonna see it's his critique of Kant in absolute knowing.

1:01:09

So what makes picture-thinking picture-thinking and what's the problem? What picture thinking does is to think the reconciliations that Hegel is claiming are implicitly already there as existing in some beyond. And the notion of beyond becomes in Christianity simply the future; that is, what we Christians know is: in some indefinite future, on the day of judgment, we will all be a resurrected body and soul. We will be returned and we will be united, finally, with God.

1:02:14

So the actual world for the Christian believer and hence, of course, all the crazy forms of American — because American religion is all about getting redemption now. All that rapture stuff. They just can't wait for the day of judgment to happen when they can ascend, drinking a milkshake right there at Wendy's and then zap up. And they never say — I know the cars get left behind, but they never say anything about the milkshake. Stay or go? I spent three years in Tennessee. Scary stuff.

1:02:56

But the thought here is, the problem then is going to be the notion of beyond as the notion of future. So the world still awaits transfiguration. But insofar as it still awaits transfiguration, it still does not have the shape of spirit. It still is inwardly disrupted. So what makes picture-thinking inadequate is its temporal schema, its idea of a discrete past, present, and future. And hence, the idea of — borrowing a phrase from Michael Murray — the idea of the Christian time design, in which God's selfhood is a past event and reconciliation occurs in a distant future, and the present is lost somewhere between manifestation and reconciliation

1:04:08

So Christianity is actually structured by a really very traditional idea of the present as a moment of lostness between, of course, Eden and Eden 2 or manifestation and reconciliation. So, and here's the hypothesis I'm going to follow after the break: namely, what makes representational thought representational is just temporal understanding. And therefore to get past representational thought and become conceptual, what we require is a different way of thinking about time. Okay, let's have a quick break, since I've said a lot very quickly and a deep breath is necessary, and we will then carry on.

[BREAK]

Religion, I've been arguing is always — in Christianity, in the manifest religions of the three monotheistic religions — the story of God revealing himself and a promise that takes place in some infinite beyond. To overcome religion is to overcome representational habits of thought. And representational thought occurs because, within it, the notion of time is taken as having a certain temporal — time is taken as having a certain form: namely, a discrete past, present and future. Hence, in order to have absolute knowing, we require a different notion of time and history.

1:20

My idiosyncratic thesis is that the standpoint of absolute knowing is the standpoint of forgiveness brought to self-consciousness. Let's see if I can make that stick. Because if I can make that stick, then all the rest is just details. Why is forgiveness necessary for the *Phenomenology* as a whole? Well, we read in paragraph 19 that, after talking about the notion of serious otherness, that "the life of God and divine cognition may well be spoken of as a disporting of Love with itself; but this idea sinks into mere edification, and even insipidity, if it lacks the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labor of the negative.” The claim here is about serious otherness. And the notion of serious otherness is in part a claim about negativity. But I want to suggest it's even stronger than that.

3:16

How serious? How seriously other are these others? The eruption of otherness, for Hegel, must be a rending of a kind which belongs to the pain of dismemberment. A rendering which no mere self-assertion can heal and that hence requires what he calls 'the patience and the labor of the negative,' the work of the negative. Let's call it a working through of the negative or the working through of a traumatic history.

4:20

The history we've read is in fact a history of trauma. And in this way, the *Phenomenology* is about nothing else than the negative, for it is about nothing else but the various ways in which human beings have posited particular objects or particular forms of life as absolute and, in each and every case, have come to ruin. It is those ruins, those scattered remains, that slaughter-bench, which has been our object. My contention is that forgiveness is the way in which we handle the negative. Why? Well, the simplest reason as to why is to say that the standpoint of forgiveness is, in the most naive sense, a non-judgmental standpoint, a non-moralizing standpoint, a standpoint of universal acceptance.

6:15

So, when I forgive you, I am already going beyond good and evil. Forgiveness is the denial that morality is ultimate. So, there is something about forgiveness which is amoral. Let's put it this way, rather than reacting to evil, we let it unfold. Okay, how do we think about this?

7:08

Part of the problem here is our first thought is to think that forgiving, as I already suggested last week, is a form of forgetting. And that therefore, there's something anti-historical, against memory, about forgiveness. And there's a beautiful expression of, let's call it this critique of forgiveness, at the end of Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, where the character who — *A Thousand Acres* is a retelling of *King Lear*, only in this story, Regan and Goneril are the heroines and Lear is the villain.

And the character who Regan [inaudible] is on her deathbed. She says roughly, 'My life has been a failure. I have failed as a wife, I have failed as a mother, I failed as a teacher, I failed as a farmer. I failed in the way in which every one of the women in our family have failed. My life in that sense has been nothing but failure.’ She carries on.

