

*“Reason . . . apprehended irrationally”: Hegel’s  
critique of Observing Reason*

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Die Frage könnte eigentlich so gestellt werden: Wie hängt, was uns wichtig ist, von dem ab, was physisch möglich ist? (Ludwig Wittgenstein)

“Observing Reason” is one of the longest sections of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is, for instance, twice as long as the much-noted part dedicated to self-consciousness. Yet it is one of the least commented, interpreted, and productively appropriated passages of this seminal work. There are two clusters of reasons that can explain this relative disregard: *First*, in the section on “Observing Reason” Hegel deals with scientific theories and accounts in the philosophy of nature of his times.<sup>1</sup> These are, at least at first sight, remote from both the actual overarching topic of the *Phenomenology* and from the model of a socially and historically oriented theory of the mental that is attractive from today’s perspective. The problems Hegel deals with here not only lie outside the interests of most interpreters of the *Phenomenology*. They refer to questions and theories that are unfamiliar to us. It would seem that in this section Hegel’s general philosophical program in the *Phenomenology* can find only sparse anchorage in the subject matter being investigated. Interpreters interested in the systematic sustainability of the entire work tend to look to other parts of the book for arguments in favor of Hegel’s attempt to prove the necessity of the sequence of all our epistemic projects on the route to Absolute Knowing.

*Secondly*, in dealing with the scientific views and conceptions in the philosophy of nature of his time, Hegel is discussing a subject matter that many of today’s readers regard as outdated. This suspicion concerns not only specific disciplines such as physiognomy and phrenology, to which Hegel pays detailed attention. The whole idea of a philosophy of nature has

Translated by David P. Schweikard.

<sup>1</sup> A detailed exposition of the historical background of the topos of “Observing Reason” can be found in Moravia (1973).

become discredited over the last 200 years.<sup>2</sup> Whoever turns to the *Phenomenology* in order to profit from Hegel's discussion of specific phenomena (and not from the overall composition of the work) has *prima facie* good reasons not to turn to "Observing Reason" to look for systematically accessible insights in Hegel.

In order to inquire into the systematic relevance of Hegel's discussion of psychology, physiognomy, and phrenology in the present, the difficulties mentioned have to be dispelled. In this attempt, I will not go into Hegel's altercation with the various conceptions of the "observation of nature" (139, ¶244), but confine myself to his discussion of those "sciences" that deal with the mental. Since my focus in the following is on the import of Hegel's objections against "Observing reason" with respect to the mental, I will not try to reconstruct the conceptual–logical structure employed by Hegel to integrate the different models into a developmental sequence, nor will I question their factual plausibility. This chapter is dedicated not to the argumentative goal of the *Phenomenology* as a whole, but to Hegel's critique of psychology, physiognomy, and phrenology. My aim is to inquire into the systematic efficacy of Hegel's analysis of the types of argument and explanatory strategies of these "sciences."

Even such a limited examination cannot forgo gaining clarity about the systematic significance of the section under scrutiny within the overall framework of the *Phenomenology*. For this reason, I will analyze the passages with which Hegel opens the part on "The Certainty and Truth of Reason" (132, ¶231) and the section on "Observing Reason" (137, ¶240), so as to determine the premises of his argumentation relevant to the subsequent remarks (section 1). The following sections will then deal with Hegel's treatment of psychology (section 2) and physiognomy and phrenology (section 3), respectively. Finally, I will formulate some further questions that emerge from our findings for the study of Hegel's philosophy of the mind (section 4).

#### I THE PLACE OF "OBSERVING REASON" IN THE *PHENOMENOLOGY*

"Observing Reason" is the first section of the fifth chapter of the *Phenomenology*. Hegel's analysis of self-consciousness as both a philosophical principle and an empirical phenomenon in the fourth part yielded "the truth of self-certainty" (103, ¶166). This truth consists in the fact that the

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Quante (2006).

unhappy consciousness makes the basic structure of first-personal self-reference the object of an epistemic attitude. Achieved thereby is the basic structure of Reason which, according to Hegel, consists in the fact that self-consciousness “is certain that it is itself reality” (132, ¶232). Reason assumes “that everything actual is none other than itself” (132, ¶232). The basic ontological stance of Reason is, according to Hegel, “idealism” (132, ¶232). It would be better to identify this position as rationalism, since the basic ontological thesis of Reason claims the structural identity of thought and being. This refers neither to a merely epistemic or subjective idealism that presupposes a duality of thought and being, nor to a mentalism that determines the basic ontological substance as mental (e.g. sense data or the like).<sup>3</sup> This certainty involves a fundamental change in the attitude of self-consciousness towards reality. In the previous shapes it was concerned with its self-assertion and “concerned to save and maintain itself for itself at the expense of the *world*, or of its own actuality” (132, ¶232). Now “its hitherto negative relation to otherness turns into a positive relation” (132, ¶232). As Reason, self-consciousness can “endure” (132, ¶232) the independence of reality and it can turn to it with a cognitive attitude of theoretical curiosity: Reason “discovers the world as *its* new real world, which in its permanence holds an interest for it” (133, ¶232).

