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Semantic Realism and Historicity: Brandom, Habermas and Hegel

Norman Schultz

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SEMANTIC REALISM AND HISTORICITY

BRANDON, HABERMAS, AND HEGEL

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College & Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Norman Schultz

May 2018
SEMANTIC REALISM AND HISTORICITY
BRANDOM, HABERMAS AND HEGEL

By
Norman Schultz

Approved January 11, 2018

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ABSTRACT

SEMANTIC REALISM
BRANDON, HABERMAS AND HEGEL

By
Norman Schultz
May 2018

Dissertation supervised by Professor Dr. James Swindal

The thesis of this dissertation is that Habermas’ universal pragmatic and the recent neo-pragmatist semantic realism of Brandom, aimed at bridging the divide, are both based on misinterpretations of Hegel. Both approaches misunderstand the central Hegelian idea of historicity, and thus fail to establish a correct connection to Hegel. The aim of the dissertation is to point to and sketch Hegel’s idea of historicity. As part of the discussion, I will defend the controversial thesis that Hegel did not have a system, but rather a historical account of how we develop knowledge under the historical conditions of society. Hegel, unlike Brandom or Habermas, thinks that philosophy does not seek knowledge of reality, where ‘reality’ is understood as the mind-independent world. Reality as such is unknown and unknowable, since it is limited through human experience of social and historical reality.
DEDICATION

To Ava.
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1. Introduction

The thesis of this dissertation is that Habermas’ universal pragmatic and the recent neo-pragmatist semantic realism of Brandom, aimed at bridging the divide, are both based on misinterpretations of Hegel. Both approaches misunderstand the central Hegelian idea of historicity, and thus fail to establish a correct connection to Hegel. The aim of the dissertation is to point to and sketch Hegel’s idea of historicity. As part of the discussion, I will defend the controversial thesis that Hegel did not have a system, but rather a historical account of how we develop knowledge under the historical conditions of society. Hegel, unlike Brandom or Habermas, thinks that philosophy does not seek knowledge of reality, where ‘reality’ is understood as the mind-independent world. Reality as such is unknown and unknowable, since it is limited through human experience of social and historical reality.

In order to demonstrate these points, I will discuss the problem from a historical perspective in focusing on the recent controversy between Brandom and Habermas. I will trace this controversy back to its origin in Hegelianism, Marxism, and the roots of analytic philosophy. I will demonstrate that the origins for analytic philosophy can be considered as reactions to Hegel and are further closely related to the divide between analytic and Continental philosophy.

The Brandom and Habermas-controversy includes Habermas’ praise for Brandom’s contribution to a pragmatic integration of reference-semantics, a term that has to be clarified in its meaning and possibility. Habermas criticizes Brandom’s conceptual realism, however, for equating facts and norms and thus failing to grasp the emancipatory function of language.

I will reconstruct the debate between Brandom and Habermas from two perspectives:

1. From the side of reference-semantics: Brandom’s reference to individuals and his solution of anaphoric chains can be read as the pragmatic integration of reference-
semantics. This is also a major part of Habermas’ Discourse Theory.\(^1\) The pragmatic integration of reference-semantics, however, is a reaction to a problem that Ideal Language Philosophy posed in following positivist tendencies to reject metaphysics, and in the process falsely attacked Hegel.

2. From the side of our normative commitments: due to the equation of facts and norms, Habermas claims that Brandom fails to point out the emancipatory function of our language. Thus, Brandom objectifies our discourses. Habermas does not see the possibility of emancipation based on Brandom’s model. The Habermasian concept of emancipation derives from a problematic Marxist concept of the development of societies. Habermas is unclear on the distinctions between idealism and materialism, and on the distinction between empirical investigations and philosophical investigations. He is further unclear about the justification of the concrete emancipation that is supposed to be central to discourse and that he calls ‘historical materialism’. On the basis of these unclear distinctions, he denies, falsely in my view, that a return to Hegel is possible.

The historical analysis will reveal that Brandom is unconcerned with the practical question of emancipation, and that his project of integrating reference-semantics is not related in any essential way to pragmatism as it has been understood in the debate. It is rather related to a problematic realism that relies on formal semantics and as a conceptual realism equates facts and norms. Since, moreover, Brandom’s project is based on what I will describe as a false relation to Hegel, Brandom’s position can also not be interpreted as a return to Hegel. It is rather a return to an aspect of Hegelian epistemology, in order to exploit partial insights of Hegel’s project. I will

\(^1\) Höffe, for example, reads Brandom for this reason as a Discourse Theoretician (see Höffe, Ottfried. *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason: The Foundation of Modern Philosophy*. Springer Science and Business 2010, 186).
argue that Habermas is right to point out these problems, but that he cannot offer an alternative, for he cannot substantiate his claim that discourse communities are necessarily evolving.

In contrast to Habermas’ rejection of a qualified return to Hegel, I will describe Hegel’s epistemology as a systematic, historical account that can usefully serve as an alternative. Hegel’s position is structured as a non-dogmatic metaphysics, whose historical conditions need to be worked out and that can be revised with regard to changing historical conditions. A Brandomian inferentialism would at most be only one limited part of a system that is developed on the grounds of history. My final goal is therefore to clarify these conditions of history and to correct some views on Hegel in the debate.

1.1 The Divide between Continental and Analytic Philosophy

For the last 50 years, philosophy has been dominated by the division between analytical and Continental philosophy. This dissertation will follow Rockmore’s suggestion that the divide can be traced back to the early reactions of philosophers like Russell against Hegel. For Rockmore the divide produced, moreover, a third competitor that is pragmatism. He defends the idea that “all three of them must be taken into account for us to have any hope of arriving at a viable

---

2 The divide can be traced back to earlier years, but this is only due to a retrospective analysis. So, for example, it is well known that Husserl was informed about both camps and stood in contact to philosophers from the circle of Vienna (see Ferraris, Maurizio. “Introduction.” In Bridging the Analytical Continental Divide: A Companion to Contemporary Western Philosophy. Edited by Tiziana Andina. Leiden: Brill, 2014, 6). The authors of Beyond the Analytic-Continental Divide: Pluralist Philosophy in the Twenty-First Century (Bell, Jeffrey, Andrew CUTFIELLO, and Paul Livingston. New York: Routledge, 2015) locate the division no earlier than in the 1960s, and Hilary Putnam notices no divide in his studies beginning at the end of the 1940s. But he notices differences in the 1960s, while at the same time Analytic Philosophy is already changing (see Putnam, Hillary. “A Half Century of Philosophy Viewed from Within.” In American Academic Culture in Transformation: Fifty Years, Four Disciplines. Edited by Thomas Bender and Carl Schorske. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998: 193-227).
understanding of the evolution of the recent debate” (Rockmore 2004, 467). The dissertation will provide a historical reconstruction of analytic philosophy and Habermas’ Discourse Theory as a historical reaction to Hegel. Before explaining the details of Discourse Theory, I will give a short characterization of the current status of the divide.

The Divide between Continental and Analytic Philosophy: In broad strokes we could say that the divide consists in the premise of a non-metaphysical analysis of language (the original positivist program), and the premise of the reflection on transcendental concepts in post-metaphysical times (Continental philosophy). A look at recent developments indicates that a unification of these programs has never occurred:

[T]he division between the traditions has caused dissension, mutual distrust, and institutional barriers to the development of common concerns and problems among working philosophers and so has significantly limited, in many cases, the range and fruitfulness of philosophical discussions and debates.” (Bell, Cutrofello, Livingston 2015, 2)

Rockmore arrived at a similar conclusion in 2004:

4 While Apel attempts to find an a priori rule for human interactions, Habermas uses the theory in order to support his own theory of a communication community that progresses toward an ideal of fair communication realized in democratic institutions.
5 Putnam claims that under the influence of Quine ‘metaphysics’ became a dirty word in the sixties (see Putnam 1998, 207). This would mean that metaphysics could have been part of an original analytic project. Nevertheless, metaphysics, according to Putnam became an important topic. So, for example, the question of whether numbers really exist reemerged in analytic programs in the 1960s (see Putnam 1998, 207).
6 Some more characteristics are “varying but overlapping commitments to the linguistic turn, the rejection of metaphysics, the claim that philosophy is continuous with science, a reductive approach to analysis, the employment of formal logic, a focus on argument and a concern for clarity” (Chase, James, and Jack Reynolds. Analytic Versus Continental: Arguments on the Methods and Value of Philosophy. Oxon: Routledge, 2014).
7 Continental Philosophy is, of course, much more complex, so that we cannot reduce it simply to the idea of metaphysical concepts. Continental philosophy includes the development of phenomenology, dialectics, deconstruction and many other approaches. Here, however, we refer to Continental Philosophy as a program that is interested in the failure of systems to deal with metaphysical concepts.
Increasing, but selective, attention has been given of late to the relation between analytic and Continental philosophy, which has been marked by a century of bad blood. Ignorance, scorn, and lack of attention on both sides have divided them in ways that may or may not be irreparable (Rockmore 2004, 468).

What causes this divide is still a question of dispute and thus the perception of the divide varies widely. An extreme position is held by Putnam. According to him, analytic philosophers quickly dissociated themselves from their positivist roots (see Putnam’s discussion 1998). With regard to this and despite the rare citation of continental philosophers in analytic journals (see Chase and Reynolds 2007, 5), Putnam claims at the end of the last century that the divide had already disappeared. Because of tendencies to approach metaphysical questions, which runs against the positivist origins of analytic philosophy, the only remaining divide, according to Putnam, is that Continental philosophers are unclear, or simply do not make arguments (see Putnam 1998, 219).

The view of the cured divide is not uncommon. Rorty suggests that Brandom overcomes the difference between analytic and Continental philosophy (see Rockmore 2004, 139). Rockmore, on the contrary, criticizes these interpretations as in effect political moves suggesting that analytic philosophers could do philosophy better than Continental philosophers. This belief of stylistic superiority seems also to be implied by Putnam’s position. Rockmore objects therefore to the inference that the divide has already disappeared:

One must wonder if it makes sense to envisage a synthesis between opposing movements, an overcoming of the differences between analytic and Continental philosophy, two adversaries that have struggled against each other and with pragmatism throughout the whole of the past century. Indeed, some observers now think that a clear distinction between the two movements can no longer be drawn (Rockmore 2004, 471).

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8 Putnam’s perspective is debatable. It seems Putnam suggests in his article that analytic philosophers are interested in traditional, Continental subjects. Putnam’s analysis, however, is mainly anecdotal. I mention Putnam, in order to develop an idea of the divide, instead of justifying his position.

In other words, he suggests that a supposed synthesis oversimplifies a conflict that remained for more than fifty years. Such simplifications, however, are common in formulating specific programs. So researchers also believe that the divide was, or, at least, could be overcome by a new understanding of realism and a rejection of constructivist accounts:

The confusion between ontology and epistemology is at the root of the relativism (and more deeply, the irrealism) prevalent in the philosophy of the second half of the twentieth century, which assumed that reality was simply the fruit of social construction and the conceptual schemes we use to relate to the world (Ferraris 2014, 7).

The dismissal of constructivist programs and the appeal of the new realisms delivered, according to Ferraris, a solid bridge for Continental and analytic philosophers. He utilizes the idea of reality: “There is a solid nucleus of reality, which gives sense to our concepts and respect to which [sic] philosophy, not unlike other forms of knowledge can produce answers” (Ferraris 2014, 7). The divide, however, might not be simply overcome by the new realism that discards or somehow overcomes the problem of interpretation as Ferraris assumes. The optimism that the divide was cured stands in contrast with the lack of citations of Continental philosophers in journals of analytic philosophy (see Chase and Reynolds 2014, 5). Putnam’s remarks are rather anecdotal than a source of evidence that the divide has been overcome, and Ferraris’ assumption that realism is the marker of overcoming the divide is too broad, since Hegel, for example, could be reconstructed as an empirical realist (as I will demonstrate in chapter four).

Instead, it occurs that the divide will subsist because of the tendency of all scientific inquiry to diversify into opposing standpoints as also Rockmore suggests: “Philosophy has been
divided among proponents of different points of view virtually since the beginning, and that seems unlikely to change whatever happens in analytic philosophy” (Rockmore 2001, 369). So even though Discourse Theory, as many attempts, was obviously not successful in unifying the divide, it studied and systematized both contradictory approaches and indirectly demonstrated their broader conceptual and historical motivation. This is because Discourse Theory was not particularly interested in bridging a divide between these two opposed programs. My thesis is that beyond this unification of conflicting, contingently appearing theories, Discourse Theory tried to deliver a model of how to unify different historical and contradictory approaches through analysis and calling relation to problems that necessarily emerge. When Hilary Putnam therefore famously asked “[w]hy can we not just be ‘philosophers’ without an adjective?”, then the answer should have been that it never was about style, or the contingent emergence of different problems in history, but that conflicting positions are part of emerging knowledge (Putnam 1998, 221).

Thus, I defend the idea that it is not only a question of two kinds of approaches worked out by philosophers interested in different questions. It is rather a question of how different discourses led to different opinions and different styles that have shaped three philosophies that symbolize a divide. Of course, I am not going so far as to state that we “cannot understand either analytic or Continental Philosophy without its ‘other’” (see Chase and Reynolds 2014, 9). I also do not claim that they are both two sides of a dialectical coin. My idea is, however, that there is a historical and systematic connection to how these different approaches came on the scene and defended their programs on social grounds in their historical relation to each other. In a

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11 Of course, such systematic relations are multi-dimensional, and oppositions are also developed inside of these disciplines. For this reason, I am not reducing the essence of Continental and Analytic Philosophy to two systematic parts of a whole, but pointing out a weaker systematic relation resulting from their confrontation.
Hegelian sense, we could say that we can test the positions of these views with regard to their rational standards that they came up with by themselves. This means, however, that we have to reconstruct these historical standards that are not independent of their history.

Ferraris’ standard for Continental philosophy is a constructivism that denies realism. Putnam’s standard is a clearer style for analytic philosophy. Ferraris standard for the new philosophy is a new realism. All seem to be inappropriate to discuss the divide. A historical analysis of these standards and how they evolved has to be delivered first.

Considering that every system of beliefs has a possible contradictory belief-system, it might be reasonable to assume that the one view is shaped when it is in contact with the other systematic part, its negation, so that proponents of each camp try to distance themselves from the other part of the system. Since there is, however, a great number of coherent systems, let us say, possible worlds of philosophy, it is not the case that one philosophy is the dialectical opposite of the other. The historical development of standards is more complex. Rockmore writes on this topic with regard to analytic philosophy, however:

Like Marxism, analytic philosophy tends to define itself through its opposition to idealism, where the latter is understood as whatever analytic thinkers reject. This longstanding negative attitude toward idealism still exists for many analytic philosophers. But it has been partly defused for others through the recent selective nascent analytic turn (or return) to Hegel (Rockmore 2004, 472).

In other words, a program like analytic philosophy is not independent of its historical moment, but stands in a relation to its opponent and its Zeitgeist. For this reason, it was not a coincidence that the beginning of analytic philosophy was motivated by a rejection of Hegel’s Idealism. Russell famously claimed: “I began to believe everything the Hegelians disbelieved” (Russell
Russell’s rejection signifies the initiation of a divide that is carried out as a miscomprehension of what Idealism means and that shaped our conception of Hegelian philosophy as well as the way of how we have followed analytic streams. Analytic philosophy in its beginning phase followed the standard of an anti-holistic movement that claimed to find immediate truth as an instance of what is externally real. The continued debate quickly revealed this as a mistake. But its false rejection of idealism, which meant, according to Russell, that only the mind exists, remained. Since Hegel’s theory was obviously not completely absurd, thinkers like Sellars’ adopted arguments against immediate knowledge, but did not discuss the more important relation to idealism. So the return to Hegel was only semblance. The later emergence of the neo-pragmatisms and their cognitive realisms is hardly interpretable as a return to Hegel since they all reject to position themselves with regard to idealism. They exploit partial insights. Thus, Rockmore writes:

Though Hegel is a leading German idealist, analytic philosophers now turning to Hegel routinely draw a tacit distinction between Hegel and idealism. Everything happens as if it were possible to appropriate Hegel for analytic concerns while simply bracketing his idealism. Though they are starting to come to grips with Hegel, to the best of my knowledge none of them has yet found a way to come to grips with his idealist commitment or with idealism in general. With the signal exception of Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer, who knows Hegel’s conception of dialectical logic well […], the nascent Hegelian turn in analytic philosophy is distinguished by its utter disregard for the deeply idealist dimension of Hegel’s theory (Rockmore 2004, 472).

According to this misapprehension of idealism as denying that reality exists, and its false return to Hegel without idealism, I claim that Ferraris standard of realism is already infected by the analytic perspective. According to Ferraris, the Hegelian philosophy as a Continental philosophy

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must be a constructivist anti-realism. Hegel’s philosophy, however, is an empirical realism and there is no German Idealist philosophy that is known to me that denies that reality exists. Ferraris characterization is therefore not historically grounded.

Given these arguments, I follow Rockmore’s thesis that the divide is connected to the reception of Hegel’s philosophy. I consequently claim that a reintroduction of Hegel into the debate is useful only in so far as we understand his idealism. A discussion of the cure of the divide must therefore be related to a historical examination of the origin of the divide and point out the development of different possible standards.

In particular, I am concerned with the Habermas-Brandom-debate. While Habermas explicitly rejects a return to Hegel, Brandom’s return to Hegel is questionable. While Habermas falsely reconstructs Hegel as a teleological thinker with a closed system, Brandom does not include a discussion of the concept of history or the so-called system. The history of the system, however, is one of the major discoveries of Hegel, which I intend to discuss as a general standard that with rare exceptions was simply ignored in the analytic debate.

The standard of historical systematization itself, however, no matter how much it is an intratheoretical or extratheoretical criterion of science (see Rockmore 2005, 198), is, indeed, a subject that can explain a feature of the divide between Continental and analytic philosophy, especially when it comes down to its metaphysical implications. Though Continental philosophy is complex and certainly there is no explicit program that philosophers have committed to, Franks comes to the following conclusion with regard to these omitted subjects:

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“[T]he German idealist conception of systematicity and its value stands between the Anglo-American and Continental traditions, which still, for the most part, pass each other by in mutual incomprehension.”¹⁴ I agree with Franks that the analytic position is based on an ungrounded fear of a closed, metaphysical system, since “the system, if successfully executed would be the culmination of philosophy as traditionally conceived” (Franks, 2005, 3). That we have such a system, however, is also not the guiding Continental position. Continental philosophy is rather concerned about the failure of what is traditionally conceived as the system (see Franks 2005, 4), and advanced therefore towards an account of systematicity, meaning a system that is open in its circularity. A system that is open, however, must include a conception of history. I claim that, contrary to popular beliefs, Hegel defends such an idea. He opens the idea of a system with his account of historicity.

It follows that I do not claim that systematization needs to become the only measure of scientific progress in current times.¹⁵ I disagree here on two levels with regard to Hoyningen-Huene’s thesis that the sciences are characterized through higher systematicity. First, Hoyningen-Huene believes that systematization can be achieved without a metaphysical theory of unity.¹⁶ Thus, he follows an analytical perspective, because the metaphysical question of unity cannot be appropriately addressed in a program that denies access to non-descriptive presuppositions such as unity. The account of unity that Hegel proposes does not mean that unity

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¹⁵ This point is defended by Hoyningen-Huene “[…] I will argue that the essential difference between scientific knowledge and other forms of knowledge consists of the higher degree of systematicity of the former.” He further notes that “the notion of systematicity is far from clear; in fact, it is vague and ambiguous.” (Hoyningen-Huene, Paul. Systematicity: The nature of science. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, ix).
¹⁶ He acknowledges, for example, the Wittgensteinian opinion that “[a]ll the sciences are united by relation of family resemblances only” (Hoyningen-Huene 2013, 27).
is presupposed as a reality, or that a mind-independent reality is structured with regard to it.\textsuperscript{17} Instead, we need an idea of historical systematization without presupposing that there is a unified whole in a presupposed reality. In my view, however, what I am calling ‘unity’ is ideally produced in discourses for pragmatic purposes relative to their historical moment. This has two consequences. First, the ideal of unity is part of our discourse and for that reason real. Second, the ideal of unity is only real as an ideal and thus allows the system to be open. This means that we make decisions on the basis of having systematized our experiences with regard to an ideal of unity of our historical moment. Our experiences are then the result of a historical unity. The idea of unity, however, is not real in a theoretical sense. But it is true in a pragmatic sense, since we need to agree on making progressive steps towards it. It is presupposed and developed for our discourse as a goal in order to cooperate, but it is not necessarily achieved. I will, moreover, defend the thesis that this concept of a historical systematicity is an original Hegelian idea. Contrary to Hoyningen-Huene, this means that historical systematicity must include a metaphysical conception of unity.

I further disagree with Hoyningen-Huene as concerns the fact that systematicity is not only an intratheoretical criterion for science. This means that systematicity is more a historical agreement about what it means to do science than what it is derived from science itself. I agree that systematicity plays a role in many current, scientific approaches,\textsuperscript{18} but it is neither clearly developed, nor entirely explicit to these sciences. For example, the idea of systematicity as “a systematic interconnection of facts” leaves open what facts are and poses thus the much larger questions of what this ‘interconnection of facts’ is supposed to be (see Hoyningen-Huene 2013, 17).

\textsuperscript{17} This is what Russell calls the ‘jelly-bowl-view’.
\textsuperscript{18} As Hoyningen-Huene demonstrates with regard to physics, for example (Hoyningen-Huene 2013, 14).
15). Such kinds of factual realisms might even confuse the productive idea of systematization that does not require reference to isolated, immediate facts. My thesis is therefore that scientists follow roughly of what they think is science with regard to the content they discover.