8:26

'So, all I have is the knowledge that I saw. That I saw without being afraid and without turning away and that I didn't forgive the unforgivable. Forgiveness is a reflex for when you can't stand what you know.' Forgiveness is a reflex for when you can't stand what you know. 'I resisted that reflex. That's my sole, solitary, lonely accomplishment.' It's hard. And I take it that that Smiley thinks that's what this novel is. This novel is that unforgiving. And Amery in his chapter on resentment, in *At the Limits of the Mind*, argues similarly. Forgiveness is forgetfulness, and he will not forgive.

9:47

Clearly, I'm using a different notion of forgiveness. And I need to explain why. And I get it from Kristeva. I mean, I think it's there in Hegel, it's there in everything I've been arguing. But Kristeva in *Black Sun*, in a chapter on Dostoevsky, is the first person I've seen to work out this thought. And she thinks of forgiveness as the standpoint of the analyst, with respect to the analysand.

She says, 'I recognize you,' — this is her definition of forgiveness — 'I recognize you, with all your faults. And I accept you with all your faults, so that those faults are not faults, and so you start again.' So just as we said last week, if faults are faults — that is, we moralize them — then there's no beginning, then we're stuck in the past, then we're stuck in in melancholy. So something about forgiveness is necessary for, it allows for, renewal and beginning.

11:17

So Kristeva thinks that to be a psychoanalyst is to take up the standpoint of forgiveness. That is, a standpoint which accepts, or at least tries to understand and not moralize. She thinks of that standpoint as itself equivalent to the standpoint of the aesthetic or the beautiful, because the aesthetic or the beautiful allows everything to be its object and it tries to find a form in which to acknowledge it all. Again, beauty is non-judgement. So, literature, on her account, finds the human in all its strangest, scarred, mutilated, and broken forms. And form is going to be the way in which — form is going to be the way of presenting evil, presenting negativity, without judging it.

12:44

So on the handout I've given you, she says, at the bottom of page 206, after saying forgiveness is aesthetic. I mean, at the very top of the page, the sentence, which you don't have all of, she says, "That analytic listening that neither judges nor calculates, but attempts to untangle can reconstruct." Then she's going on to say, "Forgiveness, at the outset, constitutes a will, a postulate or scheme. Meaning exists. This is not necessarily a matter of a disavowal of meaning or a manic exaltation in opposition to despair, even if, in a number of ways, this motion may be dominant. Forgiveness, as a gesture of assertion and inscription of meaning, carries within itself, as a lining, erosion of meaning, melancholia and abjection. By including them, it displaces them. By absorbing them, it transforms them and binds them for someone else. There is meaning. This is an eminently transferential gesture that causes a third party to exist for him through another. Forgiveness emerges first, as the setting up of a form. It has the effect of an acting out a doing, a poesis."

14:50

On page 216, which you don't have, she says that "forgiveness gets past the notion of emotion exactly by becoming a form of writing. A form of writing that does not suppress or deny, but finds a way of acknowledging all that confronts it." So, the thought is that a certain kind of writing, absorbs and replaces the act of forgiveness as an emotional impulse with, let's call it, symbolic configuration. That is, that there's a transition from emotionally impulsive to forgive into a form of presentation of what requires forgiveness.

16:16

My thesis is simple: phenomenological writing implies a forgiving regard that is given by the accuracy and the perspicuity of the writing it demands and executes. What do I mean by a phenomenological regard? I mean the method that Hegel set out in the introduction. The method that says that we do not have to judge. That's how the *Phenomenology* started: we don't have to decide to judge what is the criteria. We do not have to decide what is good or evil ahead of time. We do not have to know what the meaning is ahead of time. Rather, we are going to adopt a method whereby consciousness evaluates itself and we observe.

17:37

So the method of the *Phenomenology*, which is set out in the introduction, contains two fundamental positionalities. Observing consciousness, the consciousness of the philosopher — or, if you wish, the analyst — and acting consciousness, without claiming absoluteness for either standpoint. So, I'm claiming that, from the very beginning of the book, the distinction between natural consciousness and observing consciousness has already been the structure of judging consciousness and acting consciousness with which the book ends. That the book has been, from the very beginning, about that relationship between Antigone and Creon. And that the entire structure of the *Phenomenology* can therefore be a self-movement that is nothing but the return of the repressed. That's just what pushes it on. The repressed keeps coming back.