The rationalist conception of theoretical curiosity thereby inscribed into Reason is initially available only as certainty, but not in its truth. This is because Reason, at the beginning of its development as a new shape of consciousness, has its own “path behind it and has forgotten it” (133, ¶233). What is lacking is the experience of consciousness that could alone provide a justification of the ontological and epistemological premises of Reason. Since this new shape, in the form of Observing Reason, “comes on the scene *immediately* as Reason” (133, ¶233), it is only “the *certainty* of that truth” (133, ¶233). The entire path through the three shapes of Reason will be needed for this certainty to become the “truth of Reason” (132, ¶231). While Reason does indeed participate in the ontological and epistemological basis of Reason in its mode as “observer,” it does so only in the form of an evident prerequisite that it cannot itself thematize (cf. 137, ¶240). Within the Hegelian model of self-explicating subjectivity, such an immediate certainty constitutes a lack of mediation and thereby, on the one hand, grounds for Reason being opposed to a world that is assumed to be an independent reality. On the other hand, this lack compels Reason to

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Brandom (2002a), Halbig (2002), Quante (2002a), and Jaeschke (2004).

ensure its own certitude and verify its assumption of the structural identity of thought and world.

### 1.1 *Two kinds of difficulties*

In contrast to the other two shapes of Reason dealt with by Hegel in the second and third section, “Observing Reason” remains on the epistemic level of certainty and maintains a purely passive methodological stance. There are various reasons that the argumentation deployed by Hegel in the “Observing Reason” section is not easily comprehensible. Hegel himself gives the following short overview: “This *action* of Reason in its observational role we have to consider in the moments of its movement: how it takes up Nature, Spirit and the relationship of the two in the form of sensuous being, and how it seeks itself as existing [seiende] actuality” (138, ¶243). This delineates the three sections: “Observation of nature” (139, ¶244), “Observation of self-consciousness in its purity and in its relation to external activity. Logical and psychological laws” (167, ¶298), and “Observation of the relation of self-consciousness to its immediate actuality. Physiognomy and Phrenology” (171, ¶309). Moreover, with the remark that Observing Reason seeks its object “as actuality in the form of immediate being” (138, ¶243), Hegel notes an important structural element by which Observing Reason distinguishes itself from the other two shapes of Reason.

There are two kinds of difficulties that complicate the interpretation of Hegel’s text. On the one hand, we must always, given our cognitive interests, separate the following three dimensions of Hegel’s argumentation. First, the compositional aspects of his train of thought, indebted as they are to the overall aim of the *Phenomenology*, should be distinguished from the arguments that relate to the mental. Secondly, we must separate Hegel’s analysis of the self-conception of Observing Reason and his comments on this self-conception. And, thirdly, we must differentiate between Hegel’s specification of the mental, as it is presented to Observing Reason itself (within its own requirements), and his own assumptions about the nature of the mental. For it is obvious that Hegel’s specification of the limits and scope of the analysis of the mental provided by Observing Reason is dependent on his own premises regarding the nature of the mental.

The argumentative structure of Hegel’s analysis of Observing Reason contains a second kind of difficulty. One problem is that in the introduction to the section on “Observing Reason” (137–138, ¶¶240–243), Hegel

indicates the basic structure of “Observing Reason,” though he explicates essential elements of the basic structure only in the context of his discussion of theories of the “Observation of nature” (139, ¶244). Since I do not wish to go into Hegel’s treatment of these conceptions, I will integrate the remarks he makes there into the following reconstruction of the basic structure of “Observing Reason.” Another problem I would like to address in advance is that Hegel, due to the overall intention of the *Phenomenology*, depicts the conceptions discussed in the second and third sections of “Observing Reason” as a kind of decline.

Within the entire course of argumentation of the *Phenomenology*, the chapter on Reason is an advance compared to the shapes of consciousness and self-consciousness. At the beginning, however, the ontologically higher principle of rationalism involves two deficits: its epistemological immediacy, on the one hand, and its methodological stance of pure passivity, on the other. Both deficits are overcome in the second and third sections of the chapter on Reason in the *Phenomenology*. But Observing Reason remains continuously afflicted with these two deficiencies.

There is a conceptual–logical advancement in the section on “Observing Reason,” as well. On the one hand, Hegel structures this section according to the subject matter of nature, the mental, and their mutual relation; on the other hand, the chapters that interest us present a fine-grained sequence of conceptions. These do not mark progress, but decline. Hegel wants to show that within its own requirements, Observing Reason departs more and more from the nature of the mental until eventually a conception of the mental emerges that forces a fundamental conversion. As Hegel writes in referring to phrenology:

But Reason, in its role of observer, having reached thus far, seems also to have reached its peak, at which point it must do an about turn; for only what is wholly bad is implicitly charged with the immediate necessity of changing into its opposite. (188, ¶340)

Hegel claims that the failure of the attempt of Observing Reason to develop a satisfactory conception of the mental leads to the abandonment of passive methodology, so that “The actualization of rational self-consciousness through its own activity” (193, ¶347) can follow as the next conceptual formation.

The conceptual–logical deep structure underlying Hegel’s analysis of Observing Reason will not figure in the following analysis. While I am going to deal with psychology, physiognomy, and phrenology in the order in which Hegel discusses them, I will not address the question of whether

an illuminating conceptual development can be detected between these conceptions.