Hoyningen-Huene who has written to my knowledge one of the few analytic accounts of this theme investigates systematicity as a method that is independent from content. But he actually demonstrates that sciences have only a rough idea of what systematization means. This occurs to me as contradictory to his idea that scientists follow the idea of systematicity in a better way.\(^{19}\) To me it rather implies that Hoyningen-Huene presupposes the independence of the sciences from their historical embeddedness in a society. The unrecognized problem consists then in Hoyningen-Huene’s standard of a science as separated from the standards that people of a historical moment use in order to discuss problems. He must mean that the role of the scientist is distinguishable from the role of being a ‘normal’ person in a society. This, however, poses the difficult question of whether scientists are ‘normal’ persons at home and abnormal persons at work. These sharp distinctions would introduce too many absurdities in my mind. I think that scientist use similar reasoning at work and at home and it is hard to entirely distinguish these mindsets. Most important, however, is the fact that systematicity is something that we do at home, at work, and in sciences, but not because it is the only standard but because it is practical at this moment in history.

I am interested in how to describe systematicity appropriately. I perceive this theme to be an attempt to resolve the difference between conflicting positions in a higher unification. I regard

this as a normal occurrence of natural consciousness that happens on all levels of cognition and discourse. I do not claim, moreover, that this systematicity is independent from its historical discussion. ‘Systematicity’ is rather the abstract and historically generated description of how our natural consciousness works. Furthermore, it describes how we order the contents of our life in a society with regard to the historical moment. What I call ‘systematicity’ resembles then the Hegelian idea of development towards a system on the basis of a subject understood anthropologically. This development is guided by the notion that something is posited as an identity by posing a difference to itself. According to Hegel, this posited difference spreads out into extremes, before it finds its way back to its unity (see Hegel’s theory of the threefold syllogism). Though I use the term ‘systematicity’, it remains unclear whether we can have an entirely formal theory of this concept. Thus, systematicity cannot be a clear intratheoretical criterion. It is rather a description of a criterion that is demonstrated with regard to different contents in our historical moment. In this sense, I am opposed to a formal Discourse Theory or a formal pragmatics.

In what follows, I will understand ‘systematicity’ as, firstly, the presupposition of a norm for a context of unordered phenomena to be coherently explained with respect to a theory of its historical moment. Secondly, systematicity includes control of the concrete development until the outcomes make it possible to evaluate the formerly presupposed norm. Thirdly, systematicity allows for the conceptual correction of the norms by a process of experience.

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If we, however, follow this idea of systematicity as a formal method, namely if we seek for a higher unification for extremes that we have posited, then it seems to me that all our further descriptive ideas must be opened up for contextualism. This is because every determined concept is explained with regard to its extremes, while the mediation between these extremes must itself form an extreme. Every concept is then open for a reinterpretation, so that concepts gain histories of negation. These histories of negation have further implications for contextualism so that Rockmore, for example, writes:

If Hegel is correct, the commitment to contextualism already entails a commitment to a historical conception of knowledge, hence to historicism, that is to a view about the intrinsically historical character of all of all first-order cognitive claims (Rockmore 2005, 193).

This means that all our knowledge claims are result of historical process and cannot be understood independently from history. It seems to me that this further implies that there is not last word or an end to the debate. The remaining, grounding and more important question is then: what is history?

Thinking about historical relativism, leads me to the following conclusions: the idea of knowledge itself cannot be an arbitrary belief that we follow, because beliefs are not knowledge and societies do not justify themselves as arbitrary belief systems. They understand their interactions as justified with regard to a rational criterion that can be defended. Consequently, if historical relativism is the foundation for knowledge, then it would not have much to offer for society. My intuition is therefore that historical relativism must be in some sense compatible with a theory of truth. I will explain this intuition in the following paragraphs.

The following arguments are usually made against relativism. If I claim that ‘everything is relative’, then there are two strategies to encounter this relativism. In case, I hold a strong
relativism, I commit a performative self-contradiction, because I performatively claim something to be true, so that the content of my claim contradicts my performance. As a consequence, I might hold a weaker version of my original claim in order to avoid this performative contradiction. So I do not claim that it is absolutely true that there is no truth. Instead, I say: ‘according to my perspective there is no truth in an absolute sense.’ Then, however, my position might be just irrelevant for the discussion, since somebody else could claim that his perspective is different from mine and he believes in truth. In any case it seems to me that a mere relativism is a position that is hard to defend.

Historically relativistic claims are different. If I claim that ‘everything is historically relative’, then somebody could demonstrate that my claim must be obviously itself historically relative. My claim, however, does not stand in contradiction to my performance. While I claim that everything is historically relative, it could still be that my position depends on my history and hence is based upon history. One could object that my claim excludes meaningful claims, but, in fact, it is not excluded that my historicist claim could be true. I only deny that given the structure of our discourses, we can identify it as independent from history. This history, however, could be true. So, in this case I am open for a discussion on rational standards and expect falsification. This is a decisive difference to a mere relativism, because relativism excludes any possible opening towards truth. I am therefore opposed to equate historicism and a mere relativism. Hence, historicism is in theory compatible with truth. Margolis writes on this issue:
Historicism, in short, is itself a universalized doctrine found under quite contingent, particular circumstances to be distinctly compelling but not conceptually inescapable at every possible price (Margolis 2007, 310).²¹

I interpret this in the way that historicism is not only based on falsification, but that it also does not deny an opening. In this sense, I can claim that systematization as self-reflection with regard to history can support itself as possibly true. It is not only about the regional order of some bits of knowledge that we sometimes accept to be valid for some sciences, for it can develop a relationship to truth that is relative to its historical moment. Historicism can thus defend itself without performative contradiction or without becoming irrelevant. ‘Systematization’ can then still be understood as the extended pursuit of a unified theory of knowledge, ethics, art, and religion. Hence, it has no other end than pursuing the whole and is thus a holistic, systematizing epistemology with regard to history. I acknowledge, however, Margolis’ critique:

> In fact, it is a characteristic of numerous historicist theories that they end by embracing some form of universalism. The reason is simply that historicists are often motivated by the wish to avoid relativism or the appearance of relativism (Margolis 2007, 40).

Margolis seems to exclude a compatibility of historicism and truth as a final result. So, for example, I cannot say that everything is historical, but I know this as a truth. However, I could agree that historicism might end at some point in history because we have found truth. It could also be that we find truth through investigating history and following historicism. I would therefore phrase it differently than Margolis: It is a question of testing historical positions to determine whether they can hold to an ahistorical, universal standard. The task of historicisms is therefore not to deny truth, but to test historical positions with regard to their standards.

Given the significant differences between Hegel’s theory of history that is critical and the recent epistemological holism in analytic philosophy that is realist, I agree therefore with Rockmore that “the distinctions between analytic and Continental philosophy are real and persistent and cannot obviously be bridged merely through continuing the debate.” (Rockmore 2004, 474). I will therefore attempt to push the debate into the direction of historicism.

A further interesting feature of the debate is the following: Rockmore further excludes the view that the link between analytic and Continental Philosophy can be established by the fundamental rule of logic. This is because the Hegelian logic is distinct from the ordinary, historical logic programs (see Rockmore 2004, 474). Thus he rejects a notion of a possible whole as a semantic net of logical relations. Instead, Rockmore puts emphasis on constructivism:

The promise of the new century does not lie in continuing the fruitless effort, which stretches back in the Western discussion at least until Plato, to know the way the world is. As Kant suggests, it lies rather in further working out a constructivist approach to knowledge (Rockmore 2004, 477).

For a long time I understood constructivism as an attempt to find objective criteria of how we construct reality. I claim that this was the discourse theoretical program. Now, I acknowledge that constructivism has to be defended on the grounds of history. The advantage of history is that it is not a mere relativism, but that it claims to know objects with regard to what they have become. It tests absolute truth claims, and even falsifies them. But it does not exclude a possible opening towards truth. The challenge is to demonstrate this position in roots for the Hegelian philosophy and compare it with Brandom’s approach.

I have to remark that I am only working out the roots but that the major focus is not to demonstrate Hegel’s historical account in its entirety. Rather, I would like to discuss the debate between Brandom and Habermas, and its problematic relationship to Hegel’s historicism.
believe that my discussion of historicism in relation to this debate can open a fruitful field for further philosophical investigations.

1.2 Epistemological Holism – The Pragmatic Integration of Semantics

In the following, I will discuss the specific steps of my dissertation. My goal is to comment on the debate between Habermas and Brandom. In order to demonstrate the deficits of the debate between Continental and analytic philosophy with regard to their discussion of Hegel, I need to examine the historical relation of Brandom’s and Habermas’ approaches to Hegel.

1.2.1 Epistemological Holism and its Relation to Brandom

Epistemological holism is one of the later insights of the analytic debate that also signifies a partial return to Hegel. I will reconstruct it as one of the main bridges between Habermas and Brandom. Such a holism is, first, the denial of atomistic structures and assumes that meaning is grasped by capturing the conceptual relations between contents such as tables, atoms, or even persons. Second, the so-called pragmatic turn emphasizes the function of a knower who is necessarily involved in such processes as capturing conceptual relations. This assumes that conceptual relations alone are not sufficient for delivering significant content. Conceptual relations must be embedded in meaningful actions of persons. If, for example, Austin’s focus on utterances demonstrates that the mere propositional part of statements is not enough to express significant content, then we need to think about the performances of persons who are involved more intensively. The performative part of a statement involves what somebody does when he claims something. Thus, epistemic claims and normative commitments are related. Consequently, we need to explain the strategy of integrating a reference-semantics into a
pragmatic structure that includes a concept of linguistic performances of persons. This seems to indicate that we have to test the combination of epistemology with a normative approach or a performative semantics. In my view, however, pragmatics has to subordinate semantics to pragmatics. In this sense, I reject a semantic foundationalism, the Brandomian view that the proposition is the downtown of language. A pragmatic integration cannot be founded on the primacy of the proposition.

In order to demonstrate these theses, I will first reconstruct the foundations for the pragmatic turn that emerged within the program of analytic philosophy. I will demonstrate that the pragmatic turn is an attempt to compensate for what I will call a birth deficit of analytic philosophy that is related to a false attack on Hegel by Russell and Moore. This birth deficit is its external realism. Furthermore, I will show that both of these philosophers misinterpret Hegel as denying the external world as well as how they shift analytic philosophy’s focus to external realism. Against Hegel’s assumed ontological monism, which he, in my mind, does not defend, Russell proposes an atomistic epistemology based on reference-semantics.

By ‘reference-semantics’ I mean the different linguistically informed approaches in philosophy that presuppose immediate beings, individuals, or structures as a source for our epistemological and practical discourses. These theories still presuppose the idea of representing symbols and represented objects. Brandom’s pragmatic integration attempts to respect these immediacies as an integral part of a theory and thus also assigns a space for theory of representation. I will point out the fundamental difficulties with this dualistic conception of objects and their representation, especially when it is taken to be foundational. My overall goal

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here, however, is to reveal that the pragmatic integration is an attempt to compensate for the problems caused by the misinterpretation of Hegel’s philosophy. The question remains then whether this pragmatic integration leads to the desired outcome of a justified cognitive realism which basically means that reality must have the same structure as our conceptual operations.

I agree with the main assumptions: since there is no immediate or direct experience, symbolic mediations miss their ‘real’ semantic reference. ‘Reference’ itself is an abstract and formal term of a theory, while even the referenced object of the concept ‘reference’ is hidden behind its symbolic mediation. In other words, ‘reference’ as a linguistic term is meant to refer to something non-linguistic by linguistic means, certainly a paradoxical undertaking. With regard to Sellars’ critique of the ‘myth of the given’, I will demonstrate that these theories are not successful. I do not deny that we cognitively identify points of reference, but I do deny that we can reach a universal meaning concerning what these references ultimately mean. In a more detailed analysis of Sellars’ approach, I will discuss the consequences of an excessive rejection of reference which is an empty coherentism. His attempts to present a universal criterion for knowledge after rejecting any kind of given will be demonstrated as highly problematic. As an alternative, I will indicate that Hegel does not reject a given and thus conserves an empirical component, while Sellars replaces this by a linguistic rationalism. This indicates that there is possibly no need for a picture-realism.

A further problem arises since the truth values that we assign to statements, including symbols understood as representing immediacies, are embedded in utterances that are structured with regard to different social roles. Thus, it is one task to understand truth values objectively with regard to the grammatical structure of sentences, and so to lead a theoretical discourse. Yet, it is another task to understand how this theoretical discourse also depends on the social bonds of
the communication-community and therefore the ethical situation in which the members of a community try to cooperate and thus establish a communication-community. It is assumed by neo-pragmatists that the failure lies in underrepresenting the role of the participant’s perspective. I will test this hypothesis. My hypothesis is that Sellars’ failed attempts led to a normative analysis of the person in order to compensate for the lack of a given. Through the introduction of Hegel into the debate analytic philosophers utilize a partial conception of Hegel’s overall historical approach. However, they only pay attention to a contextualism of interacting persons. They do not discuss their position concerning history.

A unification of the propositional part of the utterance and the performative action with regard to actors can only be achieved if we follow a systematicity that will lead us to the metaphysical and historical concept of a person in a historical society. My claim is that any holism will lead to this question of historical societies. By ‘holism’ I then understand the task of explaining the foundational role that metaphysical concepts like world, soul, and God play in historical discourses. All other concepts will eventually reveal themselves as dialectically related to these concepts that we, however, only understand historically. I do not see how we can ground these questions once and for all. Furthermore, I do not say that Brandom’s approach advances into these important fields of Hegel’s theory. I will close the chapter with a detailed analysis of Brandom’s account of semantic realism. I will investigate Brandom’s concrete approach of embedding a reference-semantic into an inferential pragmatics. Brandom’s solution of anaphora to the question of singular terms will be discussed. Finally, I will indicate that his linguistic solution remains only partially successful compared with the Hegelian development of historical systematicity that includes metaphysical terms and that positions itself with regard to a historical whole.
1.2.2 Habermas’ Post-Marxism and the Linguistic Turn

Habermas’ Discourse Theory stands in close relationship to the neo-pragmatic tradition. With his book *Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns* (1981), he initiates a linguistic turn in his approach to societies. Apparently, a linguistic theory promises a post-metaphysical method that avoids the fallacies of consciousness paradigms. There are two reasons why Habermas’ Discourse Theory is relevant for the debate. Firstly, Habermas, as well as Brandom, attempts to unify analytic and Continental approaches in a pragmatic theory. Secondly, however, Habermas’ criticizes Brandom’s neo-pragmatism in *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung* (1998). Thus, Habermas‘ approach is intrinsically related to Brandom’s philosophy. Yet, he also distances himself from this theory. For this reason, I will investigate Habermas’ criticism of Brandom by reconstructing his theory. I will debate Habermas’ overall post-Marxist position and its misguided interpretation of Marx through the lens of Marxism. It will turn out that Habermas cannot justify a rational standard of human emancipation through language. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that his view of Hegel is distorted by the misinterpretation of Hegel through Marxism. Habermas also relies on the achievements of analytic philosophy with regard to the pragmatic integration of reference-semantics. I will identify the significance of the linguistic and pragmatic turn for his Discourse Theory and relate its core-concepts to epistemological holism.

The pragmatic turn, at first glance, seems to lead us away from metaphysical terms of world, soul, God, or truth, objectivity, reality and reference, validity and rationality. According to Habermas, a pragmatic theory has to explain their function and fulfill the following

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23 Habermas lists the same terms, I added the metaphysical terms world, soul and God (see Habermas, Jürgen. *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999, 7).
conditions: it has to deliver a “normative concept of linguistic cooperation”, explain the “discursively validifiable claims,” demonstrate what “formal pragmatic suppositions of the world” mean, and demonstrate “the conditions of rational acceptability” of the former term (see Habermas 1999, 9). For Habermas, the difficulty concerns the possibility of discussing a “world independent of our description” with regard to the pragmatic insight that an “immediate approach to a naked reality” is impossible (Habermas 1999, 9). My arguments should demonstrate that the pragmatic shift puts a clear emphasis on the conditions for speech acts that were worked out in Habermas’ theory of Communicative Action, but that there are metaphysical conditions necessary for its success that supersede Habermas’ approach of Discourse Theory.

For these reasons, several points distinguish my approach from Habermas’ theory of pragmatic cooperation. Firstly, I do not see that actions are intelligible in themselves. Instead, they are crossed with the epistemic whole that is historically derived through reflection. This means that a person does not simply act. Rather, a person acts teleologically with regard to historical ends, and with a historical idea of the end of all ends. This further means that a dialectical understanding of the whole is also necessary for guiding discourses. So we need to accept that dialectic leads us to questions of world, soul, and God, but overall to their relation to history.

Secondly, I will classify the historically involved person and its co-subjects as the question of an anthropology with regard to the historical development of what it means to be a human. Habermas replaces this idea of a historically developed concept of humanity by a weak

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24 Translations by me.
naturalism that from my perspective is unnecessary and metaphysically misleading.\textsuperscript{25}

‘Naturalism’ in general is rather the result of a theoretical discourse in which people produce the concept of nature in contrast to dismissible supernatural entities like souls and God. Since I do not assume that an immediate approach to reality is possible, the concept of nature is as much a product of inferences as souls and God. For this reason ‘naturalism’ has to be explained in its dialectical relationship to these ‘supernatural’ ideas and cannot be grounded in itself. Habermas’ escape to a weak naturalism therefore reduces philosophy to an empirical enterprise that does not have to be grounded any further.

Despite these deficits, it is important that Habermas delivers a concise criticism of Brandom’s conceptual realism. For Habermas, the tradition of analytic philosophy has treated the propositional claim as the paradigmatic case of meaning and truth. He notes that Frege and Russell, the semantical theories from Quine to Davidson, and from Sellars to Brandom pursued the mental theories of consciousness with analytical means (see Habermas 1999, 9). The question, however, remains: what is the “internal relation between successful communication and the representation of facts” (Habermas 1999, 11)? For Habermas, the second person perspective was widely ignored. According to the analytic position, we understand a sentence with regard to the following condition: we know what would be the case, if the sentence were true.\textsuperscript{26} Habermas argues, however, that the access to the conditions of truth is not immediate. Thus, there is a shift of the conditions for understanding the claim as true. It is not the „solipsistic approachable conditions of truth“ (Habermas 1999, 11), but the condition of what can be

\textsuperscript{25} First it is misleading, since naturalism, of course, is part of a broad discussion, and for the most part it equates philosophy with science, meaning that all phenomena can be explained without any reference to supernaturalist entities (Papineau, David. “Naturalism.” The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Edited by Edward, N. Zalta, Edward. Accessed May 1st, 2017. ). Such rejected supernaturalist entities are also ‘world’, ‘soul’, and ‘God’.

\textsuperscript{26} „Nach dieser Auffassung verstehen wir einen Satz, wenn wir wissen, was der Fall ist, wenn er wahr ist“ (Habermas 1999, 11).
accepted as publicly rational (see Habermas 1999, 11). ‘Rational’ means here that our reasons
can be shared publicly. It suspends private reasons. The mastery of a concept means therefore to
know how to use an expression “in order to cooperate with others on something” (Habermas
1999, 11). This indicates that there must be an „internal relation” between successful
communication and the representational function of language that is neglected in the framework
of Brandom (see Habermas1999, 11). Consequently, he accuses Brandom of pursuing a
methodological individualism. In other words, Brandom’s discourse participants do not
cooperate but they only observe tactically. Habermas’ criticism will be demonstrated in detail,
but, as I have pointed out earlier, his own theory of formal cooperation does not offer an
acceptable alternative.

Since Habermas rejects a transition to the Hegelian framework, because in his mind
Hegel reduces the responsibility of individuals who are controlled through a predestining concept
of Weltgeist, he rejects a further discussion of Hegel. Habermas’ reconstruction of Hegel,
however, is based on the assumption that Hegel has a closed system, while all development is
predestined by absolute spirit. A different understanding of Hegel would therefore be the most
viable option if Habermas’ objections against Brandom turned out to be true. I will particularly
focus on Habermas’ concerns with respect to a reinvigoration of Hegelian topics. I will offer an
interpretation of Hegel that respects Habermas’ criticism of Brandom, but proceeds with Hegel’s
account of a system that is open towards history.

1.3 Reconstruction of the Hegelian, Historical Systematicity
The pragmatic integration of a reference-semantics leads to the idea of the person in order to
complete the pragmatic, holistic conception. According to Discourse Theory and Brandom’s
inferential role semantics, this progression toward the person is because the validity of propositional statements depends on the ethical commitment of the speaker in a social community. The discernment of the ethical commitment of the speaker requires not only a an analysis of language, but also entails a metaphysical dimension.

Hegel’s epistemology leads us to this metaphysical dimension of the person that will finally reveal itself as a question of history and society. Epistemological analysis and claims depend on human beings and their historical context. On the contrary, the pragmatic turn as a social contextualism does not develop this historical dimension. Brandom’s analysis, for instance, focuses on developing the ahistorical, propositional structure of our communication as a foundation for objective discourses. In my final chapter on Hegel, I therefore present Hegelianism as a historicist philosophy that is incompatible with Brandom’s semantic analysis of discourse conditions as the foundation of our epistemology.