19:14

So, the other movement: observing consciousness realizes that this process is a process which consciousness enacts on itself. And the job of observing consciousness is to give form to this process as a learning process. But it has to do so minimally, to use Kristeva's phrase of minimalism. By which I mean, it cannot take up the position of the omniscient narrator. It cannot operate as a *deus ex machina*. It cannot push the narrative on. Rather, it must let the narrative unfold via determinate negation. So determinate negation is the minimum of form that allows the other to appear without judgement, without moralizing, without positing. That's the other word for judging is positing, thinking beyond Fichte.

20:45

So, if this is right, then to adopt the phenomenological method, which, when we adopted it, we thought we were just adopting some version of transcendental idealism; namely, some notion of self-consciousness, where it sets up its own notion of truth and measures itself against. But it turns out, that to operate without dualism between natural consciousness and observing consciousness — to be a phenomenologist — we can now recognize, is to adopt the standpoint of forgiveness. In this respect, if forgiveness is, as I'm claiming, the absolute standpoint — the standpoint that gathers in all this history, writes it, lets it be — in this respect, the absolute standpoint has been with us from the beginning.

22:03

Because, from the beginning, you have agreed not to judge. You suspended your judgment, you suspended your capacity to determine, and you agreed to accept, which is to say, if you're analysts, to listen. And to listen no matter what was thrown up. And to give it form. Of course, it turns out that you also are natural consciousness.

22:48

So, we are taking the stance toward our own history of loss and one-sidedness, and we are coming to recognize that our own history is the history of our attempt to overcome finitude, loss and negativity. And, if you wish, the denial of the negative, the claim that there is no irredeemable loss, the denial of finitude — we can call all of that the history of metaphysics. So, the type of such a history, we know, is the cycle of revenge. Revenge, again, is the model of human action that does not accept loss, that thinks that every loss must be paid for, eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Metaphysics is melancholia, the refusal of loss.

24:05

If the overcoming of revenge is forgiveness, when it comes to self-consciousness, and revenge is a kind of moral melancholia, then the standpoint of forgiveness, when it comes to self-consciousness, must be the standpoint of mourning, of recollection, of a gathering in of all the dead. Which is just what Hegel says absolute knowing is. It's the picture gallery. It's the gathering up of the path we have already been through.

24:57

So philosophy cannot be philosophy and be just. To be philosophy, it must be beyond justice. Kristeva suggests that perhaps it's a fullness of justice, justice beyond justice. At any rate, it is certainly to claim that there is a fundamentally therapeutic aspect to the *Phenomenology*, because it is nothing but a working through of this history and an overcoming of melancholia and a learning to mourn.

25:47

The absolute, which recognizes this process, as mourning, occurs only now, and this is why Hegel says over and over again, that our time is a period of transition to a new era. That is, only now can history begin — that is, start anew —because up to now, roughly, we had the causality of fate. History occurring behind our backs. And we've not taken responsibility for that history, because we have denied that we are that history. And in denying that history, we cannot either go forward or backward, we can only repeat. Melancholia.

25:52

Absolute knowing, then, is a mourning of a kind and a kind of, of course, achievement. A recollection and working through of that past that has been formative for our coming aware of ourselves as historical beings. So that what we thought of as history out there — one thing happening after another — must now be perceived as recollection. That is, a recollecting of ourselves. That is, the recognition that I am this history, and that my possibilities of living are nothing but the possibilities that are deposited in that history, and that I would not be here without it.

28:03

So, the recollection is neither a possession nor disavowal, but literally a work of mourning. Absolute knowing, Hegel says, is not going to give us a new content, but the acknowledgement of everything that has occurred as a work of recollection from the standpoint of forgiveness. So, the way in which — [inaudible] off the board — the way in which we put it together, subject becomes substance, substance becoming subject. The new thought we need is not any new content, but to make sense of what it means to be looking at those histories in the way we already had, but didn't know we had. Namely, from this standpoint of accepting.

29:20

Now, what's required for this? How is achieving this absolute standpoint possible? And there are two theses, and I have 10 minutes. So I guess each thesis will have to get five minutes. Nothing like transferring quality to quantity. One is the idea of a speculative proposition. And the other is, of course, what he has to say about time.

The notion of the speculative proposition, speculative sentences, occurs in paragraph 23. And then again in paragraph 59 and 60. And what the discussion of the speculative sentence is trying to think about is — and this obviously leads to thinking about representational thought — is how can we understand ordinary subject-predicate judgments? How can we understand the structure of subject and predicate that all Western thought from Aristotle through Kant took to be fundamental. Substance and accident. The subject I synthesizing subject term and the predicate term.