### 1.2 *The basic structure of Observing Reason*

Hegel emphasizes two characteristic features of Observing Reason. *First*, it makes its own observations in a controlled fashion by proceeding methodologically and by systematizing experiences (cf. 137, ¶240). Observing Reason thus demands from its data that they “at least have the significance of a *universal*, not of a *sensuous particular*” (139, ¶244). This universal is assumed by Observing Reason to be an independent being to be discovered or found (cf. 138, ¶240). As a theoretical attitude, it remains passive in this fundamental sense, for it ascribes to itself a merely receptive role. According to Hegel it is indeed active, since by understanding things it transforms “their sensuous being into *Concepts*” (138, ¶242), or distinguishes between “what is essential and what is inessential” (140, ¶246). Since Observing Reason aims at conceiving the rationality of things as an objective being, in Hegel’s view it not only misconceives their active, constitutive function, but also misses out on the fact that the structure it discovers in reality is in fact its own structure (cf. 138, ¶242).<sup>4</sup>

The aim of Reason, to discover its own essential structure in things as merely being, leads it to transform this being into a universality whose elements are necessarily related to one another. Observing Reason seeks – and this is the *second* characteristic feature – “the *law* and the *Concept*” (142, ¶248) of reality. It attempts on the basis of their presuppositions to comprehend them “as an actuality in the form of *being*” (142, ¶248). In the conception of lawlike correlations, Observing Reason therefore purports “to obtain something alien” (142, ¶250). Hence, laws are supposed to be the universal, rational structure that organizes appearances. They are universal, for it is not the particular event that is relevant, but the kind of event. Laws correlate universal properties and not particular individual things. As Hegel puts it: Reason “free[s] the predicates from their subjects” (144, ¶251). At the same time, these correlations must be necessary if they are to be correctly referred to as laws (cf. 146, ¶255). Thus, the concept of law that is also shared by Observing Reason contains an internal tension. On the one hand, the constituent parts of the laws are supposed to be

<sup>4</sup> Hegel traces this misconception to the “hesitation” (150, ¶264) of Observing Reason concerning the ontological status of modal terms.

independently existing entities. On the other hand, they are supposed to be necessarily related to one another even though this partially negates their independence.<sup>5</sup> In Hegel's system, this internal deficit grounds the limitation of the concept of law and therewith the limitation of the range of nomological explanations.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, there are two inadequacies of this explanatory strategy that are due to the specific presuppositions of Observing Reason: "To the Observing consciousness, the *truth of the law* is found in *experience*, in the same way that sensuous being is [an object] for consciousness" (142, ¶249). It is for this reason that on the one hand, laws are hypostatized as objects whose necessity is derived from things rather than being traced back to the conceptual nature of Reason. This leads to the problem of induction since, in the end, no amount of observed instances is sufficient to substantiate the intended universality of the law (cf. 143, ¶250). The validity of the law is thus reduced to "probability" (143, ¶250), so that the appeal to universality and necessity connected with the claim that these laws represent "truth" (143, ¶250) must inevitably fail.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, laws are always abstractions, as they cater to the universal that lies behind the appearance. Hence, Observing Reason is eager "to find the *pure conditions* of the law" (143, ¶250). Since it cannot conceive its own activity in so doing, but takes itself to be purely receptive, a gap emerges between the concrete event in its particularity and the universal expressible in laws:

In its experiments the instinct of Reason sets out to find what happens in such and such circumstances. The result is that the law seems only to be all the more immersed in sensuous being; but this is rather what gets lost therein. (143, ¶250)<sup>8</sup>

In relation to the epistemological and ontological premises of "Observing Reason," this leads to the question of whether such laws can be interpreted

<sup>5</sup> Hegel's concept of law is not restricted to causal laws; the latter are in fact introduced only as a specific presupposition at a certain stage of the internal development of Observing Reason. Hegel also mentions modal relations between properties (or universals) whose modality entails neither causal nor analytic necessity (cf. 145–146, ¶255).

<sup>6</sup> While I refer to the limitations of nomological explanation, it should be kept in mind that Hegel regards teleological explanations as proper explanations and as explanations of higher philosophical value, for the concept of purpose is internally more complex than the concepts of cause or law which are used by Observing Reason; for Hegel's concept of law, see Bogdandy (1989). Those aspects of Hegel's discussion of the concept of law that are critical of scientism in the section on "Force and the Understanding" (¶¶132–165) are discussed in Redding (1996), 88–98.

<sup>7</sup> In this passage, Hegel also criticizes the idea that increasing the probability could serve to approximate truth; between these two there is, in Hegel's view, a categorical difference (cf. 143, ¶250).

<sup>8</sup> The last part of this passage, which reads " ; allein diß geht darin vielmehr verloren" in the original, is not rendered in the Miller translation.

realistically or whether, to take up a formulation of Nancy Cartwright's, these laws "lie."<sup>9</sup>

Altogether, Reason arrives at the opinion that reality as something external to be observed "is merely the *expression* of the inner" (150, ¶263). It grasps the concept of law itself, which according to Hegel means the essential "inner" correlation of appearances (of the "outer"). At the same time, following the demand of Observing Reason, the inner and the outer must, although they are necessarily interrelated, remain independent from one another and "have an outer being and a shape" (150, ¶264), for Observing Reason posits even the inner as "an object, or it is posited in the form of being, and as present for observation" (150, ¶264). With this, the general prerequisites on the basis of which Observing Reason approaches the mental are made explicit.

## 2 OBSERVATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND HEGEL'S CONCEPTION OF THE MENTAL

Hegel begins his discussion of the treatment of the mental by Observing Reason with the remark that only self-consciousness can be an appropriate object fitting the cognitive targets of Observing Reason, since it "finds this free Concept, whose universality contains just as absolutely within it developed individuality, only in the Concept which itself *exists* [as] Concept" (167, ¶298). In accordance with its methodological requirements, Observing Reason searches for laws of the mental: On the one hand, it seeks to deal with self-consciousness "in its purity" (167, ¶298) and searches for logical laws. On the other hand, in order to formulate psychological laws it is directed at the relationship between self-consciousness and environment. In contrast to Hegel's discussion of physiognomy and phrenology, his treatment of these two epistemological projects of Observing Reason is relatively short, but it is especially important, because his critique reveals several of his own crucial premises with respect to the mental.