I intend to highlight that Hegel’s solution to the problem of individuals is different from Brandom’s ahistorical solution of anaphora. I agree that Brandom made thoughtful contributions to the problem of deixis by replacing the idea of representation with an inferentialist account. However, he attempts to solve the epistemological problem semantically by presupposing a propositional mind-independent reality. However, based on Hegel’s epistemology, the conception of individuals as ultimate, transcendental points of reference are produced by persons and their cooperation with others in a historical moment. 27 Thus, individuals are not mind-

27 This statement is based on a complex interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy. The Phenomenology begins with the consideration of terms such as ‘this’ and ‘now’. Yet, the gulf between universal terms and and the individual reference cannot be bridged. A series of sublations will lead us to the problem of self-consciousness, society and history. The Phenomenology deals primarily with these problems. Only later, at the end of the Science of the Logic, Hegel demonstrates that we can derive a subjective concept of reality from the concept itself. This result, however, is also embedded in the more complex framework of the Encyclopedia. In his upcoming book A Spirit of Trust.
independent. Individuals, as transcendental points of convergence, are, on the one hand, useful tools in order to discuss shared objects. On the other hand, they are only ideal because we assume them as mind-independent, but ultimately cannot justify their mind-independent existence. Hegel’s epistemology investigates how we produce such points of convergence. This means that Hegel rejects the idea of knowing a mind-independent reality. Yet, he does not deny the notion that human beings find objective ways of cooperation and thereby he develops an idea of what truth is for us.

In order to defend this interpretation, I will discuss the Hegelian epistemology and its development of a systematic approach to knowledge that finally converges into a theory of historically developing societies. Based on his belief of the impossibility of knowing a mind-independent reality, Hegel proposes a theory of intersubjectivity, society, and history. In order to explain this theory, I will show, firstly, how Hegel’s epistemology is traditionally rooted in Kant’s Copernican Revolution. Kant reverses the traditional order of explanation. Instead of the object, the subject becomes the center of the investigation, a notion that influences Hegel. For Hegel, however, we cannot separate a formal subject from its content, or its experiences. While Kant therefore investigates a formal, epistemological subject, Hegel transforms this inquiry into an anthropological question. His phenomenology is a presentation of the dialectic development of subjective, experiential knowledge that is related to a human being in a historically evolved society.

In the second part of this chapter on Hegel, I therefore explain Hegel’s epistemology and how it is based on an intersubjective, historical perspective that is related to experience. Contrary

\[\text{Brandom defends a semanticist account that he discovers in the early parts of Hegel’s } \textit{Phenomenology}. \text{ Hegel, however, is an anti-semanticist.}\]
to Brandom, Hegel does not subscribe to an ahistorical model of communication. In the “Introduction” of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he develops his epistemology with respect to the experiences of consciousness. Experiences, however, alter consciousness itself, and therefore, self-consciousness, that is always involved in the process of consciousness, is also evolving with experiences and does not simply exist in isolation from its content. Knowledge that is a result of experience is based on these historically emerging forms of both consciousness and self-consciousness. Therefore our forms of communication have histories, a concept that is unimportant to Brandom.

In a third part, I investigate Hegel’s historical epistemology with regard to his chapter on ‘Absolute Knowing’. Contrary to Habermas’ simplistic reading, I will show that Hegel’s epistemology is entirely open to history, and yet, we can achieve an absolute standpoint. ‘Absolute’ means that we have exhausted all historical possibilities to clarify our moment in history without any extrinsic means. With the Absolute, we achieve a self-transparent science that according to the standards of our historical moment cannot be superseded. Yet, this achieved objectivity that comes with the scientific standpoint remains a concept that is secondary to human beings and their inevitably changing lives. This means that history does not stop with Absolute Knowing.

Nevertheless, my interpretation of Hegel seems to conflict with his *Science of Logic*. In terms of the *Science of Logic*, it seems that subjects can achieve an ahistorical objective standpoint. When Hegel claims that reality [das Wirkliche] is rational [vernünftig] and that the rational is real, it sounds as if we can know the core structure of all knowledge because it is identical with a mind-independent reality. Indeed, while Hegel’s reinterpretation of the ontological proof of God comes to the conclusion that we can prove the reality of the concept,
we can prove this only with respect to subjectivity. Knowing this, one could object that we can know this subjectivity by objective categories so that we still have an ahistorical, objective ground. Subjectivity, however, is not based on an unchangeable categorial framework for Hegel. Although Hegel uses the term “diamond net” in the Encyclopedia in order to describe this framework, it still is a historical result. This expressions sounds ahistorical. However, Hegel uses a conditional “as if it were, the diamond net” (Hegel PoN §246, Addition, italics added). This implies that the categorial framework serves us in a specific function. Nevertheless, it does not mean that it is an ahistorical structure of our thinking that can never change. Rather, it means that our thinking is the result of a historical compression that after a long series of sublations occurs in an almost unchangeable structure. For Hegel, we have achieved the highest point in the history of philosophy, after going through the stages of empiricism, rationalism and critical theory, but this does not imply that history has ended.

I therefore presuppose that Hegel treats the question of possible ontologies in his Science of Logic, while the Phenomenology of Spirit presents his epistemological, historicist account that is the original framework for these ontologies. The Phenomenology is the clarification of the historical limitations of science and of all ontologies. The question remains: how can we understand ourselves as finite human beings with respect to our historical becoming? After having achieved the absolute standpoint of science, the task of the Science of Logic is then to demonstrate how subjects construct objectivity from this absolute standpoint.

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My guiding idea in this dissertation is that Hegel does not follow a closed system with a foundational logic, but that he follows a systematicity that is fundamentally open towards further experience and history. I will focus on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the epistemological grounding of all his further thoughts including the *Logic*. Given the limitations of this study the important question of the *Logic* cannot be addressed. Instead I have to focus on the absolute standpoint of a historical epistemology that grounds the *Logic*.

Given this structure, I am not able to adhere to a strict “philosophical analysis [that] provides a complete and consistent systematization of concepts for the description and explanation of things (objects) and their modifications over time” (Swindal 2012, 30). Instead of having a complete and exhaustive view on Hegel that clearly fulfills the criterion of a closed system, I opt for the idea of systematicity as a strategy to increase knowledge in clarifying our intentions and in providing a reflective view within the ongoing historical context. My goal is therefore to investigate in which way Hegel is a thinker of historical systematicity and not of a closed system. This change of interpretation might provide the strongest link to and also promises a reinterpretation of Discourse Theory that mistakenly focuses on the pragmatic integration of a reference semantic. In the end, this will turn out as a historicist pragmatics that also allows for metaphysical contents to be approached through an empirical realism.

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2. The Pragmatic Integration of Reference Semantics

The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that Brandom’s semantic realism has its roots in Russell’s and Moore’s false rejection of Hegel as an anti-realist. In the first part, I intend to highlight how their misinterpretation of Hegel led analytic philosophy to embrace realism. Moreover, it misguided the later analytic philosophers to a second misinterpretation of Hegel as a merely social thinker who defends an ahistorical, social solution to the problem of our contact to reality. In the second part, I will present this as the problem of pragmatically integrating a reference semantics. This problem is central for inferentialism. In the last part, I will discuss Brandom’s semantic realism and his pragmatic solution to the epistemological problem of knowing a mind-independent reality. I will argue that it is a mistake to ground the pragmatic integration on semantics as Brandom does.

2.1 From Hegel to Analytic Philosophy to Pragmatic Contextualism

In this part, I will summarize the ‘linguistic turn’ as a reaction to Hegel and demonstrate its changes during the pragmatic movements with regard to Wittgenstein, Sellars, Rorty, and Brandom. Firstly, I will focus on the reasons for the Hegelian decline in the 19th century. Secondly, I will outline Russell’s creation myth as explicitly anti-Hegelian. Thirdly, I will explain the strong external realism that resulted from a false interpretation of Hegel as anti-realist. Fourthly, I will explain how the external realisms and the assumption of an immediate contact with reality led to neo-pragmatism’s rejection of the myth of the given by introducing contextualism. To support my argument, I will incorporate Sellars’ inferentialism that aims to replace the false paradigm of a simple representation of the world with a paradigm of correctly applied, inferential rules in a community. This pragmatic turn is heavily influenced by a second
misunderstanding of Hegel as a merely social thinker. According to the neo-pragmatists, Hegel employs the normative communication structure of a society to achieve an ahistoric understanding of truth, however, their position ignores Hegel’s historicist idea of truth. In a fifth point, I will highlight Rorty’s contribution in this debate. If we cannot represent the world, according to Rorty, we must become skeptics and must entirely deny the objectivity of cognitive claims. Thus, all philosophical efforts will turn out to be only conversation. Furthermore, Rorty, even though he does not follow the Sellarsian tradition, is still anti-Hegelian, since Hegel argues that objective knowledge claims are possible, even though they do not represent mind-independent reality.

Sixthly, I will introduce Brandom’s position in relation to the analytic tradition. As a student of Sellars and Rorty, Brandom stands in line with the analytic and pragmatic misinterpretation of Hegel. Since Hegel defends that cognitive claims are restricted to the historical moment, Brandom’s major project is anti-Hegelian. For Brandom, it is the task to show that semantics, an understanding of what the world really is, builds the foundation for our pragmatic interaction. On the basis of this assumption, Brandom describes furthermore an ahistorical method of how we have to contextualize claims.\(^\text{32}\) Hegel would probably not deny that it is useful to develop such linguistic models, but he would deny that these linguistic models can be regarded as independent from their historical moment, as Brandom claims. Since Brandom does not reflect on this epistemological problem, which is the central Hegelian point of reflection, his linguistic model cannot be seen as relating to Hegel’s philosophy.

\(^{32}\) Habermas, though he has strong Continental influences through the Marxist tradition, follows the direction of this type of analytic philosophy. Due to his model of discourses he is also concerned with the integration of a reference-semantics into pragmatics. Habermas is a complicated hybrid. He adopts the Marxist goals for society, but holds that epistemology needs to be carried out in terms of pragmatics. He praises Brandom with regard to the latter. Habermas relation to the analytic tradition will be investigated in the third chapter.
2.1.1 The Hegelian Decline and the Birth of Analytic philosophy

Since I will reconstruct analytic philosophy and Habermas’ attachment to this tradition from a Hegelian perspective, I will start with presenting the Hegelian decline during and at the end of the 19th century. After this, I will briefly summarize the three major philosophical movements of the 20th century, and then in the following chapter concentrate on Russell’s and Moore’s rejection of the Hegelian philosophy. The goal is to demonstrate the internal relation that analytic philosophy has to Hegel, which resulted in the neo-pragmatic interpretations of Hegel and their ignorance of his historicism.33

Historically, the decline of Hegelianism is complex, so there are different tendencies in philosophy after Hegel’s death. These tendencies, and thus also Hegel’s decline, stand in a relation to the emergence of analytic philosophy. Though I do not claim that these tendencies are necessary for the rise of analytic philosophy, they have some significance, since many of the motifs occur as explicit topics in analytic philosophy. I identify four such tendencies that occur during Hegel’s decline in Germany after 1831.34

Firstly, the upcoming and dominant position of empirical sciences after the reopening of the German universities led to a rejection of metaphysical theories, and a turn towards sciences (see also Rockmore 1996, 2). Secondly, the resulting materialism struggle [Materialismusstreit]


34 Because of the resulting complexity of the possible causes, I address the question of history as a question of reflection. By ‘reflection’ I mean therefore to identify different topics that emerged after Hegel’s death that stand somehow in a relation to the ideas that Hegel came up with. For the following historical reconstruction of these tendencies, I do not follow the idea that history is a chain of facts, but I will demonstrate a possible development of ideas that occurred in the history of philosophy. This is because on the macro-level of societies, the various factors that influence each other create a chaotic system, so that causes of change might influence other causes back and forth undistinguishably.
fostered a return to Kant and opened the field for phenomenology. Thirdly, the reinterpretation of Marx and the political influence of a social democracy replaced the theories of Hegel that the ‘progressives’ labeled as bourgeois. Fourthly, philosophers like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche pointed out various problems that the Hegelians faced who defended a strict system. All of this resulted in the fact that Hegel’s system philosophy could only claim to be a science amongst others and thus lost its central position.  

It is not possible to summarize all philosophers and to account for all historical relations emerging from Hegel’s theory. Dealing with history is rather a matter of reflection than of exact science. Nevertheless, I would like to give a short Hegelian answer to the four causes or, better said, to the correlations of his decline. Firstly, Hegel’s philosophy does not attempt to be a science of nature, but a philosophy of nature. The results that Hegel came up with in the philosophy of nature are therefore only products of reflection. In his *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel demonstrates that the concept, the overall unifying idea, is capable to explain phenomena of nature by coherently connecting them through thought. This, however, does not mean that the philosophy of nature predicts phenomena of nature apriori. If materialism is a reaction to the idea that Hegel claimed that we could know nature apriori, then this is, for the reason above, an entirely misguided belief. To say it briefly, Hegel was opposed to apriori foundationalisms. This leads to the second defense of Hegel. Since Hegel’s philosophy is a phenomenology that relies mainly on Kantian insights without the Kantian apriorism, we do not need another neo-Kantian phenomenology that is detached from the historical insights that Hegel has achieved. One could say that Hegel attempted to proceed with the Copernican turn without a noumenon. This

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35 These tendencies were probably part of a larger trend that ultimately resulted in the scientification of philosophy.  
36 As stated above the decline of Hegel’s philosophy is much more complex, and in the historical philosophies of, for example, Jacob Burckhard alternative models were developed, but could not entirely block Hegel’s influence on philosophers as, for example, Dilthey or on Existentialism.
resembles the phenomenological project of Husserl. Hegel’s project, however, is more accurate in its acknowledgement of the historical development of former theories and thus relates it to the history of philosophy.\textsuperscript{37} Thirdly, Marx is deeply involved into Hegelianism and reapplys Hegelian ideas. It is for these reasons incorrect to treat both of these as entirely opposing philosophies.\textsuperscript{38} Fourthly, the Nietzschean, and the Kierkegaardian criticism of the Hegelian system brought forth the correct criticism of right-wing Hegelianism, but it is unclear how much Hegel defended a system overall. An involvement of his views on history will relativize his idea of a system of science. Against popular belief, Hegel probably does not have an ahistorically presupposed system, but works systematically with regard to history.

While Hegel’s influence declined in Germany, Hegelian idealism emerged in England and Scotland, and was also popular in the United States in the latter half of the \textsuperscript{19}th century. The late popularity of Hegel in the British tradition was linked to the late translations of Hegel’s works. According to Mander, William Wallace’s translation of Hegel’s \textit{Encyclopedia} occurred in 1874, while translational work began in the 1860s.\textsuperscript{39} Despite this late popularity similar problems with Hegel’s Idealism occurred in the Anglo-American tradition. William Wallace, for example, was fascinated that Hegel could replicate the concept of the evolution of species as the evolution of thoughts. With regard to the Darwinian interest in the “actual historical development of things” (Mander 2011, 43) Wallace, however, already refers to the main competitor of Hegel’s project, the natural sciences, and explicitly rejects Hegel in these regards.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Phenomenologists such as Husserl or Heidegger usually underestimate how much the problems of their time relate to the tradition and how much they stood in a historical continuity of Hegel’s thought.
\item I will demonstrate this with regard to the distinction of materialism and Idealism in the chapter on Marx and Habermas later.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Due to Hegel’s late rise in British thought, the rejection of Hegelianism inaugurated by Russell and Moore, occurs about fifty years later than in Germany. With regard to this break, Rockmore identifies three new philosophies that emerged in reaction to Hegel: “American pragmatism, analytic philosophy, and what is misleadingly called the phenomenological movement” (Rockmore 2001, 340).\footnote{Rockmore, Tom: “Analytic Philosophy and the Hegelian Turn.” The Review of Metaphysics. 55, No. 2 (2001): 339-370, Accessed July 1, 2017, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20131711.} Firstly, the phenomenological movement, which stands for the new continental philosophies, is hard to grasp, since this philosophy does not relate to Husserl’s foundationalist phenomenology that seeks to identify evident grounds after a phenomenological reduction. It rather seems that the phenomenological movement reinterprets what empiricism means by reanalyzing our experiences. I am not going to investigate the different threads of the phenomenological tradition explicitly. Later, however, I will deliver an argument for why Hegel’s historicist philosophy represents a phenomenologist theme.

Secondly, whether Brandom’s philosophy is pragmatist cannot be completely answered, as it seems that his philosophy rather relies on what is called pragmatics that is the influence of the context on claims. I am not going to investigate Peirce, Dewey or James in detail. I will include, however, short passages of Peirce that suggest that the tradition that Brandom follows is not pragmatism in the classical sense.

Thirdly, with regard to analytic philosophy, I defend a similar thesis to Rockmore:

If I am right, Hegel turns out to be a key but mainly unacknowledged figure in analytic philosophy, from whom it departs and to which it is now returning, but which it has twice misunderstood. The first, highly productive misunderstanding was one ingredient in the rise of analytic philosophy. It remains to be seen
whether the second misunderstanding, which is only now taking shape, will prove as productive in the further evolution of analytic philosophy (Rockmore 2001, 340).

I will reconstruct this double misunderstanding of Hegel and identify the key moments of the reaction to Hegel in analytic philosophy. I will reconstruct how analytic philosophy misunderstood Hegel at its beginning by defending the idea of an external world, which Hegel never explicitly denies. Moreover, I will explain how the return to Hegel to repair broken parts of analytic philosophy fostered a second misunderstanding of Hegel as a social thinker without paying attention, however, to his idea of systematicity and historicity. It will turn out that the analytic philosophy is grounded in a misunderstanding of Hegel.

### 2.1.2 The Creation Myth of Analytic Philosophy – The Rejection of Hegel

Russell presented various ‘birth documents’ for analytic philosophy that explicitly denounce Hegel’s ideas. When Russell escaped from the “hot-house on to a wind-swept headland” he meant to reject the core-conceptions of the idealist framework (see Russell 1995, 48). As a part of his creation myth of analytic philosophy, Russell focused on the complete opposite of everything that could be Hegelian: “I began to believe everything the Hegelians disbelieved” (Russell 1995, 48). In particular, Russell assumed that the major mistake of Idealism was hidden in the Leibnizean predicate logic: “[E]very proposition attributes a predicate to a subject and (what seemed to him almost the same thing) that every fact consists of a substance having a

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42 Rockmore makes various remarks on the definition of *Idealism*. While the term is unclear in the German Idealist tradition, British thinkers as well as Marxists usually assume a “binary opposition”, “which opposes idealism to something else, such as materialism, realism, naturalism, or even empiricism” (Rockmore 2001, 342).
43 Redding writes on this aspect: “As he tells it, it was his work on Leibniz that had led him to the topic of relations and there he discovered a thesis at the heart not only of Leibniz’s metaphysics but also of the ‘systems of Spinoza, Hegel and Bradley’” (Redding, Paul. *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 8).
property” (Russell 1995, 48). This predicate logic was based on the observation that every substance stands in a relation to a predicate, which suggested for Russell a possible closeness to the Aristotelean syllogistic that presupposed a fundamental dependence on substances. For Russell, this was the main mistake of Idealism (see Redding 2007, 3). Especially, Russell’s rejection of Bradley’s Idealism is justified by this ‘major mistake’. Russell assumed further that Hegel still relied on these old forms of logic, though Hegel actually wanted to renew logic.

It is unclear how Bradley and Hegel are related, but for Russell there is no great difference. Thus, Russell writes: “Mr Bradley has worked out a theory according to which, in all judgment, we are ascribing a predicate to Reality as a whole; and this theory is derived from Hegel” (Russell 1914, 38). Hegel, however, does not imply such an ontological monism, according to which there is only one ultimate substance. Instead, Hegel discusses the question of unity from an epistemological standpoint. Russell includes a short discussion on this aspect (see Russell 1914, 37-38), but in consequence he assumes that Hegel’s logic is identical with metaphysics, while metaphysics for Russell represents the universe as it is. Beyond this assumption that Hegel is a metaphysical realist, Russell proceeds with a discussion of the traditional status of logic in Hegel:

Now the traditional logic holds that every proposition ascribes a predicate to a subject, and from this it easily follows that there can be only one subject, the Absolute, for if there were two, the proposition that there were two would not ascribe a predicate to either. Thus Hegel’s doctrine, that philosophical propositions must be of the form, “the Absolute is such-and-such,” depends upon the traditional belief in the universality of the subject-predicate form (Russell 1914, 38).

45 In my fourth chapter, I will demonstrate Hegel’s account as an epistemological account which includes metaphysical ideas. However, these metaphysical ideas are not about knowing a mind-independent reality.
Against Hegel’s presupposed ‘bowl of jelly’ view of the world, the view that there is only one absolute subject to which all things as predicates are ascribed to, Russell came up with the ‘bucket of shot’ view (see Redding 2007, 4), the view that individuals contain predicates. In the following, Russel assumed an anti-holistic program that replaces the internal relations of subjects to predicates by external relations without subjects (see Redding 2007, 4).

Russell’s criticism of ontological monism does not necessarily justify ontological pluralism because this might be an unjustified dichotomy. Russell was well aware that we cannot demonstrate or that we have demonstrated an ontological pluralism. Yet, according to Ockham’s razor, Russell favored ontological pluralism over his misinterpreted Hegelian ontological monism. In reading Hegel as an ontological monist, Russell ignores Hegel’s position on epistemology that strictly denies an approach to a mind-independent reality. Moreover, Russell’s later developed neutral monism offers an interesting alternative to former problems of mind-matter-distinctions. It lacks, however, the dialectical development of these concepts that Hegel had already offered. Russell demonstrates no historical awareness about this problem and thus repeats positions that have already been developed. The problem with Russell is his superficial reading of the tradition that is also determining the further development of analytic philosophy. An example for this is that Russell’s definition of Idealism reappears in the Stanford dictionary as follows: “Like idealism (the view that nothing exists but the mental) and physicalism (the view that nothing exists but the physical), neutral monism rejects dualism (the view that there exist distinct mental and physical substances)” (see Irvine 2015).  

rather tied to an epistemological standpoint, according to which philosophers deny knowledge of the world by virtue of representations. They usually defend that epistemological inquiry has to begin on the subjective side and lead to objectivity. This rough characterization, borrowed from Kant’s Copernican turn, does not mean that the world is only mental as assumed above.