31:05

Well, Hegel begins by noting a semantic peculiarity of both English and German; namely, that the same term that is used to characterize individual consciousness is the term that is used to characterize the grammatical unit of which something is said to be a predicate. That is, being a subject — that's me — picks out a subject, say you, and offers a predicate. It is puzzle.

31:55

Now, Hegel thinks that this fact is a clue, not a justification, for what he's going to argue. And what he's gonna argue is, the propositions that interest him are propositions of essential predication. That is, where one thing is said to be the essence of another thing. So God is being — [inaudible] a bit of essential predication. And he says, 'Well, what's the deal with God is being? Well, we have a name, and we say the essence of that name is being.' And then he says says, 'But this is a bit puzzling.' And why is it a bit puzzling? 'Because,' he says, 'What happened to the subject term? If the subject term, the essence of it is being, you don't need subject term anymore? We can just say, 'Being.'

32:59

That sounds pretty inarticulate. What happens in that moment of inarticulateness? And his answer is that, as we come to that recognition, we lose our relationship of externality to what we were determining, That is, our capacities as judgers seem to depend upon 'me a subject' saying 'this is the subject and this is the predicate,' and that I, as it were, can contemplate the object, which is to say, my distance from the object depends upon that separation. But as soon as that separation looks to be a bit of artifice, he says, I lose my place as a subject; that is, as observer of something of which I am wholly [inaudible].

34:14

So, the claim is that subject-predicate grammar is a form of mastery. A form of mastery that depends upon an externality of the subject to the object. So the hint he wants to explore here is that subject-predicate grammar is the source of subject-object dualism. That our sense that we have a world that is external to us, that we merely judge, is actually — just as Nietzsche will say later — a bit of grammatical illusion. But then, if it turns out that I don't have this position of mastery, then I cannot think myself as outside of what I'm determining. But I must think of the relationship between me and the object as part of a — this is all Hegel wants to say — as part of a perpetual movement, without a particular [inaudible] or end or control.

35:38

Let's say that it's a continual movement of determination. That, instead of having rigid determinacy — there is the subject, there is the predicate. [Inaudible] gets beat up again, that's what this course has been secretly about. Instead of having that mastery, what we have is continual attempts to determine ourselves by determining the object and that we cannot separate those two moments. So, the first thing that disappears and needs to disappear, in order for absolute knowing to occur, is we need to lose the idea that we are spectators. Well, spectators on what?

36:26

Well, how about the view that we are spectators on history, for openers. That history is what exists out there, and as we write it, we are contemplating something that exists absolutely independently of us, and has its own structure. Well, what supports that idea that history is absolutely independent of us and exists out there?

How about the belief that time is a container? That time is a form of intuition, in which things are given a temporal place. So, the one assumption that Hegel suggests, in paragraph 801, that we have not questioned up till now is Kant's idea that time is a form of intuition. Because if time is a form of intuition, then events occur in time and get their temporal location in time.

37:44

So, Hegel suggests — and now we're coming to the thesis that we have to go from the Christian time design to a different conception of temporality. So, Hegel wants to say in paragraph 801, we require a transposition of our understanding of time. So, he says, "Time is the concept..." Not the concept occurs in time, or the concept — but rather, "Time is the concept itself that is there..." Time is the concept and — and I take it the 'and,' what is confusing about the sentence is really the conjunction, it makes much more sense if you read the ‘and’ as ‘but.' So, instead of *und* have *aber*. So, "Time is the notion itself that is there, [but] which presents itself to consciousness as an empty intuition..." The empty intuition, that's the giveaway that he's here trying to overcome the Kantian conception of time. Because time is not an empty intuition.

39:28

What is time? Time is the self-movement of spirit. That is, we need to move from a conception of history to a conception of historicity. By which I mean to say that we need to think of time not as an external container that has events in it, in the past and some in the future, but time as who we are in our continual movement of determination, as, as I've I said throughout, as a community of the living and the dead.

If that's what the concept is, history itself, the self-movement of time, then, of course it follows that the gathering up is going to be — and this is all I needed to use from the speculative proposition — a self-gathering. Because now there's no externality, there's no history out there. That was the illusion that the form of judgment, Kant's greatest discovery — trashed in 25 years, so much for great discoveries.

And moving beyond that, to conceptual thought. What conceptual thought means now is thought that is, in a fundamental sense, proudness. That is, nothing but what we do as historical, recognitive beings who are grounded in our possibilities through the forms in which we recognize one another in the present and as a community of the living and the dead. Just there. That's it.

39:41

[APPLAUSE]

40:24

That was fun.