### 2.1 *Logical laws?*

Hegel does not deal in detail with the concrete attempt of Observing Reason to discover laws of thought or of logic with its own resources. It seeks, for one thing, to oppose these laws as a "*quiescent being* of relations"

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Cartwright (1983).

(167, ¶300) to thought as the active implementation of these laws. But it thereby misconceives the active constitution of self-consciousness:

In their truth, as vanishing moments in the unity of thought, they would have to be taken as a knowing, or as a movement of thought, but not as *Laws* of being, (168, ¶300)

With this, Hegel objects to the reification of those laws and to the mistake of conceiving self-consciousness as a thing. Knowledge and thought are, according to his portrayal, to be understood as practical performances, not as observable, static being.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Hegel criticizes Observing Reason for its conception of laws that makes it postulate the basic elements of thought, i.e. “a multitude of detached necessities which, as in and for themselves a *fixed* content, are supposed to have truth in their *determinateness*” (167, ¶300). This move overlooks the holistic constitution of self-consciousness which, according to Hegel, consists in the fact that the distinguishable elements or aspects of the mental are constituted through their interconnection. The content, meaning, or function of such mental units can be grasped only if they are understood as moments of self-consciousness. Such an interconnection can be disclosed only hermeneutically and thus rules out the methodological and ontological presuppositions of Observing Reason. Hegel's objection against the possibility of logical laws is, like Donald Davidson's argument against psycho-physical laws,<sup>11</sup> of a “general nature” (168, ¶300). Therefore, in Hegel's view it is unnecessary to undertake a detailed analysis of the various models of Observing Reason, since they are based on a category error that is manifested in an epistemological–methodological incommensurability.<sup>12</sup>

## 2.2 Psychological laws?

As self-consciousness is, according to Hegel's premise, “the principle of individuality” (168, ¶301), the explanatory target of Observing Reason must be an individual self-consciousness in its specifically individuated constitution (cf. 169, ¶304). And since, according to Hegel's second

<sup>10</sup> This fundamental objection is also a crucial element of Hegel's later critique of insufficient theories of the mental in his theory of Subjective Spirit in his *Encyclopedia* of 1830 (especially in §389); cf. Wolff (1992), Halbig (2002), and Quante (2002a, 2004a).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Davidson (1980), esp. essay 11.

<sup>12</sup> Siep (2000), 135, has suggested understanding Hegel's critique in terms of anti-psychologism in logic as it was later formulated by Frege or Husserl. My analysis is compatible with that suggestion, but it has the advantage of not having to clarify the ontological status of the entities postulated by anti-psychologism.

premise, “in its actuality [it] is *active consciousness*” (168, ¶301), its active constitution must be explained. Observing Reason, which cannot by its own means grasp self-consciousness in its purity, tries to explain it with respect to the interaction between self-consciousness and its environment. Here, the psychological laws formulate two contrary directions of influence: On the one hand, self-consciousness is taken to be passive, receiving influences from its environment “into itself” and “conforming to” its environment (168, ¶302). On the other hand, self-consciousness is taken to be active, seeking to make its environment “conform to it” (169, ¶302).<sup>13</sup> In accordance with its methodological requirements, the “Observational psychology” (169, ¶303) depends on modularizing self-consciousness by discovering “all sorts of faculties, inclinations, and passions” (169, ¶303). Due to its effort to explain individual self-consciousnesses in their activity, observational psychology does not realize, even “while recounting the details of this collection” (169, ¶303), that the unity of self-consciousness cannot be grasped sufficiently this way. Apart from this, it encounters the discrepancy that these modules of the mental are conceived as “dead, inert things” (169, ¶303), while at the same time they appear as “restless movements” (169, ¶303).

### 2.3 Hegel's conception of the mental

Hegel's objection against the possibility of psychological laws is also fundamental in nature so that, once again, he does not have to get into the details of observational psychology:

Therefore, *what* is to have an influence on the individuality, and what *kind* of influence it is to have – which really mean the same thing – depend solely on the individuality itself. (170, ¶306)

On the one hand, the determinate individual in its individual constitution is conceived as a product of the influences of its environment; on the other hand, it is active, interpreting and rearranging its environment. Hegel's objection is that in this activity the specific individuality of self-consciousness is already effective. The concrete impact of the environment on an individual self-consciousness results from the specific constitution of the individual self-consciousness, so that it is impossible to explain the

<sup>13</sup> By “environment” Hegel understands the social world of “habits, costumes and way of thinking already to hand” (168–169, ¶302). His objections can be transferred to the attempts of teleosemantics which tries to explain the mental as an adaptation and formation of an environment captured in biological–evolutionary terms; cf. Millikan (1984).

individual characteristics of self-consciousness by appeal to the influence of its environment. Thus, and this is the upshot of Hegel's discussion, observational psychology does not reach beyond general statements that cannot grasp a concrete self-consciousness in "*this specific individuality*" (170, ¶306); it can express only "the indeterminate nature of the individuality" (170, ¶306).<sup>14</sup> From this result Hegel draws the following methodologically important consequence: The specific individuality of a self-consciousness can be "comprehended only from the individual himself" (171, ¶307). What is required of an adequate explanatory strategy, then, is a comprehensive, context-sensitive interpretation that takes into account the active and holistic constitution of self-consciousness and its "freedom" (171, ¶307).<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Hegel's objections are of importance for his own conception of the mental, for he recognizes the function of the social environment as a constitutive element of the individual self-consciousness:

If these circumstances, way of thinking, customs, in general the state of the world, had not been, then of course the individual would not have become what he is; for all those elements present in this "state of the world" *are* this universal substance. (170, ¶306)<sup>16</sup>

Looking at the context in which Hegel develops his conception of the mental helps to avoid two obvious misunderstandings. First, Hegel's claim that the individual self-consciousness can be grasped "only from the individual himself" (171, ¶307) cannot be evaluated as a suggestion that the mental be conceived through singular first-person access. The methodological–solipsistic conception of introspective psychology only extends the deficits of observational psychology, since it neglects the social constitution of the mental and thus adopts essential prerequisites of Observing Reason without further examination. Second, Hegel's critique of the methodological solipsism of introspective psychology cannot be interpreted as behaviorism, since Hegel criticizes and rejects even those methodological and epistemological premises of Observing Reason shared

<sup>14</sup> The fate of the attempt within causalistic action theory to formulate causal laws of action can be taken as a contemporary example for this difficulty.

<sup>15</sup> In this context, it is crucial to keep in mind that Hegel's concept of freedom is not meant in the sense of agent causality, but as openness to the rational structures of the (social) environment; cf. Pippin (1999, 2004a).

<sup>16</sup> Pinkard's discussion of these sections primarily highlights this aspect of the social constitution of the mind (Pinkard 1994, 89). A more detailed account of Hegel's thesis that the mind is socially constituted, – though with respect to Hegel's later theory of Objective Spirit – can be found in Quante and Schweikard (2005).

by behaviorism and introspective psychology.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, our analysis renders visible Hegel's own conception of a social – externalist conception of the mental.<sup>18</sup>

### 3 PHYSIOGNOMY AND PHRENOLOGY

Observational psychology must, consequently, fail for categorical reasons, so that Observing Reason, in its attempt to explain the mental, is thrown back to the psychic immediacy of individual self-consciousness as a possible basis of explanation. This immediacy “contains the antithesis of being *for itself* and being *in itself* effaced within its own absolute mediation” (171, ¶309). Hegel's discussion of physiognomy and phrenology treats two research projects current at his time. Although, from a present-day point of view, both must count as obsolete in many respects, Hegel's objections against them continue to be systematically relevant, since his critique aims at the fundamental presuppositions that have remained effective to the present day. In his treatment of physiognomy, Hegel tries to arrange the different variants of this conception into a conceptually developmental sequence that necessarily ends with phrenology. Since I do not intend to track this dimension of Hegel's argumentation, which stems from the overall aim of the *Phenomenology*, I will briefly place the five main stages of the development side by side. I will then analyze Hegel's critique of physiognomy, which he takes to be essentially the action theory of Observing Reason. Here, I will collect the elements of Hegel's own action theory which can be extracted from his critique of physiognomy in order to complete the picture of Hegel's social – externalist conception of the mental. Finally, I will round off the picture by analyzing Hegel's critique of phrenology.

<sup>17</sup> On this point, there is a deep affinity between Hegel's and Wittgenstein's conception of the mental; for the latter see ter Hark (1995).

<sup>18</sup> For the understanding of my argumentation, three clarifications or explanations are important: First, in what follows it is not claimed that Hegel's social–externalist conception of the mental is presupposed as an argument against scientism. There are, on the one hand, objections that are independent of this conception and, on the other hand, Hegel's social–externalist conception assumes its full contour only in the course of his work. Secondly, Hegel's social externalism about the mental should not be identified with a model of the mental that is ultimately bound to behaviorist demands, as the one conceptualized by Donald Davidson. Hegel's social externalism is rather genuinely social in the sense that it is developed from the participant perspective of the *We* (or *Spirit*); cf. Quante and Schweikard (2005). And, thirdly, along with social externalism Hegel defends an ontological externalism about mental states which rejects the dualism of thought and world; see Halbig (2002) and Quante (2002a). It is for this reason that Hegel's conception is not exposed to the danger of becoming a “frictionless spinning in the void” in which thinking circulates only within itself or within social spheres and cannot connect with the world.

## 3.1 Variations about "inner" and "outer": five antitheses

The basic idea of law, and according to Hegel even the concept of law as such, consists in the notion that a sequence of something outer acquires its meaning through something inner that appears therein. Due to the methodological and epistemological requirements of Observing Reason, the inner and the outer not only have to be independent from one another and, at the same time, necessarily interrelated, they must both be conceived merely as being. Against this background, Hegel distinguishes five antitheses between inner and outer that are formulated in physiognomy. Each of these pairs of antitheses aims to explain self-consciousness in its concrete individuality from the perspective of an observable outer. In the first four approaches to physiognomy, the position of the inner is assumed by the activity of the subject by means of an organ (paradigmatically, a hand or the mouth). The outer, however, is modified respectively because of the insufficiencies of the previous stages.<sup>19</sup>

In the case of the *first antithesis*, the outer is specified as "the action as a reality separated from the individual" (173, ¶312). This conception of the inner, which expresses itself through action, appears in the result of the action that is distinct from the individual. Hegel criticizes this explanatory model for twice violating the prerequisites of physiognomy. On the one hand, the inner that is objectified in the outer through the result of the deed acquires an independence against which the individual can no longer assert itself (in this respect, the inner loses the required independence from the outer). But, on the other hand, it is precisely this deficit that allows the individual to reflect critically on the deed by retreating to her intention and distancing herself from the meaning of the deed:

The action, then, as a completed work, has the double and opposite meaning of being either the *inner* individuality and *not* its *expression*, or, *qua* external, a reality *free from* the inner, a reality which is something quite different from the inner. (173, ¶312)

To eliminate this deficit, an inner has to be found "as it still is within the individual himself, but in a visible or external shape" (173, ¶312). Now – and this is the *second antithesis* – if one tries to replace the deed by the outer

<sup>19</sup> Hegel's exposition of this development of the models of physiognomy (173–176, ¶¶312–318) is, despite its complexity, simplified. The inner and the outer are, on Hegel's account, terms of reflection; so a shift in the meaning of one always entails a shift in the meaning of the other. If I am right, Hegel does not make this development of the inner a subject of discussion with respect to the first four antitheses, but confines himself to the outer.

shape of the individual qua “*passive whole*” (173, ¶313), the result is too weak a relation between inner and outer – the relation of a merely conventional “*sign*” (174, ¶313) that is not anchored in the thing itself. However, such an “*arbitrary combination*” (174, ¶314) yields “*no law*” (174, ¶314), according to the requirements of physiognomy itself, and therefore Hegel infers that the claim to the status of science cannot be met in this way (cf. 172, ¶311). Prognosticating the fate of the individual by the state of her hand remains an equally arbitrary combination, and physiognomy remains one of the “*other questionable arts and pernicious studies*” (174, ¶314). This is also why the construction of the *third antithesis*, in which the outer constitution of the organ of action in question is declared to be an appearance of the inner, i.e. of the particular individuality, is unsatisfactory. Neither the traits of the hand, nor “*the timbre and compass of the voice*” (175, ¶316), nor the “*style of handwriting*” (175, ¶316) can be taken to be expressions of individuality, for the individual can take a reflexive stance towards these features and employ them deliberately. This capacity for self-interpretation, which Hegel calls the “*reflection on the actual expression*” (175, ¶317), explains why the external features invoked by physiognomy cannot adequately be accounted for from that perspective. As expressions of intentional agency, they are accessible only to a comprehensive interpretation, but not from a perspective of Observing Reason.<sup>20</sup> The capacity for “*inner*” reflexive annotation of one’s own doings and deeds reveals a characteristic of intentional agency that is used in the *fourth antithesis*. The inner reflection on one’s own deed as “*the actual expression*” (175, ¶317) must itself have an observable, outer aspect. The facial expression is supposed to show whether an assertion is being made seriously or not (this is Hegel’s example for this phenomenon). But under the premises of Observing Reason this is again inadequate, for two reasons: Since the facial expression must be “*degraded to the level of [mere] being*” (176, ¶318), it stands in a purely conventional relation to the determinate individuality and can be deployed at will: Therefore, this expression of the inner is, for the determinate individuality, “*as much its countenance as its mask which it can lay aside*” (176, ¶318). This possibility presupposes the difference between intention and will on the one hand and deed on the other (cf. 176, ¶311). As Hegel argues in the following, by generating the *fifth antithesis* from this, physiognomy becomes action theory.

<sup>20</sup> This is the systematic benefit which MacIntyre (1998) gains from his interpretation of these passages.

### 3.2 The "inverted relationship" of physiognomy

According to Hegel, the following consequence is to be drawn from this fourth antithesis: "Individuality gives up that *reflectedness-into-self* which is expressed in the *lines* and *lineaments*, and *places its essence in the work it has done*" (176, ¶319). The refinements of the models of physiognomy reveal that this "science" has met the fundamental problem of action theory:

The antithesis which this observation encounters has the form of the antithesis of the practical and the theoretical, both falling within the practical aspect itself – the antithesis of individuality making itself actual in its "doing" ("doing" in its most general sense), and individuality as being at the same time reflected out of this "doing" into itself and making this its object. (176–177, ¶319)

But the solution hinted at by Hegel is incompatible with the presuppositions of Observing Reason. In fact,

it contradicts the relationship established by the instinct of Reason, which is engaged in Observing the self-conscious individuality, ascertaining what its *inner* and *outer* are supposed to be. (176, ¶319)

While Hegel can accept this consequence on the basis of *his* theoretical framework, Observing Reason must take up the basic structure of intentional agency it has discovered "in the same inverted relationship which characterizes it in the sphere of appearance" (177, ¶319). Thus, the claim is that an action theory that remains within the paradigm of Observing Reason takes over the structure of appearance and is incapable of accounting for it in a conceptually adequate way. Hegel then sketches this "inverted" action theory as follows:

It regards as the *unessential outer* the *deed* itself and the performance, whether it be that of speech or a more durable reality; but it is the being-within-itself of the individuality which is for it the *essential inner*. Of the two aspects possessed by the practical consciousness, intention and deed (what is "meant" or intended by the deed and the deed itself), observation selects the former as the true inner. (177, ¶319)