Russell, however, identifies idealism as a theory of reality as mental, and influences analytic philosophy by this misinterpretation. Moreover, as already mentioned, he misses the point that Hegel is concerned with epistemology; the question of how to justify knowledge. Hegel is not concerned with ontology, the question of what the world really is (see Rockmore 2005, 5). Questioning, nevertheless, how to know the world, is less controversial than questioning the existence of an external world, or stating what the world really is. Due to such superficial interpretations of idealism, however, the question of the external world becomes central for the early analytic philosophy and resulted in an unnecessary fight against the shadows of anti-realism.

### 2.1.3 The Problem of the External World in Analytic Philosophy

In his reading of the early analytic tradition, Rockmore focuses on Moore’s perception of the British idealists. According to Rockmore, these British idealists were mainly opposed to British empiricists who claimed that we discover reality and not construct it (see Rockmore 2001, 344). In consequence, there are several conflations that Rockmore accuses Moore of when he, like Russell, presumes that “modern idealists” claim that the “universe is spiritual” (Rockmore 2001, 345):
First, it indicates his [Moore] awareness of a distinction between modern and other forms of idealism.

Second, it simply ignores Hegel and other German idealists, none of whom holds this or an analogous view, and takes up English-language idealists like Berkeley and Bradley (Rockmore 2001, 345).

Hegel, unlike the idealists that Moore has in mind, does not discuss the question of an external world, but simply replaces the idea of a noumenon by phenomenology.47 By this I mean that he is interested in how an object appears to the subject as an object in-itself, while the in-itself is something that the subject produces in its process of knowing or constructing the object. The noumenon as a presupposed, real and external thing is thus rather a part of the phenomenon, or better, of the consciousness that attempts to connect the fact that the sensed, perceived and conceptualized object is always dependent on this consciousness. Moore’s denial, however, leads him to the position that “sensation is always sensation of something” (Rockmore 2001, 345) in the sense that we are always in immediate contact with external things, and thus always already outside of spirit (see Rockmore 2001, 345). The problem, however, is not the outside world, but that the understanding of this outside world is not fundamentally distorted. One idealist problem is to identify how we can reliably link the distorted sensations, perceptions or conceptions of

47 Rockmore gives three clues on the position of Hegel as somehow acknowledging something outside of the mind: “Here are three such clues. To begin with, in the so-called Differenzschrift, his first philosophical publication, he advances the view, which he never later renounces, that philosophy begins in (ontological) difference. His position can be simply characterized through the complex assertion that epistemological unity depends on ontological disunity, or difference. In this connection, it is crucial to note the distinction, on which Hegel insists, between the opposition between subject and object, in which the latter is simply defined as negation of subjectivity, and claims to know mind-independent objects as they are, which Hegel simply rejects. Second, in the Phenomenology of Spirit Hegel presents a phenomenology of the experience of consciousness. The stage-wise development of consciousness includes consciousness, self-consciousness, and reason, whose final phase is absolute knowing (absolutes Wissen), in which the subject is said to know and to know that it knows its relation to what is other than itself. Sense-certainty, the initial phase of consciousness, tells us that something is, or exists, hence acknowledges the existence of the external world but not what it is, which further requires perception. Third, the same basic position is further developed in the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences where Hegel provides an important account of the ‘Positions of Thought to Objectivity.’ It is incorrect to tax Hegel with denying the existence of the external world in any way, for instance, by reducing it to spirit. Moore thinks that either one denies the existence of the external world, or one must acknowledge its existence and be able to know it as it is. The third possibility, which he does not consider but which Hegel defends, is that the existence of the external world can be conceded, or at least not denied, although no claim is made to know it as it is. There is an enormous difference between the traditional realist claim to know the mind-independent external world and the weaker” (Rockmore 2001, 350).
objects to a mind-independent object. But, Hegel’s view is that we are not capable of establishing such a reliable connection. It is, nevertheless, a Hegelian position that natural consciousness takes objects as immediate, but to be more precise, their immediacy is an immediacy for us. As Hegel demonstrates then in the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, this split between the in-itself and the for-itself is a split that is for consciousness. This major observation motivates his project of a further investigation of self-consciousness and its occurrence in historically grown societies. Rockmore claims that Moore’s simplification of Hegel’s idealism in favor of being immediately in contact with reality influenced the later analytic debate (see Rockmore 2001, 345). Historically, Moore’s view is neither new nor informed, yet it is guiding the debate so that it finally led to Sellars’ intervention with his theory of the myth of the given.

**2.1.4 The Neo-Pragmatic Turn and Sellars’ Myth of the Given**

Moore’s historically uninformed position on the problem of immediacies, which for him is also connected to the affirmation of the external world, stands in contrast to Wittgenstein’s later objections. According to Wittgenstein, it is important to ask whether claims to know are “mediated by a frame of reference (Bezugssystem)” (Rockmore 2001, 346). Beyond the impact of the social on our activity of claiming, Wittgenstein also suggests that the pseudo-problem of an external world should not be of any concern for philosophers. In our practical lives, we barely make claims about an external world as independent from our perception of it; rather, we discuss how the world is for us and how we can mediate these views with others. Though Moore certainly influenced the analytic tradition, Wittgenstein’s objections against Moore fostered a broader rejection of the ideal language philosophies and their kind of raw empiricism. The
holistic movement arose, which became a social turn towards the contextual conditions of utterances and also included Hegel in its later phase.

Though these steps towards epistemological holism are advances relative to analytic philosophy, the neo-pragmatists\textsuperscript{48} still misinterpreted Hegel or could not reach the achievements of his historicist position. Instead, the hypothesis of having immediate access to an external, mind-independent world constituted the main problem that the contextualist pragmatists attempted to solve.

Rockmore distinguishes three forms of contextualist pragmatisms: “Quine is concerned with how we can reasonably be said to know; Rorty, who is an epistemological skeptic, is concerned with why we can reasonably be said not to know; and Putnam is occupied with what and how we know” (2001, 356). Though all of these contextualist pragmatisms develop important arguments against representationalism, I will primarily deal with Sellars’ influence on Brandom. Firstly, I will reconstruct his position as rejecting the raw empiricism of analytic philosophy and discuss his linguistic coherentism. His linguistic coherentism will, however, face the problem of a frictionless void. Secondly, I will discuss Sellars’ parallelism as a solution to this problem. In the three last points, I will argue that Sellars can neither be considered as Kantian, Hegelian, or pragmatist in the classical sense, since he still commits to an anti-Hegelian framework by arguing for knowledge of a mind-independent world.

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\textsuperscript{48} The comparison to the original pragmatism is only to some degree reasonable, for the original pragmatist movement started with deflationism. According to Williams, “The pragmatists associate representationalism with an excessive intellectualism that tends to divorce knowledge from the activities of inquiry” (Williams, Michael. “Pragmatism, Sellars and Truth.” \textit{Sellars and his Legacy}. Edited by James R. O’Shea. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016: 223-260). Instead of assuming that theoretical claims are the foundation of knowledge, the classical pragmatists focus on truth as action (see Williams 2016, 223). Consequently, ‘making true’ is an activity in which we show that something helps us in coping with practical problems (see Williams 2016, 223). But ‘making true’ is only one specific field of interaction. There is therefore a problem to call the contextualist, pragmatic movements pragmatism, since they either maintain a theoretical approach to truth or fall entirely into skepticism.
2.1.4.1 Sellars’ Break with Empiricism and his Linguistic Coherentism

As one of the first analytic philosophers, Sellars breaks with representationalism by rejecting it as a metaphysical ideology that falsely assumes a given on the level of the senses. This so-called myth of the given means that many analytical approaches assume an immediate contact to an external world. In other words, Sellars identifies the historical problem of a strict dualism between a coherent formal side of knowledge and its independent material information. For him, it is questionable whether the receptivity of the senses is entirely independent from the conceptual framework. In this sense, Sellars’ objection indicates, indeed, a turn towards a Hegelian investigation that questions a raw empiricism.49

Even though this is an advancement within analytic philosophy, Sellars still holds on to the question of an ahistoric, objective criterion for knowledge that is independent from our action. This does not only distinguish him from pragmatism, but also reveals that his approach is ultimately incompatible with Hegel’s philosophy.

It is true that Sellars relates to the holistic arguments of Hegel’s chapter on sense-certainty in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The idea is that direct knowledge, in Hegel’s language ‘the immediate’, is a myth that fueled representationalisms, but that finally could not justify their positions (see also Rockmore 2001, 360). Thus, Sellars develops the foundation for epistemological holism that will deliver the ground for Brandom’s ‘linguistic rationalism.’ At its core Sellars denies that claims of truth are justified by a relation to the external world. Under this perspective, the comparison to Hegel occurs as reasonable, since Hegel denies that we can know

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49 Rockmore writes on Sellars’ rejection of raw empiricism: “His [Sellars] central point seems to be that we do not and cannot depend, as classical empiricists believe, for the justification of claims to know on immediate experience whose probative force is undermined by the rejection of the myth of the given” (2001, 348).
an external world. It is also similar to the original pragmatist movement that started with a deflationism, the idea that truth is bound to action and not an adequation between intellect and things.

As an alternative to a raw empiricism, Sellars’ concept of semantic assertibility should ground truth in a normative commitment to rules, which is a normative action. In *Science and Metaphysics*, Sellars states his central thought, “for a proposition to be true is for it to be assertible, where this means not capable of being asserted (which it must be to be a proposition at all) but correctly assertible; assertible, that is, in accordance with the relevant semantical rules, and on the basis of such additional, though unspecified, information as these rules may require […] ‘True’, then, means semantically assertible (‘S-assertible’) and the varieties of truth correspond to the relevant varieties of semantical rule” (Sellars 1968 §26, 101). So semantic assertibility means that truth depends on the semantic rules that govern the semantic framework. Since truth exists if we follow these semantic rules, truth is then more an action than the adequacy of a word and a fact.

With such proposed sets of semantic rules, we can then define the relation between different predicates, so that, for example, the implication of the common phrase, *if it rains the street becomes wet*, suggests a specific relation between ‘rain’ and ‘wet.’ Here, we could, for example, conclude that if ‘wet’ is not ‘dry’, then ‘rain’ cannot be ‘dry.’ In other words, we can derive a net of semantical relations without making sense data our only foundation. Kolb explains: “Different predicates will have different formal relations to other members of the genus. Thus ‘red’ and ‘green’ would be related as species of ‘color’ while ‘loud’ and ‘piercing’ would be species of ‘noise’; ‘noise’ and ‘color’ would be species of ‘sensations’, and so on”

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This means that material implications have important effects on the understanding of predicates and their relations to each other, building classes of predicates. Overall, this means that we interpret experiences coherently with regard to our language, but that we do not simply represent an external reality. In a word, there is no inference back from our semantic assertions to external reality. Kolb paraphrases: “Of course our names do relate to the world, but they do so by being part of a language which is being used to picture it. Names (in atomic statements) are the basic elements which picture particular entities within the world, but they do so only by virtue of being part of the network of interlocking linguistic types which form a language. Their individuality and meaning are established by their places in that network, not by the picturing relation” (1978, 388). In other words, the semantic net that is defined by the relations of the terms will determine the meaning of the used names. The meaning of a name does not represent a single fact outside of our semantic net, but displays various structures that help us with our practical orientation.

The problem of semantic assertibility, however, is that it “provides no way to adjudicate whether the semantical rules of one linguistic framework are more adequate than the rules of another” (Levine 2007, 248). This means that there can be many equally successful, semantic nets that are in themselves coherent but incompatible with other semantic nets. Rockmore argues therefore that Sellars’ rejection of empiricism causes the problem of a frictionless coherentism: “The space of reasons relies on coherence, or the interrelation of concepts in a conceptual

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framework. Yet since the coherence in question cannot rely in any way at all for justification on
the given […] , it is an instance of what McDowell, who is otherwise sympathetic to Sellars, calls
“unconstrained coherentism” […A] theory can be coherent but false. Many individuals in mental
one framework as ‘more true’ than another framework would be relative to the semantic rules of
the framework. This deficiency leads Sellars to his concept of “picturing” (see Levine 2007,
248). By this, Sellars wants to recover a connection to an outside reality (see Williams 2016,
224) as a criterion for securing higher truths. Sellars’ account of picturing motivates the
following conceptual realism. Conceptual realism is the idea that we cannot approach reality
directly, but that reality and our cognitive operations must have the same structure, since
otherwise cognition could not be possible. Since this idea is one of the grounding ideas of
Brandom’s semantic realism, I will reconstruct Sellars’ approach of picturing in the following.

\subsection*{2.1.4.2 Picturing for Compensating an Unconstrained Coherentism}

Sellars acknowledges that “the hook-up of a system of rule-regulated symbols with the
world is not itself a rule-governed fact, but […] a role in the rule-governed linguistic system, and
world. Yet, he assumes that something justifies the linguistic system from the outside. Though
the signs of our language signify something within the system of language, they also picture an
outside world by virtue of “causal uniformities” (see Levine 2007, 254). Levine emphasizes this difference: “The causal hook up between language and world that takes place through our being inculcated into certain non-conceptual uniformities is one of picturing while the rule-regulated aspect of a language is one of signifying” (Levine 2007, 254). In other words, Sellars defines the relation of signification and picturing as non-interference. Signification is about the intentional action that the speaker performs (see Levine 2007, 254). In representationalist truth-paradigms, this aspect had been ignored and words were thought to receive meaning only by virtue of a representation. As a consequence, representationalist theories defended a conception of truth that was independent from the action of the speaker and his normative ways of conceptualizing. Picturing should avoid the problem of omitting our normative interaction and, at the same time, it should not interfere with the normative role of the speaker. Therefore, these theories describe picturing as a mere “isomorphic relation between two types of objects” (Levine 2007, 254). These two objects are linguistic words and natural entities. Speaking more generally, it involves a parallelism between “the rule-governed assertibility of semantically significant items” (Levine 2007, 254) and the “natural objects in the real order” (Levine 2007, 254). To paraphrase in epistemological terms, this parallelism is supposed to escape the problem of ontological difference, i.e., that is explaining the connection between material and forms, two different ontological categories. For Sellars, world and language simply share the same structure.

Kolb explains picturing as follows. Firstly, language replicates the structure of the world (Kolb 1978, 393) to a certain degree. According to Kolb, Sellars assumes a “complex isomorphism between the particulars in the world … and the atomic sentences in the world-story” (Kolb 1978, 393). This parallelism occurs as “a structural similarity between two arrays of particulars” (Kolb 1978, 393). In order to justify this parallelism, Kolb employs Sellars’
naturalist justification: “What makes the one a picture of the other (and not just a similar structure) is that the linguistic array is used by an organism to guide its behavior” (Kolb 1978, 393). In other words, Sellars thinks that the linguistic sphere is motivated by our success in the natural world. A successful linguistic action occurs only if a sentence can resemble the same structure of the external natural world. If linguistic actions would not resemble the natural world in its structure such success would be impossible.

This explanation is grounded on a naturalist presupposition. My criticism of this is the following: firstly, it might be true that an organism uses language to guide its behavior from time to time, but that does not mean that we can causally explain the structure of language by this behavior entirely. This inference from part to whole needs further justification.

Secondly, we cannot explain the entire constitution of language as a tool for guiding behavior, as language only successfully guides our behavior in certain instances. For example, language could also have an aesthetic or a social function. It is possible that it supports people’s cooperation or that it help them to discuss structures of meaning that are not tied to the external natural world. We could, for example, use language in order to build our identities in a social hierarchy. The instrumentalist view of language, on the contrary, neglects further, important interpretations of language by claiming that language is for its most part directed towards success in the external natural world.

Thirdly, language could be an additional function of the brain that evolved as an unnecessary appendix. Thus, it is possible that it does not stand in relation to the external world. Language would then have no intrinsic function. Rather, it would be a tool that an underlying will utilizes for a specific purpose.
If any of these arguments are reasonable, then the naturalist argument is not more than one hypothesis amongst many. It might be relevant for a science of biology wrestling for explanations of language, but then Sellars would not be able to make an empirical claim. I do not see how there must be necessarily a parallel between an external reality and language, nor do I see that language evolved on top of such conditions of biological success. Though I do not deny the plausibility of such an explanation, we must assume more than one function for language. If language has more than one function, then we need to know the ways, we use language. Unless we better clarify how we use language for success in nature, we cannot accept Sellars’ naturalist assumption.

Nevertheless, let us grant that language helps us in guiding our behavior. Does that mean that we grasp reality as it is, or that we become better in grasping it? Language is supposed to give orientation in the external world. Yet, only a few of our tasks are based on orientation in space-time. Sometimes, for example, we use language to set down normative rules. Marriage is not something about facts in the external world. But it is instituted by language as a fact that can only be discussed in language. Sellars, however, makes clear that the fundamental function of picturing, must be orientation. In fact, he only applies picturing to the language entry-conditions.\(^\text{55}\) He uses the example of a robot that scans its environment by virtue of radiation. The more this robot moves around and records data, the more information it collects about its environment, i.e., the way the world is.\(^\text{56}\) Kolb writes about this: “Once we give up the notion of an intentional relation between the mind and the world, the isomorphism of picturing forms the

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\(^{55}\) I want to avoid giving an inaccurate theory of Sellars. Of course, he assumes that picturing is only related to a subset of our language that includes low-level observational sentences. The odd thing, however, is that he assumes that sciences will describe everything in terms of these atomistic phrases as I explain later.

link between the world and our brains as organic computers juggling symbols in accordance with formal rules” (Kolb 1978, 393). The idea is that we map the external world, and though the reconstruction depends on our semantic rules, we arrive at a more and more adequate picture of reality. Driving from Chicago to San Francisco, for example, would not deliver a merely contingent picture (see Kolb 1978, 393). We would reveal inadequacies of our maps by bumping into unexpected events like “Kansas City or the Rocky Mountains […] small deviation in the orbit of Mercury, or unexpected behavior on the part of our children” (Kolb 1978, 393). The idea is that through these corrections our picture becomes more and more subtle (see Kolb 1978, 393) and thus more accurate.

The idea that a mere collection of data supports higher knowledge with regard to a mind-independent world, however, is flawed. Let us assume that two persons have each the task to solve a labyrinth on a computer. They each work independently and do not see any lines representing walls or whatsoever on the screen. They only see a cursor representing their position. Let us further assume that after a random amount of time, the labyrinth will be solved independently from what the two persons have done. This means that all the moves that these people made with the cursor are unimportant for the solution of the labyrinth. Nevertheless, both of them will have collected entirely arbitrary data about how to solve the labyrinth. They will present these data as knowledge. For example, person A might claim in front of person B: ‘I made good experiences with going up two squares and then turning to the right.’ Altogether their knowledge systems are false. They created pseudo-knowledge. It is unclear when their systems will fail, because they might still rely on the chosen collection of data. Without further knowledge about the labyrinth, or without a person waiting and doing nothing, these persons cannot determine their degree of error. It is also questionable how much time they will need to
figure out that the solution to the labyrinth comes about independently of their actions. Such a total collapse of the system, moreover, is also possible for our coherent systems, if we are, as Putnam suggested, for example, brains in a vet.

Independent of these examples, however, I see different factors that make Sellars’ idea problematic: first, of course, the picture of a trip from Chicago to San Francisco (the example from Kolb) depends on our idea of normal physical extensions and our normal movement through one time in one direction. These are, however, ungrounded presuppositions about a mind-independent reality. In fact, ideas of philosophy extension and movement are not independent from what we take ourselves to be, physical bodies. Of course, it is hard to determine whether we are only physical bodies, but, according to Sellars’ theory of neurological states, he assumes that we can explain mind with regard to a mind-independent world. Sellars self-confidently states that we will know by virtue of neurophysiological states what it means to be a thinking substance. He writes: “I submit that as belonging to the real order it is the central nervous system, and that recent cybernetic theory throws light on the way in which cerebral patterns and dispositions picture the world” (Sellars 2007, 228). This implies that we are not only talking about a parallelism, but that we can easily translate the structures of our mind into a scientific theory that grasps what the mind really is. So his theory is grounded on the presupposition of a scientism that can exhaustively explain the mind.

Secondly, we also have to take into account that the physical world might change. Thus, we can only make a statement about reality for a certain moment in time.

Thirdly, we must accept that reality occurs as large and includes a large number of possible events. It is unreasonable to assume that by knowing only a part of it, we know the rest of the structure a priori.
In any case, we first have agree of what we take to be a reasonable statement about any labyrinth that we plan to produce knowledge about. If reality resembles a labyrinth, then I claim that we have not clarified the rules which we must follow for this labyrinth. We have agreed as a society about the rules that can be counted as successful for the parts that we have experienced and acknowledged so far. By this, however, we have no secure idea of what reality really is. Instead, we rely on experience. Thus, the only thing we have achieved so far is a somewhat stable society based on the cooperation of individuals and their experiences as the justification for their knowledge systems.

Let us come back to Kolb’s example of a trip from Chicago to San Francisco. This specific operation includes a clear teleology, namely getting to a physical location that is San Francisco. It means travelling through a previously clarified space-time with a very limited number of events (in comparison to the amount of events in the known universe) that might prevent this trip. The story of achieving a more and more accurate picture is easily told in this case, but it seems to me that the goal of human kind and its journey through space-time, history, evolution and whatever else has much more to offer than an arrival in San Francisco. Achieving better knowledge does not depend on the random collection of data with regard to an arbitrary goal in a physical space. What we acknowledge as knowledge depends on the goal we have defined, but who says that driving from Chicago to San Francisco brings us anywhere nearer to the truth? Despite this, we cannot solve so-called open-world-problems by the collection of data, because it is unclear what data we should collect in the first place, especially if we have no goal. In the end, any presupposition of a particular kind of data can only provide us with a better picture of what reality means for us. Then, however, this will depend on how we define our goals in the first place.
Given these objections, we can argue that Sellars assumes his parallelism only for a small amount of language entry conditions, and that the normative commitments between humans do not relate to these conditions. Kolb, however, makes Sellars’ commitment to the original atomism of analytic philosophy clear: “While any partial or complete world-story would be a system of juggled symbols, the true world-story will be the one whose manipulations end in the pattern of atomic sentences which is isomorphic with our world” (Kolb 1978, 393). The idea is that the ultimate picture is then the unification of “everything under one set of laws and name[s]” (Kolb 1978, 393). I admit that it might be a transcendental necessity for sciences to assume a possible unification, but I think that Sellars conflates the necessity of a unity with the real possibility of achieving this in a final theory. He takes a necessary regulative idea for sciences to be reality. According to Kolb, Sellars’ “full world-story” would identify all particulars and utilize all possible predicates (see Kolb 1978, 390). In other words, we are only speaking within a minor variation, a dialect, of what is real truth-talk. Yet, we speak our language with the necessary structure in order to decide by comparison that we are coming closer to truth (see Kolb 1978, 390). Though such an ideal can be guiding for discourses and might be necessary, since we need a criterion for truth discourses in, let us say, sciences, this does not mean that such an ideal is clear or that such an ideal is correct for all time, thus, independent from history. I claim that Sellars transforms the necessity of a criterion for practical endeavors, and our choice of some criteria in historical contexts (for example, to arrive in San Francisco) into the existence of an absolute criterion, namely to tell the story of physical time and space.

Kolb makes Sellars’ commitment to scientism clear by revealing another internal contradiction of Sellars’ approach. Firstly, he refers to Sellars’ “skeletal relational predicate […] which signifies the fundamental type of order in which the individuals to which the language can
refer must stand” (Kolb 1978, 374). Brandom describes these fundamental relations as “robust material exclusions,” since for him incompatibilities are a condition for meaning at all. Kolb proceeds: “Since material rules of inference make world-stories possible, there could be no world-story whose individuals do not stand in an appropriate skeletal relation” (Kolb 1978, 374). So all individuals stand in material relations to each other, since material conditions are the precondition of our semantic skeleton. The assumption is that if these material conditions remain unfulfilled, then there would be no meaning at all. The argument is then: since we have meaning there must be a reality that fulfills these conditions. This, however, is problematic, since, according to Sellars, reference to individuals is not possible (see Kolb 1978, 395). It is a misapplication of our normative intentionality to even assume individuals. Individuals are conditions for communication, but this does not mean that the world consists of individuals. Terms like “individual” might only be an abstract way of coping with particular problems. To assume a reality of such individuals, and then to presuppose that our striving for a coherent picture refers ultimately to simple entities, is then contradictory. In other words, a normative system of semantic references and a picturing realism do not go along with each other. Kolb denies their compatibility because there is no apriori link from Sellars coherence to the necessary truth of picturing. Thus Kolb writes: “Sellars would like to claim that in the ultimate picture every basic particular would have only one non-relational attribute, but it is not clear that this ideal is enforced a priori by his theory” (Kolb 1978, 396). Picturing is helpful, but it is not necessarily the ultimate truth of what we do.

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57 I agree with the view that ‘individual’ is a theoretical term to tackle specific intratheoretical problems. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether ‘individuals’ exist besides our intratheoretical problems.
In the end, Sellars defends only a scientism that cannot justify its grounds. Kolb writes about this scientism:

Thus we can deduce from the theory of language and picturing that the best world-stories will be systems of non-metaphorical atomic propositions naming very simple spatio-temporal objects, with laws relating their behavior to their location and to the basic attributes of other simple objects. This is physical science (Kolb 1978, 397).

All of this reveals that Sellars follows a deeply ahistorical approach. He expresses this himself, when he writes down his popular slogan in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*: “[I]n the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not” (Sellars 1997, 83). Sellars’ restrictive view of science is the “descriptions of spatio-temporal entities (or events) of a very simple sort” (Kolb 1978, 382). Later, Kolb adds “science is the preferred candidate for that final language” (Kolb 1978, 382).

As an alternative Kolb sees proposes a perspectivist approach:

Others see each theory as a complementary way of describing a world which cannot be captured by any one of them. On either view, science approaches no one perfect description of the world. Even though he accepts many of the premises of such historicist views, Wilfrid Sellars has long argued for the unity, perfectibility and primacy of science (Kolb 1978, 381).

After Sellars’ failure, which divided the left-wing-Sellarsians, who focused on Sellars’ coherentism, from the right-wing-Sellarsians, who focused on Sellars’ picturing, the following question remains: After the failure of representationalism, should we dismiss epistemology altogether?

The latter is Rorty’s position, the dissertation director of Brandom. I will investigate his position later. Contrary to Rorty’s skepticism, I will claim that Hegel offers a historicist perspective that relies on experience in order to produce justified knowledge. Before I will
discuss Rorty’s position, however, I should make some remarks on Sellars, who according to Rorty transitions analytic philosophy into its Kantian stage.

2.1.4.3 Why Sellars cannot be Kantian

Regarding the break with the raw empiricism of a sensory given, Rorty distinguishes two schools of analytic philosophy: The first school is interested into how we represent things as they are. The second school is interested in how we use language internally (see Rorty 1988, 215). Even though Sellars breaks radically with first order empiricism, Rorty still sees Sellars in relation to the representationalist theories. According to Rorty, Sellars transitioned analytic philosophy from its Humean phase to its Kantian, and Brandom, Sellars’ student, transitioned analytic philosophy from its Kantian phase to Hegel (Rorty 1997, 3, 8, 9). These interpretations are, however, problematic.

Sellars’ rejection of empiricism is not necessarily Kantian. Kant was a second-order empiricist. This means that we gain “knowledge of an independent object through knowledge of a dependent object” (Rockmore 1997, 197). My conclusions on Sellars’ are the following: I agree that our language strives for a single description, but that does not mean that we make progress regarding reality. It only means that we make progress in society with regard to better ways of cooperation. I do not think that pragmatism can be grounded in a material semantics that

59 With regard to this empirical realism, Rockmore distinguishes three kinds: first, “direct knowledge of an independent object” (Rockmore 1997, 197), second, “indirect knowledge of an independent object through a dependent object” (Rockmore 1997, 197), and third, the denial of direct and indirect knowledge claims of a mind-independent world, but experience of mind-dependent objects. Rockmore argues that Hegel commits strongly to this “tertiary empiricism” (Rockmore 1997, 197).
is supposed to line up with the real world. Sellars’ parallelism is motivated by successful knowledge based on experiences. Yet, we cannot legitimately extrapolate this experiential knowledge to represent the structure of a whole, but can only see what the consequences of the extrapolated terms based on experience mean for us, so that we can possibly derive regulative ideals for our sciences. If we depend on such ideals, that does not imply that they are constitutive. In effect, Sellars produces a transcendental argument for the necessity of such a parallelism, but he neglects Kant’s insights that these cannot be constitutive. Kant remains modest when, for example, he claims that a Newton of the blade of grass cannot exist. Sellars, however, makes contrary claims, when he refers to the explanation of the cogito by neurological states. All in all, it is unclear then how, according to Rorty’s claim, Sellars has transitioned analytic philosophy into a Kantian state.

2.1.4.4 Why Sellars cannot be a Pragmatist

I have given an admittedly rough reconstruction of Sellars’ account of picturing. Picturing became the central claim of Sellars’ theory. I attempted to demonstrate the incompatibility of his picturing with his inferentialism of semantic assertibility. If my thoughts are correct, then we cannot even classify Sellars as a pragmatist. Peirce, for example, followed a scheme of a regulative ideal, while Sellars seems to assume a regulative ideal that is constitutive. Levine writes in this regard on Peirce: “For Peirce, truth as the ideal outcome of scientific inquiry is a regulative idea that always outruns the mundane conceptual practices that are undertaken in its light. As such, the gulf between appearances and things-in-themselves is unbridgeable” (Levine 2007, 65). In other words, science is moving beyond our original, conceptual practices, but this does not mean that we will ever achieve a complete scientific
explanation of everything at some point. Sellars, on the other hand, assumes that the scientific community possesses an Archimedean lever and thus wants to direct its inquiry towards the real world. Levine writes in this respect: “For Sellars, on the other hand, the distinction can in principle be bridged because the scientific community, in having the notion of picturing, already possesses what Sellars calls an Archimedean point outside the series of beliefs toward which inquiry approximates” (Levine 2007, 65). This means that there is a real, possible, and a priori defined outcome for Sellars. I agree, on the contrary, with Levine’s argument against Sellars’ claim that we have such an Archimedean lever:

“[…] for finite beings within inquiry there is no such point. What Sellars should conclude is that while our conceptual practices have conditions of possibility in the real order (insofar as we are living beings), these practices, once they have emerged philogenetically, have — like their practical counterparts — a sui generis logic which must be countenanced in any theoretical account of this world” (Levine 2007, 269).

Possibly Hegel can develop such a self-generating logic. Yet, he would only justify it with regard to our current historical situation of thinking. This would be pragmatist, while Sellars’ linguistic coherentism develops an ahistorical scheme according to which we get closer to reality.

2.1.4.5 Why Sellars and his Followers are not Hegelian

Because I aim to demonstrate Hegel’s historical account of the development of knowledge, it is therefore important to explain why we cannot classify Sellars as Hegelian and why Brandom also does not transition into a Hegelian direction. I will discuss two reasons for why that is not possible.

First, Sellars rejects the importance of experience, while, on contrary, he includes a kind of realism that Hegel does not defend. Rockmore writes on this:
“For Hegel, on the contrary, categories, or concepts arise out the effort of the subject to come to grips with the given, to come to grips with experience, hence on an *a posteriori* basis. Though Hegel is not an empiricist in the classical British sense, he retains an empirical component as the basis of the formulation of the categorical grasp of experience” (Rockmore 2012, 30).

If we read the chapter on sense-certainty in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, we will encounter the fact that the given in experience cannot be made entirely intelligible. All the attempts in the section on sense-certainty lead to a hardly bridgeable gulf between what is meant and what is known. This, however, does not imply that the given is ultimately dismissed, it only means that we deal with a dialectic between language, which is universal, and the point of reference, which is individual. I interpret this point to be showing that our experiences are concrete, a mediation of what is individual and universal, immediate and mediated. In each stage of Hegel’s phenomenology, he will transform the immediate. The immediate is always the starting point of each cognitive movement. The task of the dialectic is then to grasp the following cognitive movement as the knowing of knowing, which is relative to the way that consciousness develops. We can conclude, however, that Hegel operates with immediacies, while Sellars seems to reject such givens overall, focusing only on semantic assertibility as the lever of a logically coherent system. If this is the case, then, as explained above, we have two incompatible approaches.

Second, there are some indications that Sellars endorses a dualism between content and form, even though his ultimate goal is a monistic scientism. While, according to my interpretation, there is no epistemological dualism for Hegel, because he investigates the interplay of the subject and its object, Sellars assumes an independent status of concepts (see Levine 2007, 253). In “Is There a Synthetic A Priori?” Sellars proposes a divide between content and form: “the conceptual status of descriptive as well as logical - not to mention
Sellars argues here dialectically, exploring the positions of empiricism and rationalism. It is hard to see whether this is his final position. If my interpretation, however, is right, then he thinks that the rules for referring to content are not material, only formally interpreting content. In order to constitute material, observational content, these formal rules do not explicate the meaning of what we observe. He must therefore proceed:

Notice that I am not saying that “‘rot’ means red” is true merely by virtue of the intralinguistic moves proper to “rot” (in German). For “‘rot’ means red” can be true only if in addition to conforming to syntactical rules paralleling the syntax of “red,” it is applied by Germans to red objects, that is, if it has the same as “red.” Thus, the “conceptual status” of a predicate does not exhaust its “meaning.” The rules on which I wish to focus attention are rules of inference. Of these there are two kinds, logical and extralogical (or “material”) (Sellars 1956, 154).

We see here how Sellars runs into the problem of dualism. His intra-linguistic approach cannot explain how Germans condition each other, in order to accept something as red. This means that an approach to experience must be involved. Sellars’ solution, however, is a parallelism that essentially preserves the difference between form and material.

The main problem is that Sellars takes the partial success of a coherent structure of symbols to represent the whole structure of reality. If we preserve a strong distinction of material and content, then we need a parallelism in order to avoid the problem of an ontological difference, an unbridgeable gap between form and content. If we do not want to operate with parallelisms, then it seems to me that a dialectics between content and form is necessary, which means to give up the strong distinction of content and form that Sellars pursues.

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Sellars encounters the problem of the ontological difference as the problem of a frictionless coherentism on the formal side. This leads him to explain that the formal rules for semantics are not enough to make an utterance of ‘I see red’ meaningful. If we look into Sellars’ rule of substitution, we will see why he encounters such difficulties to deal with individuals:

I can best indicate the difference between them by saying that a logical rule of inference is one which authorizes a logically valid argument, that is to say, an argument in which the set of descriptive terms involved occurs vacuously (to use Quine's happy phrase), in other words, can be replaced by any other set of descriptive terms of appropriate type, to obtain another valid argument. On the other hand, descriptive terms occur essentially in valid arguments authorized by extralogical rules (Sellars 1956, 154).

Sellars proposes here that logical systems follow the rule of salva veritate. This means that we can replace one term by a term of the same extension without changing the truth-value of a proposition. Reference to individuals becomes, therefore, the main problem for his theory, because his system is formulated without an explicit connection to experience.

Hegel argues against a division of method and content, and thus does not fall into the paradoxes that Sellars poses for his theory. Since this dialectic of form and content is central for Hegel, since Sellars pursues an Archimedean lever, it must be difficult to call Sellars theory in any way Hegelian.

Of course, Rorty does not call Sellars Hegelian. Yet, if Sellars’ followers are Hegelian, they must dissociate themselves from some of Sellars’ central claims. This, however, would make them hardly Sellarsian then. Rorty’s descriptions of a Hegelian transition within analytic philosophy fits only if we accept that using someone’s idea makes him a follower of that kind. Since analytic philosophy turns towards social epistemologies, we can only describe it as a
Hegelian turn if we ignore the fact that the dimensions of dialectics of form and content, and historicity are a core of Hegel’s philosophy.

Instead of calling it a Hegelianism, the stronger influence on analytic philosophy seems rather to come from Wittgenstein’s theory that references need a framework. In this respect, Sellars enterprise is motivated by a rejection of immediate knowledge (see Rockmore 2001, 347) and representationalism, a project that rather stands in relation to Moore’s and Russell’s rejection of Hegelianism.

2.1.5 A Note on Rorty’s Skepticism

Despite Sellars’ attachment to picturing, it is important to see that the problem of the presupposition of an external world disappears as an unquestioned condition, which implies the possibility of a rehabilitation of Hegel. In this sense, the tradition of the reemerging pragmatism completes also a shift towards an epistemological holism. In light of this discussion the insight that our concepts mirror nature becomes meaningless (Rockmore 2001, 357). Yet, Rorty transforms the associated arguments falsely into skepticism: since knowledge must be representational, but since we have no means to investigate the source of representations except for using representations, there is no way to look behind representations (see Rockmore 2001, 357). With this rejection of knowledge claims and the resulting skepticism, Rorty commits to the ideas of Continental philosophy as conversational philosophy: They [Die Gesellschaft für analytische Philosophie in Deutschland] correctly perceive that a thoroughgoing holism will sooner or later lead to a conversational view of philosophy. 62 The shift from the

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representationalist view towards a “contextualist theory of justification” (Rockmore 2001, 357) is for Rorty a shift away from the problem of truth. He does not see that, for example, circular epistemologies could be an alternative to representationalism. Because of the failing representationalism that was one of the cornerstones of analytic philosophy, analytic philosophy splits into different programs: a holistic movement that would be instantiated by left-wing-Sellarsian, and a remaining representationalism, which accordingly would be instantiated by the right-wing-Sellarsian. Moreover, there is also a third party: Rorty believes that philosophy cannot achieve any knowledge about knowledge itself (see Rockmore 2001, 357). Rockmore summarizes Rorty’s position:

If analytic foundationalism fails, then philosophy in all its many forms fails. Since philosophy is concerned with knowledge, and since analytic foundationalism fails, there is nothing interesting to say about knowledge (Rockmore 2001, 357).

This presupposes that analytic philosophy, according to Rorty, was the last serious attempt to deduce the means of our knowledge. It is, however, unclear why we should have exhausted all our means for this endeavor, especially if we see how inaccurately we have proceeded with the Hegelian tradition. Hence, I defend the idea that there is knowledge relative to reflections on history, which is a Hegelian idea that analytic philosophy never touched.

2.1.6 A Note on Brandom’s Epistemological Holism and its relation to Hegel

For Rockmore, it is questionable whether we can interpret the return to epistemic holism that qualifies for Sellars, Putnam, and Brandom as a return to Hegel. Rockmore distinguishes three forms of holisms: firstly, an “epistemic holism, or the Quinean view that theories meet their fate as a whole”, secondly, a transition into the “Wittgensteinian ‘social’ justification of claims to
know in relation to a form of life”, and thirdly, “the Hegelian idea that claims to know are indexed to the historical moment” (Rockmore 2001, 363). Even though Rockmore sees similarities between Hegelianism and neo-pragmatism, he argues that the basic differences are misconceived. The neo-pragmatist contextualism represents a denial of knowing the world directly as it really is (see Rockmore 2001, 365). Beyond this rejection of a mind-independent reality, however, we must also understand contextualism with regard to history (Rockmore 2001, 366).

Brandom relates to Rorty’s insights against representationalism, but, according to his attachment to Sellars, he does not commit entirely to Rorty’s skepticism or to deflationism (see Rockmore 2001, 361). His book Making it Explicit directs us instead to the context of social self-consciousness, which represents another attempt of bridging the gulf between content and formal, inferential semantics (see Rockmore 2001, 361). Bavaresco emphasizes this shift to the relationship of thought and action. According to him, Brandom who wants to explain semantic content in terms of the interactions between people:

Brandom is associated with these strategies. He is interested in such issues as these: (i) nature and culture: ‘Cultural products and activities become explicit as such only by the use of normative vocabulary that is in principle not reducible to the vocabulary of the natural sciences’ […] Brandom 2000, 33); (ii) the Hegelian pragmatism and his influence about conceptual norms. Kant understood concepts as the norms that determine what we ourselves are responsible for, committed and entitle us to it, by particular acts of judging and acting. However, Kant punted the origins of this normativity into the noumenal realm. “Hegel

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brought these issues back to earth by understanding normative statuses as social statuses, … all
transcendental constitution is social institution” [… Brandom 2009, 34] (Bavaresco 2012, 77).  

Though this social turn in epistemology is progress in terms of its analytic predecessors, it is not yet on the level of the achievements of Hegel. Rockmore’s main criticism is that Brandom fails to grasp Hegel’s historicism and only focuses on the constitution of self-consciousness in a society. Society is, for Brandom, simply the game of giving and asking for reasons, a social, logical space.

Brandom’s analytical position replaces the difficult task of sociology that is explaining the occurrence of human institutions on the level of macro-societies by understanding sociology as a task of calculable events on the basis of people’s micro-social activities (as if they scored points in a baseball game). Rational choice theory does not reflect on the question of the contextual position of these language games in institutions and their broader, normative development in history. Similarly Brandom ignores the question of whether societies are independent from their historical formation. Though Brandom refers to rather metaphysical terms like ‘self-consciousness’, his concept of self-consciousness occurs as an inferentialist observer who plays language games without relation to history.

I will discuss Brandom’s approach in more detail later. Before, I will point out the problem that analytic philosophy has set up for itself with regard to the pragmatic turn, namely the integration of a reference-semantics. I perceive this as the central problem that Brandom attempts to solve in Making it Explicit.

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2.1.7 Conclusions on the Birth of Analytic Philosophy from the Spirit of Hegel

The birth of analytic philosophy is historically hard to determine. But it is undeniable that we can identify certain topics in Moore and Russell. Since I defend viewpoints of historicism, my goal is not to replace these founding-myths of analytic philosophy by “historical truths.” Rather, I historically contextualize the starting point and the goal of analytic philosophy. With regard to such historical contexts, we can also read Redding’s remarks:

Myths are more than sets of mistaken beliefs about the world, they are cultural products which play constitutive roles in the formation and maintenance of group identities, exemplifying and reflecting back to their members the shared fundamental norms and values binding them as a group (Redding 2007, 7).

The birth of analytic philosophy is for these reasons founded on a historical myth that rejects Hegel, but is historical itself. Analytic philosophers assumed that Hegelianism captured something fundamentally wrong. Yet, their rejection could also have been the expression of a cultural formation. This rejection might then be less about Hegel, but more about the institutional politics that led to such a rejection.

I cannot achieve a precise analysis of the historical conditions, which is a task of the science of philosophy and history. Instead, I offered reflections on how ideas developed and unfolded historically according to the misguided view of Hegel as an ontological monist, who denies that there is a reality. The recent return to Hegel, in order to tackle problems of analytic philosophy, is then not necessarily a return to Hegel. But, it is a return to the myth of Hegel as an ontological monist. Since Hegel, however, has never been an ontological monist, analytic

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65 “Recent work on the origins of analytic philosophy has started to replace the myth with historical truth […]” (Redding 2007, 7).