On the basis of its own premises, this action theory can in fact see only the outer, from which it then infers the essential inner that first renders the observable event as an action. The presupposed irrevocability of the difference between inner intention and outer action event leads to the feature of intentionality that marks off an action from mere physical events being conceived as a separate factor, which can and must be inferred in the observation of an event: According to Hegel, actions are objects in intersubjectively accessible space and in this sense they are external to the

individual's private internality. But Observing Reason takes this "visible present as visibility of the invisible" (177, ¶320). And since it regards the inner as the essential that finds its expression in the outer, the agent's intention becomes the essential feature. Because the intention – separated as it is from the realized action – does not necessarily match up with the deed determined by the social context, the intention plays the role of a theoretical item which is epistemologically inaccessible and in this sense "being that is 'meant'" (177, ¶320). Thus, action also becomes "an existence which is only 'meant'" (177, ¶319), for on this account it is constituted by the self-understanding of the individual and not by the interpretive social space. For this reason, there can be no laws in which intentions and the actions that are essentially constituted by these intentions stand in the appropriate relation of dependence required by laws.<sup>21</sup> Since intentions presuppose epistemically inadmissible inferences to something that is in principle unobservable, they are not meaningfully conceivable within the framework of Observing Reason, but are merely arbitrary constructs. And because the action is constituted by these constructs in the first place – in contrast to the interpretation of the deed in the social space – these constructs are also unobservable entities. An action theory according to which actions are observable events does not comprehend the constitutive interpretive capabilities through which events become actions in the first place. Such a theory also does not understand that it is precisely this presumed conception of inner and outer that makes intentions only an inferable, in principle private kind of entity.

Hegel leaves no doubt that, in his view, the deed that is part of social space is "[t]he *true being* of man" in which "individual[ity] is *actual*," for in this way the acting individual "does away with both aspects of what is [merely] 'meant' to be" (178, ¶322). In contrast to attempts by physiognomy to infer the underlying intention of the acting subject from the observed action event, Hegel holds the view that an individual can err about the true meaning of his action and that only the realization in social space reveals "the character of the deed" (179, ¶322). Contrary to the conception of inner and outer presupposed by Observing Reason, the objectification of the intention in the deed does not constitute an insurmountable gap: "the objectivity does not alter the deed itself, but only shows what it is" (179, ¶322). The conditions of identity for actions are determined by social standards and contexts and not by the private

<sup>21</sup> This excludes only a relation between types that would be necessary for laws. But the question of how concrete mental episodes relate to observable events is not yet settled.

perspective that an acting subject has on her own doing. Hence the proper locus of action theory is Objective Spirit, since only within ethical and legal practices can the rules be identified that frame the descriptions under which deeds can be ascribed to subjects, and under which they are held responsible or can claim exculpation or excuse by virtue of their own subjective perspective.<sup>22</sup> However, owing to its premises Observing Reason is blind to this social dimension of reality and hence does not attain its target of explaining the determinate individuality of a subject through the explanation of actions.

### 3.3 Phrenology

Since Observing Reason cannot grasp the determinate individuality by reference to action, Hegel has no further option but to examine the thesis “that the individuality expresses its essence in its immediate, firmly established, and purely existent actuality” (179, ¶323). Now it is no longer the outer aspect of activity that is supposed to indicate the constitution of an individual subject, but rather the subject’s immediate physical existence. Phrenology, the “science” Hegel has in mind here, is a topic of discussion that is *prima facie* obsolete, as it stands for the attempt to infer specific mental properties of the subject from the properties of a skull. But Hegel’s discussion is interesting inasmuch as in criticizing phrenology he brings out fundamental presuppositions of this conception that are effective in present-day philosophy of mind.

Because of its presuppositions, phrenology has to conceive the relation between the mental and the physical “as a *causal connection*” (180, ¶324) and “[mental] individuality . . . must, *qua cause*, itself be corporeal” (180, ¶325). Observing Reason finds in the brain and in the spinal cord the corporeal seat of mental individuality. Therefore, phrenology finds the sought-for relation in the causal connection between brain and spinal cord, together conceived as the “corporeal *being-for-itself* of [the Mental]” (181, ¶328), as well as skull and vertebral column which count as “the solid, inert Thing” (181, ¶328).<sup>23</sup>

At this stage – and this is one of the most significant points about Hegel’s critique of phrenology – he calls attention to the fact that the brain is ascribed a dual role in phrenology such that a fundamental ambivalence arises. On the one hand, the brain is thought of as a mere object: “a

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Pippin (2004b) and Quante (2004b).

<sup>23</sup> Hegel confines himself, as I do in this reconstruction, to the role of the brain.

*being-for-another*, i.e. an outer existence” (181, ¶327). As such a “dead thing” it can no longer be “the presence of self-consciousness” (181, ¶327) that it is supposed to be. Hegel points to the fact that we have to distinguish between the functional activities of the brain and the brain as a physical body. In the former reading, the active character of the mental is captured, but the difference from observational psychology gets lost, while in the latter, phrenology forms a proper alternative to the psychological account of the mental. But, as Hegel emphasizes, it is inconceivable how the brain as a “dead thing” could be connected with the determinate individuality in any explanatorily illuminating way. In this ambivalence, the conflict between phrenology’s goals becomes manifest, for it seeks “a being, though not, strictly speaking, an objective being” (180, ¶325) of the mental.

In his critique of causal laws between brain and skull, Hegel points to another ambivalence of this conception, which becomes manifest in a second dual role of the brain as “a *physical part*” and as “the *being of the self-conscious individuality*” (183, ¶331). This dual role leads to a misattribution of properties or accomplishments to the brain by means of mental predicates that are in fact used only figuratively. The danger then is that one cannot debunk this metaphorical use and is led to the false conclusion that biological and mental properties are being ascribed to one and the same object. This can subsequently fuel speculation that one is dealing with two kinds of description of one subject matter (be it activities, properties, or states of the brain). Once one has spelled out this ambivalence of the role of the brain in this context, these assumptions lose their plausibility.<sup>24</sup>