66 I agree with Redding on the point that we are dealing with myths of philosophy more than with particular thoughts: “In this sense we treat myths as the central graspable unit of a philosophy that we deal with. We do not attempt to bring philosophies to their historical truth here, but we observe streams of philosophy with regard to their mythological role they play among philosophers. This includes the necessary reduction of philosophies to various
philosophers might still want to correct errors that Hegel has never committed. Ontological monism has been an easy enemy, in order to justify logical atomism (See Redding 2007, 8). If we assume now that the further development in analytic philosophy follows a historical dialectic, then the current return from the perspective of logical atomism to Hegel must be different from Hegel’s position. Hegel is not concerned with an ontological monism, but is skeptical with regard to semantics. Instead, Hegel is a philosopher of history, first and foremost concerned with the epistemological problem of a historical contextualism.

Given the analytical line of thinking, a return to a historicist Hegel is not yet prepared. For this reason, Redding’s suggestion of how to proceed is flawed. Redding writes: “Given the fundamental and obvious philosophical errors known to lie at the heart of the idealist tradition – that is, those errors learnt about from Russell – what could be possibly learned from them?” (Redding 2007, 8). It is unclear what these obvious mistakes are that we should learn from Russell’s analysis of Idealism, because Russell obviously did not discuss Hegel. It should be clear that without Hegel’s concept of history, we discuss a strawman of Hegel. There is nothing in Russell, nor in the analytic philosophy that I discussed above that prepares us for the historicist insights of Hegel.

The analytic philosophy directed our attention to the problem of the external world as an anti-Hegelian idea. Rockmore’s reconstruction of this line of history introduces the social slogans as long as we work in a reconstruction of the historical framework, but, of course, this work should not be limited to myths and slogans. The more serious attempts shall be a reconstruction of problems that we face with regard to a systematic approach to the whole” (Redding 2007, 7).

67 It is questionable whether the “monist or speculative, contradiction-embracing logician is the “real” Hegel” (see Pippin, Robert. Hegel’s Idealism. The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 4).
interpretation of Hegel as a compensation of these former problems. In addition, there might be many more historical and institutional reasons why a return to Hegel occurred.

Pinkard’s book *Hegel’s Phenomenology* accused in the same year as Brandom’s *Making it Explicit*. So the question remains why there is an interest in the social construction that Hegel offers. The switch from the ontological questions of semantics to the questions of use, the normative space of reasons, emerges as a theme in Brandom. For Pinkard, social space is important, too. He writes:

> Within a ‘social space’ individuals assert various things to each other and give what they take to be reasons for these assertions, and people impute certain reasons to them on the basis of the shared social norms that structure their ‘social space’ – that is, on the basis of what they take the person to be committed to in light of what he does and their shared norms (Pinkard 1994, 7-8).

This means that we socially contextualize utterances. Instead of linking the Hegelian turn back to the social insights of pragmatics, an alternative historical interpretation could be to analyze the neo-classic arguments that reject a historical Marxist analysis of economy and reduce the subject to a profit-maximizing individual. The turn toward the social is, in this sense, another return to Hegel that was, however, not motivated by the problem of the external world. Neo-classic, economical theories expressed a rejection of the Continental interpretation of historically developing societies. Historically, however, there are different standards of cooperation. It is not only about maximizing our profits. In effect, it is questionable whether we can identify the one reason by which we operate in a society. Pinkard therefore points out that there are many ways of how we can deduce principles of societies:

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All the various activities of reason-giving – for example, of telling someone why you take some belief to be justified […] are themselves forms of social practice in which we in turn mutually evaluate each other’s actions, in which we each assume certain types of epistemic and ethical responsibilities, and in which we impute certain moral and epistemic responsibilities to others in light of their behavior. In the various social practices involving reason-giving, we also have principles of criticism for evaluating the reasons we give. Reason-giving, that is, is itself a social practice goes on within a determinate form of ‘social space’ that ‘licenses’ some kinds of inferences and fails to ‘license’ others (Pinkard 1994, 7-8).

In other words, there is not one rationality of cooperation that is at work in the social space. If we follow this interpretation, then the return to the social Hegel is motivated by further historical factors. This could be actors acting with regard to a social space of shared values.

Redding proposes to read Hegel as a response to Russell’s animosities with German Idealism, and Brandom demands a semantic reading of Hegel as an inferentialist philosophy (see Redding 2007, 15). The problem is that they reduce reason to only one mode of cooperation. Thus, Brandom’s inferentialist philosophy closely relates to the pragmatic turn that analytic philosophy undergoes. It does not discuss how societies operate by different forms of reason that we have to analyze as Spirits, i.e., the concrete forms of self-consciousness at a given moment of history. Hegel’s idea is to analyze these spirits and how the occur in history. He will analyze their history and present them as absolute. This means that we cannot further exhaust their meaning because we have taken everything into account that has occurred in history. This resulting Absolute Knowing remains, however, historically relative and is open to change.

In this sense, we can tie the discussion to Habermas’ criticism of Brandom. Habermas accuses Brandom of treating societies from a theoretical perspective of observers who create one

69 This is also a criticism that Taylor expresses in his discussion of Brandom (see Taylor, Charles. “Language not Mysterious?” Reading Brandom – On Making it Explicit, Edited by Bernhard Weiss, Jeremy Wanderer, New York: Routledge 2010, 32-47.
form of communication that is necessary for meaningful interactions. However, Habermas does not make explicit that the question of how societies evolved is originally a Hegelian question. It is only implicit in Habermas’ theory. Moreover, with its goals of a quasi-Marxian emancipation, the relation to Hegel gets obscured. I will explain these problems with Habermas’ theory in chapter 3.

To summarize, it is difficult to determine historically why we return to Hegel. Nevertheless, if there is a prevalent reason for a return, then it is because we do not yet understand the complexity of his approach to history, its influence, and its meaning for our time.

2.2 The Pragmatic Integration of Reference-Semantics

In this part, I would like to introduce the discourse-theoretical position, according to which the pragmatic turn is a reaction to the linguistic turn. This interpretation summarizes Habermas’ and Brandom’s position from the analytical standpoint of language philosophy. Later, I will reconstruct Brandom’s semantic account from Making it Explicit as an attempt to pragmatically integrate a reference-semantics. I regard this as the key question in the current debate of language philosophy. For understanding this aspect, I will reconstruct the linguistic and the pragmatic turn in the following points.

Though language has always been an important subject in philosophy, it never became the center of the investigation due to the search for alternatives to metaphysical theories of consciousness (Fierke 2015, 75).\(^{70}\) According to the linguistic and pragmatic turn, language is not only regarded as a mean to transfer thoughts, but it also plays a role in all cognitive acts as an

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apriori for disclosing the world (see Braun 2007, 413). Thus, the transcendental-pragmatist Edmund Braun states, “Sprache begleitet, begründet, stützt und formt unser Denken und Handeln“ (Braun 2007, 414). This means that there is only linguistic thinking and all thoughts and cognitions occur within language. This is also referred to as the Unhintergehbarkeit of language, i.e., the impossibility to reach behind language. In particular, Discourse Theory attempts to provide a non-metaphysical demarcation criterion for our epistemological discourses on the basis of pragmatics. Discourse Theory, in this sense, is supposed to clarify the hermeneutical foundation for our understanding. It claims that we operate on grounds of a holistic conception of language within our discourse community. It therefore investigates the universal conditions for us to make references and knowledge claims.

Since the instrumental concept of language is widespread, Discourse Theory is considered as an extreme philosophical position. Though it is absurd to assume that we deal with concepts rather than with pictures, only language can investigate the relation between subject and object. This means that only language can build the ground for developing scientific theories and claims. This, however, does not mean that all our cognitive activity is conceptual. Since language gives us the possibility to reflect, it has means to operate on the objective and subjective level. Therefore, it might achieve an identity that could serve as the starting point for science. If we understand language representationally, however, we would presuppose a fundamental difference between subject and object that could not be bridged. Instead, Discourse Theory

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focuses on the language as a sense-giving [sinngebend]\(^{72}\) achievement that can only be recognized by introducing pragmatic concepts.

I will explain the above indicated apriori of language, in the following three points. In order to do so, I will examine, firstly, the ‘linguistic turn’ with regard to Wittgenstein. According to Wittgenstein, language is the limit of cognition. After this investigation of Wittgenstein’s reference-semantic position, I will look, secondly, at the pragmatic advancements with regard to Peirce, the later Wittgenstein, and Austin and Searle. Lastly, I will problematize why the pragmatic integration of reference-semantics should not be interpreted as a semantics of semantics. I will argue that it has to be its own qualitative pragmatics, a pragmatics that is open for further development. In the subsequent part, I will discuss Brandom’s flawed attempt to pragmatically integrate a reference-semantics by virtue of a semantics. My analysis will enforce the fact that Brandom’s approach cannot be considered Hegelian since Hegel does not solve the problem semantically but rather develops a historically open pragmatic account.

2.2.1 The Importance of the Language-Apriori in Discourse-Pragmatics

The most important goal of discourse-pragmatics is to give the foundation for a *universal, normative ethics*.\(^{73}\) In order to guarantee an appropriate discussion of the linguistic concept of reason with regard to a normative ethics, the idea is that normativity [Sein-Sollen] can be grounded in the structure of language. Language is the horizon through which we interpret rules, make rules, and eventually produce rules (see Braun 2007, 414). This means that language is not

\(^{72}\) It is a mistake to discuss ‘Sinn’ as meaning, since meaning is ‘Bedeutung’. I suggest to translate ‘Sinn’ by ‘sense’ and to understand its meaning technically as the way of how something is given.

\(^{73}\) For this reason, for example, Habermas is less interested in Brandom’s project of a complete pragmatic integration of a reference-semantics, and focuses rather on the implications of a universal pragmatic for his quasi-Marxian agenda. I will discuss Habermas approach in chapter three.
only a means, but also a space, in which recognition of the participants and their social status occurs. Thus, language turns out to be a major condition for the foundational norms of our communication-community. According to Discourse Theory, however, the justification of norms is only possible if language as a relative a priori of sense and validity is historically established in a community (see Braun 2007, 418). Accordingly, meaning [Sinn], laws and communities cannot be complete without language because they are based on linguistic rules. Language, however, is a complex phenomenon. On the one hand, the various human institutions are equipped with a spirit of language that nobody actively pursues. On the other hand, institutions and games of language do not merely exist by themselves, but are achieved through human interactions. Therefore, language as an undeniable normative instance is neither simply a product of human intentions, nor a phenomenon of nature. Yet, language, according to Discourse Theory, is constitutive for any normative ethics as the foundation for societies. Consequently, it becomes the main object of investigation. We are left with the question: Is there a fundamental function of language?

The guiding idea for Discourse Theory is pragmatic. According to the pragmatic turn we can understand the function of language as representational, though only in the dialogue-pragmatic dimension, indicating that we can only explain the content of a concept by the use of the concept in a communication-community. The representational function of language is only possible as an interpretation of signs with regard to their communicative function of representing. Furthermore, language only occurs in communicative situations and the semantic-syntactic sense [Sinn] can only be the content of speech-acts within a communication-community. I will describe

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74 Language change, for example, is a phenomenon that speakers cause somehow. Yet no person himself has changed or made the German language.
this as the ‘performative-propositional double-structure of a speech-act, which is fundamental for understanding Discourse Theory (see Braun 2007, 418).

In the next paragraphs I will carve out the historical motivation for the performative-propositional double-structure. Specifically, I will rebut the claim that language is a ready-made tool that, at some point in time, was only found. I will also deny that language is a ready-made tool that no longer changes. I will discuss both points in relation to the linguistic turn of the early Wittgenstein. With regard to the pragmatic integration of such a semantics, Braun describes three phases of development: the semiotics of Peirce, who discovers the triadic sign as a foundation for every language-use; the pragmatic turn, which describes the conception of a language-game-theory; and a specification of the pragmatic turn by Austin’s and Searle’s speech-act-theory, according to which each possible utterance consists of a propositional content that, despite being content, is only interpretable with an eye to its performance (see Braun 2007, 418). Before this discussion, however, it is necessary to explain the linguistic turn as the starting point for the pragmatic turn.

Analytical philosophy moved language towards the center of the philosophical investigation. Though it is one goal to avoid metaphysical confusions that came with this as ‘unclear’ perceived language of Continental philosophers, the goal is to replace the inexact ordinary language with an ideal language that follows the rules of a logical syntax (see Braun 1996, 36). The early phase of analytic philosophy, the approach of Wittgenstein becomes crucial, and is even interpreted as the very beginning of the linguistic turn (Fierke 2015, 74) that takes language to be a constructible system of signs. This system has the function to describe facts as

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75 Putnam remarks here that, if language is a tool, then it is more like an ocean liner, a tool that many people have to cooperate in order to use it (see Putnam 1998, 214). The whole discussion is directed against people who believe that language is a set of rules stored in only one’s head (see Putnam 1998, 214)
functionally ordered, and expressed by signs. Each description is considered to be a meaningful sentence as long as it represents the logical structure of facts.

The Kantian, transcendental philosophy is undergoing a transformation after the linguistic turn. Since cognition is no longer said to depend on a relation between intuition and concepts by presupposing a transcendental object, the sense phenomenon is interpreted and grasped as a pure and simple concept. Now, cognition depends only on a language a priori (see Braun 2007, 416). This dependence is expressed by Wittgenstein: “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.” This implies that we cannot achieve cognitions beyond our language. The recognizable world is equivalent to the logical structure of our current historical language. Of course, the first analytic approaches attempted to grasp cognition in terms of an ideal language. According to Wittgenstein, cognition occurs if and when we identify the meaning of a phenomenon in linguistic symbols (see Braun 2007, 417). We identify a fact only by a linguistic proposition. What can therefore be understood as a matter of fact [Sachverhalt] is predetermined by the propositional structure of the language we are using. Insofar as the proposition is considered as matter of fact [Sachverhalt], its existence can be demonstrated by language. Language and world, accordingly, have an identical logical structure, and the sum of all meaningful and true sentences [sinnvolle, wahre Sätze] represents the sum of all facts in the world (see Braun 1996, 37).

Now, the question exists: how can the reference-semantic paradigm, which is propositionally oriented, take into account the intentions of speakers who actually speak (see Braun 2007, 418). Language, after all, is not a ready-made fact, nor a ready-made tool, but happens to emerge during interactions. In Wittgenstein’s approach, however, language exists as a

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constructed fact next to all other facts, as if there could be a book that includes all true sentences that represent the entire structure of the world. But Wittgenstein understands language as a transcendental framework for the representation of the world. Hence, for him, the ideal, logical structure of all true sentences expresses the criteria by which true, scientific language is demarcated. Nevertheless, how do we then achieve this language? Just by happening to use it?

Language is certainly not a complete product of its users, but is evolving with regard to their actions. For example, the sum of the German language does not exist in a book. Its existence is closely bound to the fact that we use it. It is therefore also unclear whether we can reduce language to a set of formal, logical rules. But even if we interpret language as logically constrainable, did we, for example, just happen upon its logical principles? As discussions around the principle of non-contradiction reveal, there is no unified solution with respect to the idea of language having fundamental principles. Also, the problematic attempt to reduce the fundamental structure of language to a generative grammar has revealed many difficulties. Braun proposes, therefore, that we must extend the reference-semantic model to the pragmatic dimension (see Braun 2007, 418). Thus it is not only an extension, but also a replacement of semantic theories in general.

Since there cannot be isolated propositions, for these always occur in the reflective-intentional and interpretative use of language and its users, the first intuition we might have is to extend the dual base of language to the triadic structure of a pragmatic semiotics (see Braun 2007, 418, or Habermas 1999, 9). Accordingly, we have to reconstruct language with regard to three irreducible dimensions: with regard to the language-interpreter or sign-user, with regard to the sign that has a material quality, and with regard to a signified and assumed object. Peirce writes with respect to this: “I define a Sign as anything which on the one hand is so determined
by an Object and on the other hand so determines an idea in a person’s mind, that this latter
determination, which I term the Interpretant of the Sign, is thereby mediately determined by that
Object” (Peirce 1998, 482). By this semiotic triangulation, Peirce respects the fact that the
relationship between the signifier and the signified can be understood only in a communication-
community. Peirce understands the pragmatic dimension of language as a reflective-intentional
act of its interpreters. The relation between the sign and its so-called ‘object’ has an effect on the
interpreter (see Braun 2007, 418). It follows that the content of consciousness that is mediated by
signs can only be explained by reference to the semiotic triangle (see Braun 1996, 31). Cognition
without interpreter, without sign or without reference cannot be. None of these terms can be
explained without assuming the others. They are sense-dependent.

The sign captures, in its syntactical relations, the logical function of language, which,
however, is only meaningful, if the relationship between both a referent and its reference is
assumed and established. The sense in which this relation is causal is, of course, complicated and
we tend to commit category mistakes. Altogether, we face here the inclusion of semantics into a
broader pragmatic scheme. In this sense, we do not reject representations or references, but we
want to ask which role these play with regard to sign-users or with regard to a structure. The
sign-user plays the more important role. Brandom expresses this point with regard to locutions in
Making it Explicit: “The point of the inferentialist order of explanation is not to object to using

79 All of these interpretations are grounded on the semiotic triangle of Peirce. As, for example Diggins testifies, Peirce plays a crucial role for Habermas and Apel: “In Habermas’s estimate, a subject to be discussed in the concluding chapter, Peirce holds the key to cracking open the problem of modernity” (Diggins, John Patrick: The Promise of Pragmatism. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, 161).
80 I borrow this term from Brandom, but I admit that his term is misleading. Obviously, Brandom assumes that there is no reference for Hegel and that Hegel discusses an internally coherent system. The issue becomes more difficult if we respect that Hegel actually includes a concept of experience and that he is in this sense a realist. For Peirce there is a referent involved, but content and form are not assumed as distinct.
representational locutions to talk about semantic content” (Brandom 1998, 496). Instead, he proposes his idea of inferentialism:

“The inferentialist idea is to start with a preliminary understanding of conceptual content in terms of inferential articulation – to approach semantic contentfulness by means of the functional role claims play as premises and conclusions of inferences” (Brandom 1998, 496).

Whether conceptual content can be exhaustively explained by its inferential role without any concept of representation is one of the major questions that Brandom debates in Making it Explicit. I claim that Discourse Theory with its pragmatic integration follows a weaker version of Brandom’s inferentialism. Rather, Discourse Theory defends the thesis that reference-semantics is only possible if a communication-community that interprets signs (pragmatics) is assumed by the speaker and addressed. As Habermas demonstrates in Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung, it is not about a theoretical individualism, in which others only assume potential competitors. Instead, there is a fundamental dimension of the other as cooperating with us. This idea is an important component of language. Habermas also discusses this in his critique of Marx’s merely instrumental approach to human interaction. Prior to explaining the relationship between the sign-user and the co-users that is not merely instrumental, however, I will discuss how the semiotic understanding is further advanced by Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations.

According to the linguistic turn, it was argued that signs do not possess any meaning by themselves. On the contrary, true statements are only possible with regard to a sentential structure that is logically ‘compatible’, i.e. identical, with the possible world of facts. It is problematic to assume such a parallelism. Thus, it is necessary that we introduce the concept of sign-users, who uses language self-reflectively and intentionally. Only by these means comes the difference between signifier and signified to the fore, since otherwise the signs of the private
user of language would be the reference and remain unidentifiable for others. Conclusively, there are no facts without sign users within a communication-community who interprets signs as related to facts. This acknowledgement of a play in the signification makes signification possible. The sign user acknowledges that disclosure of the world is not guaranteed, but that it should somehow be coordinated in our language. It should become clear then that the sentence ‘It is true’ is not only a redundant structure, but that it hints towards a presupposition of all sentences. This presupposition is ‘the sign-user’, who addresses a communication-community with a claim about the status of the world. Interpreted in this way, it is clear that it is not about a universal language consisting of atomic sentences that is the sole transcendental framework, but that language is world-disclosure through language by setting up a relationship between a sign-user, his co-subjects, and the possible reference (see Kuhlmann 1992, 20).

In the following paragraphs, I show how Wittgenstein demonstrates that cognition of objects can only occur with respect to a community of subjects who give the signs of a language-game a common value by use, and who wrestle for a common language. Formal logic is only one aspect of this problem. Of course, it is not a tactical game or battle between members, but a task of friendly coordination. No matter, however, whether we see this disclosing function of language as a strategical game of score-keeping or of coordination, language is not a ready-made tool that we merely pick up and use. If we look at the instrument of language, it should become clear that we construct it at the same time as we use it. The claim that a sign signifies a real-world object presupposes an already established connection between sense and referent. Wittgenstein brings this fact to light by demonstrating the manifold relationships between world, language-game and language-users (see Braun 2007, 415). For these reasons, Wittgenstein does

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not explain the semantic content of a sign by a relation between a sign and an object, but explains it from a relationship between sign, signified reference, and sign-user who uses the sign in a series of communicative actions and who clarifies the meaning of the sign in communication-procedures. The sign-users correct their use of signs until the intended use is sufficient, but not necessarily true. Language-use is therefore not only theoretical observation, but emphasizes the role of language as a tool for coordination and creates coordination. The possibilities for referring to a world are manifold and not explainable by only a logical identity between the structure of world and language. Instead, this world is not presupposed, but constructed within language. The meaning of a word is thus not explicable by the signification of objects that we can find in the logical world, but we also develop meaning from the use of an existing although not ready-made language of a communication-community. Thus, the subject-object-relation (the representation of the world in one subject) is brought into the subject-to-subject-relation (cognition as the discourse about the linguistically and publicly interpreted world, see Kuhlmann 1992, 13). Meaning, in this sense, is not the present use, but emerges from the historical use of language. This ‘ordinary’, conventionally established language, and not the ideal language, is the place where meaning and sense occur.

Altogether this means that it is not the ideal subject who constitutes the identity of world and language, but the community of speakers, who refer with language to a linguistically, pre-interpreted, intended and historical concept of world. Speakers, thus, reflect on themselves, if they speak about the world (see Kuhlmann 1992, 12). What we mean when we say ‘we’ includes a notion of a socially shared and historically produced surrounding. Consequently, language is not an organ of representation, but an absolute lifeform of the speaker who finds

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82 Brandom declares this „we“ to be the main theme of Making it Explicit.
himself in using this language and is thus reflectively broken in front of the horizon of history. Representation occurs in this life-form, a historically developed language. The difficult part, however, is to demonstrate how this life-form-approach does not drift into skepticism. Lafont addresses this problem:

[A] global critique of reason, one that radicalizes the detranscendentalization inherent in the linguistic turn to the point of advocating an absolute contextualism. The insurmountability of worldviews inherent in natural languages turns any universalist position into a mere illusion, the illusion of achieving a ‘God’s eye point of view’ (as Putnam puts it). It would seem as if the linguistic turn as such lends support to a contextualist position. (Lafont 1999, 121)\textsuperscript{83}

The question is whether the turn towards an anthropological, historical philosophy that grasps language as an historical lifeform, can produce any kind of knowledge. Instead of following the pragmatic turn in its focus on the social lifeform, I will defend an interpretation of Hegel, according to whom we have the possibility of a phenomenological logic that develops and thus historically achieves knowledge.

In the following points, I will introduce some distinctions that are remarked by the ordinary language philosophers point out and that are helpful to reconstruct a needed and improved concept of language. The ordinary-language-philosophers work out the concept of a pragmatic turn with further fertile distinctions (see Braun 1996, 40). For Austin, the focal question becomes: how do we use our means of language (Levinson 1990, 228).\textsuperscript{84} Prior to Austin, to say something was equivalent to claim something in analytic philosophy (see Austin


\textsuperscript{84} Levinson, Stephen C. \textit{Pragmatik}. Translated by Ursula Fries. Thübingen: Niemeyer Verlagmeyer Verlag, 1990.
Austin observes a different phenomenon, namely sentences that are not claims and that we thus cannot evaluate as true or false. He calls these sentences ‘performatives’, and assumes firstly a false dichotomy between these and sentences that express claims, called ‘constatives’. During the course of his investigation, however, he must acknowledge that he cannot defend the dichotomy and that constatives represent performatives, namely the performative of a claim. For this reason, we can see in his lectures *How to do things with words* (1972) how Austin develops a theory of illocutionary acts from an original distinction between performatives and constatives.

For universal and transcendental pragmatics there are two essential insights: first, each utterance is a unity of an illocutionary act and a propositional content (it is “sachverhaltsbezüglich”) of this act. Second, meaning cannot be reduced to a reference-semantic structure. There are other parts that influence the meaning of that structure which according to the principle of expressiveness (Searle), must be explicable (see Braun 1996, 43).

### 2.2.2 The Pragmatic Integration of a Reference Semantics

After this brief sketch of the reference-semantic situation and overview of language as an act that we must to investigate as an attachment to a historical artefact and its communicative conditions within a communication-community, we must explain what a reference-semantic is with regard

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85 In this case, however, the assumption that Wittgenstein influenced Austin has to be rejected, since Austin barely knew the later works of Wittgenstein. Yet, there are parallels. For example, similar utterances that are used in different contexts can have different meanings (see Levinson, 1990, 228). The reason that there are parallels between Wittgenstein and Austin, is that both are reacting to Logical Positivism.

to the pragmatic situation. For this reason, Braun writes with regard to the current situation of the discussion in transcendental and universal pragmatics:

Die Struktur des propositionalen Satzes in der semantischen Relation der Sprache muss durch die pragmatische Dimension, d. h. genauer durch den *ichhaften intentionalen und interpretativen* Gebrauch von Sätzen im *Situationskontext* durch Zeichensubjekte, die dadurch performativ eine Sprachhandlung vollziehen, ergänzt werden (See Braun 2007, 419).

To elaborate, we have to pragmatically integrate the reference-semantic with regard to its intentional use of language by sign-users within a communication-community, in order to avoid a shortened [verkürztes] concept of language. The claim is that we can achieve this by recognizing the complementary structure of propositions and the pragmatic-performative self-relationship of a sense-intentional [sinnintentional] articulation. The illocutionary force has significant importance for the sign-user who uses language sense-intentionally as I-We, because they understand the reference-semantic sentence as a meaningful act. By this so-called performation, claims become reasonable, since they are uttered self-reflectively (see Braun 2007, 420). Under this self-reflective structure, a proposition counts as fulfilled if the receiver understands the message. Understanding, however, occurs only if the self-reflective sense of the used symbols can be clarified, i.e., if the knowledge about the act is available, and if, furthermore, the illocutionary force, i.e., the subject-reflexive-intentional, as well as the performative sense is grasped (see Braun 2007, 420). For example: consider a student who suddenly stands up in a lecture, uttering the words ‘I am in a lecture.’ After this utterance, he immediately sits down. Though we would admit that the meaning of this propositional structure is somehow transported, there is no real transportation of meaning without clarifying its sense. Why does he stand up and utter a claim that is trivially true? Of course, this sentence is meaningful according to the early Wittgenstein, since it is a descriptive sentence that can be true
or false. Nevertheless, we understand the meaning of the propositional structure conventionally, since we are already used to the propositional talk. The meaning of this sentence might arouse some further thoughts in his fellow students and they might search for the self-reflective meaning that he pursued as a member of their communication-community. Did he make a claim? If so, it would be trivially true. Did he discover a Cartesian moment in his philosophical life? On that account, we would grant him this moment. Is he conducting a social experiment? Or is he rather just crazy? This would simply devalue the meaning of his utterance. In each situation, the pragmatic interpretation changes the meaning of the utterance. Moreover, the utterance includes a communicative entitlement that each member of our communication-community can utilize. Is he nevertheless entitled to make such a claim? In this context, are students allowed to stand up in lectures and make claims? The student simply makes a claim, but the reflection on the pragmatic context has consequences for his claim. The assumedly redundant structure “it is true that…” expresses therefore that we make a claim always with regard to an expressible content and with regard to a community of reasonable beings who can evaluate this claim. It is not only me who makes a propositional claim, but it is me with regard to a community of speakers who attempt to coordinate meaning by internalized, open performative pre-structures. I also try to mediate my own position in order to clarify the reality of the signs by saying that this is not only a perception, but that I am also convinced that this is talk of the truth. All of the contexts are weak linguistic bonds between the members of a community, and are expressed in a performative coherence that exhibits the gentle force of reason. Austin analyzes this as the illocutionary force.

The described double-structure of an utterance can be expounded upon now: on the one hand, with regard to the conventionally established ordinary language of a communication-community, meaning must be interpreted as lebensweltlich, and historically with regard to this
gentle force of reason that we internalized as some normative structures; on the other hand, and as a consequence of the dependence of the propositional structure on the self-reflective use, with regard to the discourse a priori, according to which at any time an illocutionary claim of a proposition can be questioned in its validity. We are even capable of opening its conventional sense for discussion (see Braun 2007, 421). Let us consider our example of the confused student who stood up in a lecture to announce that he actually is in a lecture. We, as fellow students or lecturers, could, indeed, question whether this is really a lecture. Does he question the concept ‘lecture’? Such instances might have a revising force that ultimately changes our language. The condition of the openness of the signs is necessary, in order to be capable of describing the manifold uses of language and in order to explain sentence- or sign-ambiguities. But this openness contributes to our understanding of our social relations. It is not only a descriptive sentence. A claim is always an opening for a society to agree or disagree and thus it is also a possibility that the society might revise its fundamental concepts.

This focal point of a principal openness of the pragmatic reference-semantic by the possibility to question and criticize will be explained in the next chapter with regard to lexicology and lexicography. In addition, I will suggest the term of openness, in order to describe linguistic discourses and discuss the problem of a misinterpretation of pragmatics as a semantic of a semantic. The question is whether whatever contextualism we could introduce could convey meaning. This question poses the fundamental challenge that Habermas will finally address in Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung. Habermas does not offer a solution for this problem. At the end of this dissertation, I will discuss Hegel’s solution, namely a historical relativism.
2.2.3 Problems on the Border between Semantics and Pragmatics

Lexicography attempts to describe the mental concept of a pragmatically used concept. I will discuss the difficulties of understanding lexicography semantically in the following paragraph. The sign ‘school’ can be lexicographically described with regard to its semantics. As lexicographers, we can capture the content in three semantic core concepts: first, ‘school’ as an institution, second, ‘school’ as a building, or third, ‘school’ as a branch within a discipline (for example, ‘the Frankfurt School’). With regard to lexicology, we can assume that the core contents are semantically represented by mental concepts in the brain. This assumption, however, has some problems. On the one hand, if there were three semantic concepts of ‘school’ in the brain, the sign ‘school’ in the sentence ‘there have been some problems with school’ could not be meaningful as long as the specific mental concept is not activated. The proposition would remain incomprehensible, because the question of which mental concept ‘school’ our brain should activate arises. On the other hand, even if we assume that all three mental concepts are activated at once, we would run into further problems. For example, ‘to go to school’ is not the same concept as ‘to leave for school’. While ‘to go to school’ can mean ‘going to the school location right now’ and ‘attending a school in general’, the concept ‘leaving for school’ has only one meaning. As a consequence our brain would be highly inefficient, if it had to activate all mental concepts, in order to grasp meaning. The sheer amount of semantic extensions of a normal conversation would lead to an excessive activation of mental concepts. We can conclude, signs neither simply signify something immediate, but also do not refer to distinct concepts. For this reason, I argue that all signs and concepts are ambiguous, even if they are perceived as immediately clear. Thus, if we want to explain signs with regard to their reference, it would be hard to identify which reference is meant. This institutes a pragmatic argument to reject
reference-semantics as the core of our language capacity. The gulf between what is meant and what is said is not easily bridged. It is clear that if we had followed the reference-semantic approach, we would have to explain the enormous effort that speakers would have to invest in order to learn all of these concepts.

For these reasons, lexicography faces the challenge to appropriately describe our mental lexicon. Lexicography asks: what is the core meaning of a name according to our mental lexicon? Because of this modus operandi, however, we should not commit a lexicographic fallacy and understand our mental lexicon consisting of entries in a lexicon. In lexicology, that is interested in the mental concept and not in the lexicographic concept, we must first recognize the speaker as a sign-user who interacts in a communicative situation. This is necessary in order to make reference-semantic ambiguities at least interpretable. Since only speakers utter sentences, we have to socio-pragmatically interpret the content of concepts.\(^87\) The concept, furthermore, has a meaning that we utter in a specific context. A rough socio-pragmatic explicit phrasing of ‘to go to school’ could therefore be ‘Hereby, I convey to you the information that I as a student have some reasons to tell you as my only father that I go to the school as a building because of a gentle force of commitment within a society, namely to attend a school as a publicly acknowledged institution.’ Of course, it is absurd to make all such structures explicit and it is more than possible that we will find a further ambiguity. Even though we constantly assume that we can specify ambiguities, we strategically operate with regard to the fact that reality cannot be communicated in its entirety. Instead, I suggest that we work strategically with regard to

\(^{87}\) Since the 80s, text linguistics attempts to decode texts as complex signs (see Gansel, Cristina and Frank Jürgens. *Textlinguistik und Textgrammatik*. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2002, 127). Within text linguistics, texts are defined as communicative acts that consist of more than one utterance. The foundation for this theory is the semiotic triangle. According to this triangle, texts stand in syntactic relations to each other. Texts are interpreted by subjects pragmatically with a semantic relation to their preceding knowledge.
circumstances and not with regard to formal rules. We work with vagueness and not with
formally explicit structures. Yet, we know that if necessary we could unfold the vagueness in
more formal interpretations that suffice the context. Lexicography is therefore always bound to
the status quo of how communicators communicative and can never fully achieve a final,
explicit, semantic map of our mental lexicon.

A complete semantic explication of the hermeneutic, communicative situation runs
therefore into the problem that each sign in a sentence has to be interpreted with regard to its
hermeneutical ‘as’ within the already consisting circle of self-reflectiveness of language-users.
Thus, we cannot achieve a last valid semantical explication of a concept, since this would mean
to grasp the essence of the speaker and his surroundings, which is impossible. Concepts are
dependent on users and users are finite in their capabilities. Moreover, we would hypostasize the
linguistic capacity of the speaker as an ergon (as a readymade fact) and would not capture his
linguistic creativity as Energeia (as an activity). All of this hints to the fact that we must
understand the sentence as an utterance that is performative and we have to accept that we cannot
entirely express intentions of performatives by semantics. The explicit formulation of the
implicit performative ‘Hereby, I claim’ is therefore not captured with the semantic explication
of the implicit pragmatic horizon. We must interpret the used signs as well as the sentence itself
with regard to a pragmatic context that is open. I thus disagree with Brandom that the
propositional claim is the downtown of language, and regard linguistic actions in a specific
historical context that is open as being more important. The pragmatic context is conventionally
established in the linguistic life-form. The life-form, however, cannot be entirely explicated with
a set of performative vocabulary. This is also because the performatives of one utterance are
ambiguous. In the following paragraphs, I will explain the ambiguity of performatives.
If a general gives orders to a civilian, then the order cannot unfold its illocutionary force that it would have with regard to a soldier. An illocutionary force is a socially established form of interaction that can be successful or not successful. We could only assume that there might be an illocutionary force of making somebody to do something. Yet, it is not an order. For this reason, it is difficult to assign the correct semantic performative with regard to its illocutionary force. While a soldier would follow the order, and while it seems that in such a case the performative should be entirely clarified, we cannot do this as easily in the case of a civilian. Because of this, Austin sees it as a necessity to introduce the idea of a perlocution, the idea that an action can have results that were not intended or socially secured. If a general therefore gives an order, and a civilian follows, then this would be a perlocutive effect with regard to the order. However, we could also evaluate this as the illocution of asking somebody to do something. In this case, the illocution would be successful. Then, however, the possible performatives are semantically ambiguous as well as the meaning of concepts are ambiguous. The question of which illocution was finally used is unclear.

My claim is therefore that that there is no strong force that works causally and forces subjects to do things; instead societies exercise weak forces. Instead of eliminating the possibility of recognizing these weak forces, we have to accept that ambiguities are an essential part of our discourses. There should be no explicit reference-semantics, in order to allow for ‘Spiels’. Wittgenstein’s idea of language-games refers to the German, technical notion of Spiel, which also invokes the idea that something has play. The performative part of the utterance itself is pragmatically ambiguous, and thus we need to develop a pragmatic understanding of the openness of concepts that allows for ‘Spiel’. So what is the horizon of pragmatics in terms of this play?
In order to answer these problems I introduced the concept ‘poetic’, which was already realized in numerous publications by the word ‘metaphor’. An example for this can be found in Lakoff’s book *Metaphors we live by* (1980). In so far as the metaphor and metonymy principle are recognized in their poetical function to structure phenomena, pragmatics can be understood as semantically open. If semantics is open for pragmatics, then semantics is not entirely integrated, but also not completely replaced by pragmatics. This would acknowledge the anthropological situation of humans who are, indeed, determined by the conventions of language, but who are creative within these conventions, who change these conventions, an who make these conventions.

The pragmatic integration does not mean to reintroduce a further semantic interpretation. Rather, we must emphasize a qualitative difference between the holistic conception of a pragmatic approach that allows for openness and play, and the particular approach of a referential semantic that ties meanings down to an explicit reference. Instead, a pragmatic conception can be achieved by the manifold determinations of the poetic functions of language within a historical communication-community. We have to point out, however, that the sign, the propositional sentence as well as the performative act are embedded in historical situations. Finally, pragmatics has to be interpreted as historically open, and thus discourses are a non-closable circles and occur in histories. In the end, the concept of openness shall achieve a first interpretation of the creative use of language as well as the creative interpretation of co-subjects within pragmatics.

Furthermore, Hegel’s idea of historical systematicity will give us a criterion of demarcating any sort of a game from the specific games that should achieve knowledge. Despite

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such a relative openness, Hegel will show that we can achieve objective knowledge with regard to our historical moment. The pragmatic project can only move towards a Hegelian perspective, if the concept of history becomes a central point.

2.2.4 Summary

The transcendental and universal pragmatic reconstruction of language as the foundational condition of cognition and of all communication communities is based on the pragmatic integration of a referential semantics. Yet, it cannot be limited to this analysis, since a correct understanding of language has to be amended by the historical understanding of language. I demonstrated the pragmatic integration with respect to three stages (Peirce, Wittgenstein and Austin). Finally, I have pointed out that the final result cannot be a semantics of semantics. I criticized all projects that point out the foundational character of language as a logical form. Rather, we have to understand language as a life-form in a historical context.

Nevertheless, this life form shall not express a pragmatic perplexity. The question of history remains untouched in the neo-pragmatic tradition. Yet, a discussion of history might ground relative, yet objective knowledge. Before I come to the question of history, however, I will reconstruct Brandom’s account as an unhistorical attempt to pragmatically integrate a reference-semantics by virtue of semantics. I will argue that he cannot deliver a criterion for objectivity of knowledge.
2.3 Brandom’s Pragmatic Semantics and its Relation to Realism
Historically, we can read Brandom’s theory as a systematic attempt to address the problem of the pragmatic integration of a reference-semantics by formal semantic means. Though this problem has its origin in a misinterpretation of Hegel and though Brandom claims to be neo-Hegelian, Brandom’s intended solution for these problems does not represent a return to Hegel. The recent return to epistemological contextualism, resembling a Hegelian holism, is motivated by the failure of analytic philosophy to provide atomistic knowledge. In particular, analytic philosophy was firstly interested in demonstrating that reality exists, a claim that Hegel never denied. Secondly, analytic philosophers invested great efforts to prove our immediate contact with such a reality. It is a proof that Hegel thinks is impossible. Instead, Hegel’s arguments for an objective epistemology evolved around a phenomenology based on experience. Analytic philosophy’s recent turn to contextualism rejects similar to Hegel the idea of an immediate contact with reality. Yet, we cannot dissociate this rejection from the realist motivation of analytic philosophy. In this sense, Brandom’s Sellarsian rejection of immediate knowledge, leads to an unreasonable rejection of experience. Accordingly, experience would only deliver a relativist source of objectivity for epistemology. Brandom’s rejection of experience and his turn to a linguistic rationalism, however, faces then the problem of an empty coherentism in a frictionless void. ‘Linguistic rationalism’ means for Brandom to integrate an inferential semantics into a pragmatic framework that can be objectively secured from the inside of language. Since Hegel’s account is, however, also anti-semantic, Brandom’s use of formal semantics to ground pragmatics cannot be called Hegelian. Since Brandom, furthermore, presupposes a reality expressed in his semantics, it cannot be Hegelian either, since Hegel denies the possibility of metaphysical realisms on the epistemological level.
In order to contrast Brandom and Hegel, I will therefore reconstruct Brandom’s arguments for semantic realism in detail. I will point out four characteristics of Brandom’s approach:

a) his external realism

b) his procedural realism

c) his formalized, linguistic model

d) and, finally, his incomplete solution of anaphora for the problem of reference.

In particular, I will develop, firstly, a general notion of his realism, which is, however, not clarified by himself. For this, I will also lay out the general structure of his central work *Making it Explicit* and explain the before analyzed realism as one of its major goals.

Since it seems that Brandom’s realism could also be read as a matter of objective procedures, I will, secondly, investigate his idea of linguistic normativity. Moreover, I will demonstrate that the objectivity of these normative discourse-structures cannot be objectively secured either.

Thirdly, I will demonstrate that the ontological consequences from his distinctions of commitment and entitlement are not carrying his philosophy beyond linguistics and that his transcendental argument for the mastery of discourses does therefore not hold for demonstrating truth in discourses.

All of these steps converge into the final analysis of Brandom’s explanation of reference with regard to his solution of anaphora. I will demonstrate that his idea of inferentially relating a linguistic model to perceptual episodes does not solve the problem of communication.
2.3.1 Brandom's Realism

My thesis is that Brandom is a realist without clarification of what this means. In order to prove this claim I will distinguish an external realism and a procedural realism. External realism is the idea that there are determinate things that can be known as independent from our mind. Procedural realism is the idea that we can get closer to reality by the correct methods. I defend the thesis that Brandom is a realist in both senses and that Brandom’s account is thus incompatible with a Hegelian account.

2.3.1.1 Realism, Brandom and Hegel

Though I do not deny that something about our experience is real, I deny that we can clearly distinguish our methods of construction from an unfiltered content, a naked reality. ‘Reality’ is therefore a rather abstracted term that we produce, in order to describe something that occurs in our experience. The term ‘reality’ has a function for subjects who cannot ultimately justify themselves as subjective, but who need to develop a concept of objectivity. Hegel develops this concept at the end of his *Greater Logic*. This conception of reality, however, is derived dialectically. The Brandomian attempt to secure objective, procedural discourse-conditions, on the contrary, does not follow such a dialectical discussion, but rather simply presupposes reality.