Detecting the first ambivalence is important, because Hegel’s objections now have to be read not just as a critique of causal connections between brain and skull, but can also be transferred to conceptions that claim a causal connection between functional and physical states of the brain, where the former are identified with the mental. Thus Hegel’s analysis turns out to be relevant for contemporary philosophy of mind which belabors the mind–brain relationship. Because of the internal tension Hegel considers it impossible to draw informative connections between the functional level that captures the mental and the physical level of the brain. What is lacking in the latter is the dimension of intentional meaning that characterizes the mental; the physical constitution does not have “the value even of a *sign*” (184, ¶333). Ultimately, “what remains and is necessary

<sup>24</sup> Hegel himself points to such a misuse of predicates with regard to the skull (cf. 184, ¶333).

to form" (185, ¶335) is therefore just a "concept-less [*begrifflose*], free, pre-established harmony" (185, ¶335) that can no longer explain anything.<sup>25</sup>

In this context, Hegel indicates a connection that also plays an important role in present-day philosophy of mind. Since the brain must reflect the internal structure of the mental in its dual role, the idea of a functional modularization of the brain (*qua* functional unit) suggests a "being structuring [*seiende Gegliederung*]" (181, ¶327). On the level of the brain (*qua* physical object), this corresponds to the idea of localizing specific kinds of mental processes in specific brain areas (cf. 184–185, ¶334). The kind of modularization – and this is another important suggestion for current debates – will depend on theory development in psychology. The semblance of a successful explanation of the mental within the framework of Observing Reason, as Hegel's remark (cf. 185, ¶335) can be understood, is created by the interplay of observational psychology and phrenology, since these are two inadequate conceptions of the mind which interlock and mutually enforce each other.

A true explanation of the essential features of the mental is, according to Hegel's conclusion, not attainable within the framework of Observing Reason.<sup>26</sup> The bottom line is that the account of phrenology results in an uninformative identity claim for the mental and the physical which even "[t]he crude instinct of self-conscious Reason" (188, ¶340) must regard as unsatisfactory. Therefore, Reason leaves behind the paradigm of Observing Reason and tries other ways of conceiving the nature of the mental, and thereby of itself.

#### 4 THE TOPICALITY OF HEGEL'S DISCUSSION OF OBSERVING REASON

The scientific – philosophical theories of the mental that Hegel discusses in the *Phenomenology* are doubtlessly outdated. But it has been shown that Hegel's critique of those theories is still systematically relevant, since crucial presuppositions of Observing Reason are effective in scientifically oriented philosophies of mind right up to the present day. Moreover, this

<sup>25</sup> Hegel's characterization applies to the relation of global supervenience that claims a necessary, but explanatorily not illuminating dependence relation between the totality of mental entities and the totality of physical entities.

<sup>26</sup> It is, however, important to note that Hegel excludes neither a localization theory (cf. 184–185, ¶334) nor the existence of causal relations between the mental and the physical for *conceptual* reasons (cf. 185–186, ¶335). But he is of the opinion that in this way neither secured insights can be obtained (cf. 185–186, ¶335), nor can the essential aspects of the mental come into view. I discuss the question of how mental causation can be integrated into Hegel's action theory in Quante (2004b), 177–185.

critique reveals fundamental traits of Hegel's own conception of the mental as later developed in his theory of Subjective and Objective Spirit. The scientific ("Observing") investigation of the mental being carried out today by cognitive science and brain research cannot, if Hegel is right, capture the essence of the mental, even if this perspective is adequate for several aspects of our existence as subjects of mental episodes. Above all, Hegel's critique must be understood as a refusal of the self-imposed constraint of philosophy of mind to adopt or imitate the ontology, epistemology, or methodology that is inscribed in Observing Reason. Such an imitation of scientific theories of the mental not only does not lead to a higher degree of scientificity, but it also misses the social – externalist character of the mental as an activity or as a life form that is revealed only in the understanding participant's perspective. Concerning this matter, Hegel's reconstruction of the relationship between the mental and the physical in terms of the logic of reflection has the potential to unravel intricate problems well beyond the metaphors of the "space of laws" or the "space of reasons" (an opposition that remains too close to the concepts of Observing Reason).<sup>27</sup>

Hegel decidedly rejects the idea that philosophy in general, and philosophy of mind in particular, have to be subordinated to the requirements of the sciences. He thereby insists on the independence and higher dignity of a philosophical analysis of the mental.<sup>28</sup> However, he dealt unremittingly with scientific theories and empirical findings, and related his own theory of the mental to them. So the question now is how one must interpret the relationship between everyday, scientific, and philosophical views in Hegel's system. Without doubt, Hegel's own conception of the mental in the later system is much more stringently elaborated than his presentation in the *Phenomenology*. In one respect, however, the basic intention of the *Phenomenology* seems to me more suitable for developing an answer to this question. In the later system "Nature" and "Spirit" are indeed introduced as terms of reflection, but the semantic interplay takes place only between the Philosophy of Nature and the Philosophy of Spirit.<sup>29</sup> Since the relation of the empirical sciences to these two parts of the system is unsettled, we can gain there only very few insights relevant to our question, whereas in the *Phenomenology* all epistemological projects have to contribute to the path of consciousness towards Absolute Knowing. Hence, the experiences

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Quante (2002b).

<sup>28</sup> For a general discussion of the relation between everyday, scientific, and philosophical interpretations of the mental, see also Quante (2000).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Quante (2004b).

we gather about ourselves in the scientific analysis of the mental are a constitutive element of a philosophically adequate conception of ourselves as mental subjects. Pursuing this question entails detecting the traces left by Observing Reason in a conceptually adequate philosophy of mind. Ferreting out these traces would, however, be the topic of a different chapter.