To be more specific, Brandom’s formal pragmatics is a propositional, inferentialist realism that is supposed to liberate words like “true” and “refers” from the representationalist paradigm (see Hookway 2016). Yet, his inferentialist realism still translates these ideas into

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ahistorical, procedural terms of normative correctness. Thus, Brandom’s connection of semantics and pragmatics, for example, is not only the question of whether pragmatics stands on the grounds of an inferential role semantics, but it is also the question of whether semantics ultimately solves the epistemological problem of justifying and identifying our conceptual contact to a presupposed reality. Hegel does not deny a reality, but he denies such epistemological efforts to distinguish what is constructed and what is reality once and for all. This endeavor is difficult, if not impossible. For Brandom, however, our participation in reality is a condition for objectivity, even though we cannot say what reality is. Thus, Brandom states:

The objectivity of conceptual norms requires that any attitude of taking, treating, or assessing as correct an application of a concept in forming a belief or making a claim be coherently conceivable as mistaken, because of how things are with the objects the belief or claim is about (Brandom 1998, 63).

In other words, our attitudes depend on how things really are. It is hard to deny that this is an external realism, since Brandom presupposes things as independent from our thoughts. Despite this strong external realism, Brandom, however, also believes that all semantic content is normatively grounded in social interaction. He does not believe that reality can be represented, but that it must restrict the way of how we forge concepts. Knowledge would then be about achieving greater mastery of concepts and about creating concepts with regard to what is reality. This indicates that we could read the statement above in a rather charitable way. In this case, our interactions would be about objects of assertions and not necessarily about an external reality.

Brandom’s realism, however, comes more explicitly to the fore in the following statement:

A semantically adequate notion of correct inference must generate an acceptable notion of conceptual content. But such a notion must fund the idea of objective truth conditions and so of objectively correct inferences. Such proprieties of judgment and inference outrun actual attitudes of taking or treating judgements and inferences as correct. They are determined by how things are, independently of how they
are taken to be. Our cognitive attitudes must ultimately answer to these attitude-transcendent facts.

(Brandom 1998, 137).

So “things”, which are independent from us, influence our judgements. Brandom’s main idea is that correct cooperation involves a concept of what reality is. In other words, we do not know what reality is, but we are in contact with reality because otherwise there would be no successful communication. There is a necessity for “attitude-transcendent facts” such as real objects, which are entirely independent from us and that are thus an absolute foundation for our communication (Brandom 1998, 137). I have to test whether this is only an assumption or whether Brandom can deliver proofs for such a correcting influence of reality.

I am not denying that we probably need to presuppose an idealized content for our preferred communication, let us say, in sciences. Brandom, however, claims that we know that reality is independent from us. His central claim is that we do not know reality in its essence so that we can represent it, but that we know reality in how it objectively structures our discourses. In other words, Brandom claims that an ‘attitude-transcendent reality’ guarantees the objectivity of our procedures. Since he also thinks that our content is not an immediate representation of reality, he must assume that we get closer to reality by greater mastery of concepts. Thus, Brandom does not claim that we are more successful only with regard to standards that we set up by ourselves, which would be a Hegelian model, but that we, indeed, get closer to reality. This is what I call his procedural realism. Brandom’s commitment to this second kind of realism masks his ungrounded external realism.

My thesis is therefore that despite his procedural realism, Brandom is an external realist in presupposing that there are things that are independent from us. I hold that both realisms are impossible to defend.
2.3.1.2 Realists and the Cheerful Constructivists

Some analytic philosophers celebrate Brandom for his realist account. Their enthusiasm leads them to critically anticipate any skeptical attempt to deconstruct his realism-argument. Here is one example:

Given the open-ended nature of the game it need not come as a surprise that experts working in the philosophy of science or in the sociology of knowledge that tend to be a bit on the pessimistic side, might feel themselves inclined to endorse the thesis that objectivity will simply be unavailable in the final analysis. They might join forces with cheerful constructivists who embrace the thought that entitlements have in the final analysis (Bransen 2000, 23).

For Bransen these “cheerful constructivists”, or “[t]hese not so sophisticated anti-realists won’t find Robert Brandom on their side” (Bransen 2000, 24). On the contrary, Bransen knows that “the expert who becomes familiar with the deep problems about knowledge, reality, objectivity and truth” will agree with Brandom. According to him, “the expert” needs to reconstruct Brandom’s approach according to the following steps:

a) We have to demonstrate first “that normativity cannot do without entitlements” (Bransen 2000, 23). Only if I am entitled to something there will be a normative force. Entitlements are based on endorsements that are expressed as normative commitments in an interactive space of reasons.

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b) Structures of entitlements have ontological implications because without these implications, we would not acknowledge the possibility of being correct. In other words, we need to presuppose a reality during our interactions in the space of reasons.

c) The open games will let the attitude-transcendent facts speak, express themselves, and they will intervene mistaken discourses.

I will discuss the whole argument under point 2.3.3 in more detail. For now, I have to point out that all these claims are, however, at least problematic. A) since a further presupposition of Brandom’s model is that all our language is normative, the first claim assumes that entitlements are the core of our communication, which reduces language already to its instrumental function. Language is used in order to achieve or secure entitlements. B) the need for ontologies and the presupposition of an ontology does not guarantee that ontologies are adequate. C) it is questionable whether ‘attitude-transcendent facts’ utter themselves, or whether this is an anthropomorphism. Facts do not act. Or, at least, this assumption needs more theoretical foundation. Bransen’s conclusion expresses therefore a problematic excitement that analytic philosophers of Brandom’s color feel, and it is then questionable whether we can claim that we become better in a game of truth, as Bransen proclaims further:

[…] appreciating these problems is a matter of playing the same game as the child whose cognitive development displays a rapidly growing success in coping with objective reality, namely the game of human understanding, the game of giving and asking for reasons — a game in which it is possible to become better (Bransen 2000, 23).

I have discussed the problem of more sophisticated coherence games with regard to Sellars above (2.1.4). I attempted to demonstrate that more detailed knowledge in one domain of knowledge depends on the conditions of our conception of knowledge in the first place. In this
sense, we can agree that Brandom provides new solutions for formal semantics, which is a highly elaborated game that some analytic philosophers have agreed to play and that they call knowledge. Beyond this elaborated game, however, we also have to demonstrate that his attempt does not only cater to a small group of experts who agree on a problem. Margolis, for example, is critical of Brandom’s selective pragmatist tradition that turns its insights into solutions for the problem of reality. He criticizes the necessary idealizations that a formal semantics undertakes in order to understand ordinary language. He describes the abstractions for such an idealization: “notably, an analysis of the holist, contextual, societally embedded, historicized, tacit, profoundly informal, improvisational, consensually tolerated, and practically effective forms of discourse” (Margolis 2009, 184).91 Given the complexity of our interactions, Margolis is very skeptical of formalist semantics and evaluates Brandom’s project on the basis of this:

But I find it more than unlikely that Brandom would be satisfied with the verdict that his conception was hardly more than a heuristic prop catering to the interests of a stubborn cohort of skillful specialists who are committed nevertheless to a project that was probably impossible (Margolis 2009, 184).

To summarize, Brandom’s approach might be only relevant to the inner circle of analytic philosophers who are interested in a transition to pragmatics, but his approach is grounded on the problematic assumptions of this tradition. Though I have discussed these aspects before (2.1.3 and 2.1.4) I will summarize Brandom’s problematic assumptions with regard to Sellars’ coherentism.

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2.3.1.3 Brandom’s Relation to Sellars’ Coherentism

On the one hand, Brandom adopts Sellars’ inferential coherentism for his semantics. On the other hand, Brandom inherits the idea of attitude-transcendent facts from the above described Sellarsian problem of picturing (2.1.4). Sellars attempted to constitute objectivity in a coherence structure of inferences by assuming a necessary operation of picturing reality. Since Sellars rejected the given as a myth, he could not rely on experience that gives objects, in order to ground a coherent structure. Brandom follows this strategy. In his major work, Making it Explicit, the term ‘experience’ does not appear in the index. Brandom, in accordance with Sellars, believes that a merely inferentialist framework can constitute a coherent theory of meaning that is a formal theory that constitutes knowledge without experience. Without experience, the major question is then how to qualify one coherent system to be better than another one. Brandom claims that he has found a lever of objectivity inside of the inferentialist paradigm. The idea is that individuals, usually the non-conceptual content of statements, are normatively structured by navigational actions of the speakers. Brandom believes that knowledge is “norms all the way down” (Brandom 1998, 44). Knowledge of individuals is then relative to our social contexts. In the preface, Brandom makes clear that he is interested in the “objectivity of concepts” with regard to such social contexts (Brandom 1997, 156). Jackman writes on this Brandomian issue that “[u]ltimately, being correct is to be explained in terms of being correctly taken to be correct” (Jackman 2017). For this reason, I assume that there is no attempt to justify the individuals contents of statements as ultimately true, but we adopt them in discourse practices that only work if we presuppose reality as attitude-transcendent. It introduces a revised

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verificationism, which is here the idea that we can use right procedures that get verified in social practice.

It is, however, questionable whether the idea of correct procedural conditions can be deduced. The main problem is therefore that Brandom tries to operate without a concept of experience. As an alternative, Brandom develops a formalized, procedural realism. This procedural realism has to be investigated in more detail.

### 2.3.1.4 Conclusions on Brandom’s External and Procedural Realism

Even if we granted a minimal, external, realist presupposition, it would be unclear how such a reality influences our discourses epistemologically. In this case, it is not enough to say that there is a reality, but if there is a reasonable argument, it must entail what reality is and how it influences our discourses. Rockmore cannot find further arguments that support Brandom’s realism. He remarks that Brandom’s verification of concepts is “no more than a promissory note” (Rockmore 2016, 112):

> In Brandom’s position, verification consists in ascertaining which concepts are true through confronting them to reality. This is no more than a promissory note, which cannot be redeemed. The insuperable difficulty lies in going from fact-dependence to objectively correct inferences through relevant conceptions of normativity. That an inference is objectively correct according to prevailing normative standards is unrelated to what is really correct about the real. In short, the suggestion that inferences respect the facts according to the best current standards is insufficient to show they succeed in grasping how things are. In other words, as Kant points out in his Copernican turn, no one has ever been able to show how one can correctly infer from appearance to reality (Rockmore 2016, 112).

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For Rockmore, it is impossible to obtain objective inferences through normativity by stating a fact-dependence. Our standard of what counts as objectively correct, is independent from what is real. Rockmore indicates further that a discussion of this actually Kantian problem is necessary, in order to demonstrate the impossibility of knowing reality by current means of philosophy.

I intend to discuss this Kantian problem as the ground of the Hegelian epistemology later (4.1.2). Before, however, I need to clarify the general structure and thoughts of Brandom’s central work *Making it Explicit*, in order to test his argument - if there is one. Despite the acknowledgement of Brandom’s contributions to formal semantics, it is questionable whether it contributes to the epistemological problems of the Kantian, Continental tradition. If this is true, it entails that Brandom does not bridge the gap between Continental and analytic philosophy, and that he cannot be called Hegelian.

2.3.1.5 *Brandom’s Making it Explicit*

Before I investigate Brandom’s arguments for procedural realism in more detail, I would like to give an accurate representation of the goals that Brandom pursues in *Making it Explicit*, his central work. With regard to the specified replacement of the paradigms of consciousness by pragmatics, Brandom attempts to explain the semantic content of our statements by a pragmatic integration. Brandom states: “The book is an attempt to explain the meanings of linguistic expressions in terms of their use” (1997, 153). This further attempt of a pragmatic integration of semantics has to be tested. The book starts with “an account of social practices” (Brandom

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94 Marshall defends the same opinion: “It showed how Brandom’s work emerged out of the broad shift in the philosophy of language from semantics to pragmatics that also informed speech theory” (Marshall, David L. “The Implications of Robert Brandom’s Inferentialism for Intellectual History.” *History and Theory* 52, 2013: 1-31).

1997, 153), investigating the structural conditions that makes them “linguistic practices” (Brandom 1997, 153). For this account, Brandom distinguishes the capacity of speaking from the capacity of only producing sounds. Speaking is about our mastery of treating something inferentially, instead of only referring to things. This means, we can distinguish between good and bad inferences. Photocells or parrots do not understand the concept of red (see Brandom 2009, 170). If they ‘answer’, it will only be a stimulus response. Humans, on the other hand, can master this concept by understanding its inferential role (See Mosteller 2014, 81).

Understanding its inferential role means to accept that an utterance has certain implications for a system. Such a “conceptual role semantics” focuses on the question of how we exchange different speech-acts and produce content during these acts (see Brandom 1997, 153). In this sense, content is not magically picked up and introduced into a formal system of language, but content is produced by language itself and by the requirements of the pragmatic situation.

Brandom does not want to leave anything to a mystical force outside of language. Thus, his account can be seen as embedded in the analytical tradition that rejects any metaphysical discussion without its justification in linguistics. Nevertheless, he does not commit to the view that all Continental considerations are meaningless. In his reply to Taylor he admits to have a very broad position:

I am working within a broadly pragmatist tradition that includes not only the classical American pragmatists, but also the early Heidegger and the later Wittgenstein. My pragmatism is distinguished from theirs, however,

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by being joined to a kind of philosophical rationalism. It is this unusual combination of commitments that draws me to Hegel (Brandom 2010, 301). 

Despite this commitment to such a broad spectrum, Brandom’s relation to claims, which he describes as the downtown of language, is a controversial point. Claims are significant for his analytic position. According to Brandom, we can describe a claim as a specific form of speech act. It exhibits a relation of meaning and use in the context of descriptive or ascriptive vocabulary (see Brandom 1997, 153). His overall goal is to tie down this meaning of a sentence to the proposition expressed by such claims.

Brandom discusses the problem of use, since use seems to adjust the meaning of claims. He mentions simple cases of use-specification. So we can use, for example, “the word ‘not’ to express negation” (Brandom 1997, 153). We find the contrary extreme in the open field of theories that present concepts as very vague. These are “descriptions of the movements of particles expressed in the vocabulary of physics” (Brandom 1997, 154). The use of such vocabulary cannot support a stable meaning, since “expressed by various noises or inscriptions, it will in general fail to settle even that anything is meant or expressed by them” (Brandom 1997, 154). According to Brandom, this difficulty to settle any meaning is because our normal “intentional vocabulary”, as well as our “naturalistic vocabulary” cannot transfer what we mean entirely (Brandom 1997, 154). In order to solve these difficulties, Brandom wants to apply “normative vocabulary” (Brandom 1997, 154). For him, each communicational practice includes norms of correctness with regard to the used expressions. In other words, speech-acts need to fit the social standards (see Brandom 1997, 154).

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describable objects of physics. In these cases, we must be aware of how we are doing things with language, in order to avoid misuse. Brandom suggests that our claims are normative in any case and that such extreme physical examples will reveal the need of normative vocabulary.

Altogether, Brandom’s realism is here hard to express, since he does not explicitly discuss this claim. In fact, his claim that things are normative all the way down, interferes with his realism. His realism, however, is clearly stated with regard to physical limit cases:

For the properties governing the application of those concepts depends on what inferences involving them are correct, that is, on what really follows from what. And that depends on how things really are with electrons and aromatic compounds, not just on what judgments and inferences we endorse (Brandom, 2000, 27).

Brandom needs to specify what is real about “electrons and aromatic compounds.” As his realism is expressed in this passage, it stands in contrast with the claim that things are normative all the way down. So, we have to understand how his normative pragmatics is supposed to be combined with his external realism.

In Chapter One, Brandom presents his “normative pragmatics” and its origin with regard to Kant, Frege, and Wittgenstein (see Brandom 1997, 154). His goal is to achieve an explanation of meaning without the use of any naturalist vocabulary. Brandom assumes that all speech acts include normativity: “Interpreting states, performances, and expressions as semantically or intentionally contentful is understood as attributing to their occurrence an ineliminably normative pragmatic significance” (Brandom 1997, 154). Brandom does not treat this implicitly normative practice as inexplicable (see Brandom 1997, 154), because these norms are “instituted by social, practical activity” (Brandom 1997, 154). This social activity on its most fundamental layer involves commitments and entitlements (see Brandom 1997, 154). For Brandom, it is a discursive practice, in which participants acquire points. He writes:
Beginning with basic deontic scorekeeping attitudes and the practices that govern them, an account is offered of how locutions must be used in order to express explicitly the very normative notions - is committed, is permitted, ought, and so on - that are appealed to in laying out the normative pragmatics (Brandom 1997, 154).

In other words, Brandom explains meaning in terms of use, while use is depending on the normative pragmatics. The core of a normative pragmatics are locutions. The terms of “attitudes of attributing, [...] acknowledging deontic statuses of commitment and entitlement” (Brandom 1997, 154) are then the key-terms for his project because they express the most foundational actions in identifying what really follows from what. The more crucial issue is, however, the following:

The next step is to say what structure such a set of social practices must have in order to qualify as specifically discursive practice. This is a matter of moving from pragmatics to semantics. The defining characteristic of discursive practice is the production and consumption of specifically propositional contents (Brandom 1997, 154).

This must mean that after having moved from semantics to a pragmatic strategy of explanation, we will move back from pragmatics to semantics. Brandom declares the propositional content to be the key ingredient for his system, which is contradictory to the original attempt of a pragmatic integration. It also contradicts the claim that things are normative all the way down. The reason for this can be found in Chapter Two, in which he argues that “propositional contentfulness should be understood in terms of inferential articulation; propositions are what can serve as premises and conclusions of inferences, that is, can serve as and stand in need of reasons” (Brandom 1997, 154). This means that Brandom, declares inferentialism as the binding force in our language games, and inferences demand for propositions. Brandom wants to point out that this activity is beyond “nonlinguistic creatures” that have intentional states (see Brandom 1997,
The application of the term ‘intentional’ is “parasitic” to “full-blooded linguistic intentionality” (Brandom 1997, 154) that humans have, and thus the observation that animals have intentionality is only possible with our developed vocabulary. Intentionality depends, instead, on the capability to make inferences, which can only be achieved, if we claim something.

There are three important steps to Brandom’s endeavor of a linguistic realism. Firstly, to show that all meaning is normatively depending on use. Secondly, that all use depends on inferences, and inferences depend on propositions, which can be objectively demonstrated. Third, the third step of his project is to demonstrate that our so called “substitutional inferences” can explain singular terms and predicates, since they cannot “directly play the inferential role of premise or conclusion in an argument” (Brandom 1997, 155). This step is the most difficult and most controversial aspect of his endeavor. Brandom analyzes singular terms and the “systematic contributions to the directly inferential roles of sentences in which they occur” (Brandom 1997, 155). In chapter six, Brandom relates then to the main issues of Sellars’ inferential role semantics. He addresses the problem of an empty coherentism by his notion of anaphora, “the relation between a pronoun and its antecedent” (Brandom 1997, 155). Anaphors are supposed to explain singular terms, and thus they are supposed to solve the Sellarsian problem of an empty coherentism. In Chapter seven, Brandom will accordingly argue that anaphora can express unrepeateable events. In particular, anaphors can explain “demonstrative tokenings” (Brandom 1997, 155).

After these three steps, Brandom adds a proof of objectivity that will be carried out with regard to a conceptual role semantics that is determined by the distribution of roles and the “implicitly normative linguistic social practices of a community” (Brandom 1997, 155).
Brandom’s main target is to explain the representational dimension of our discourses by inferentialist terms. The word ‘of’ “that expresses intentional directedness”, as well as the word ‘about’ make only sense if Brandom’s communicative, inferentialist model is applied (Brandom 1997, 156). Chapter Eight is supposed to demonstrate how these expressions are actually used within this model and finally require a notion of reality (see Brandom 1997, 156). Brandom intends to demonstrate how his inferentialist model “institute[s] objective norms” of a discourse that has to be directed towards attitude transcendent facts. In other words, to an external reality. His overall conception of norms, rooted in an inferential role semantics that relies on propositions, expresses therefore his procedural realism:

“norms according to which the correctness of an application of a concept answers to the facts about the object to which it is applied, in such a way that anyone (indeed everyone) in the linguistic community may be wrong about it” (Brandom 1997, 156).

Brandom’s proof for the correctness of procedural conditions relies therefore on a formal understanding of reality that is for everyone the same. I will investigate this as his procedural realism in more detail.

To summarize, since Brandom does not clarify what mind-independent things are, a possible argument for his realism must be found in the idea that reality has to be presupposed during our discourses and that we get closer to it, even though we do not know it.

2.3.2 Brandom’s Procedural Realism and The Problem of Rules

After having discussed Brandom’s relation to realism as a heritage from Sellarsian problems, after having distinguished his twofold realist claims (an external realism and a procedural
realism), and after having explained the relation of external and procedural realism in his major work, *Making it Explicit*, I have to discuss Brandom’s relation to normative vocabulary in detail. Brandom argues that according to our normative attitude of giving and asking for reasons, meaning is intersubjectively conveyed by inferences that make propositions necessary and that arguments are hereby objective. For Brandom, there are three components necessary for meaning:

a) The intersubjective play of deontic score-keepers,

b) an inferentialist structure of their moves during their play,

c) and the fact that inferences depend on propositions.

Despite these strictly formal requirements, it is hard to identify Brandom’s realism immediately, since each of these structural moments could be provided as an internal moment of our communication, and thus we could argue that Brandom is actually not a strict realist. With regard to this Rorty even states that Brandom’s account leaves “no room” for realism. He writes:

> There is, as far as I can see, no room for anything unconditional in Brandom’s view of things, nor any room for a “foundation” for an existing consensus. I take it that for Brandom no principle can claim a higher status than being presupposed by some ‘de facto’ established practice (Rorty 1997, 176).  

We have to test this peculiarly relativist reading of Brandom, since, as I have claimed, the problem of Brandom’s position is exactly his realism.

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2.3.2.1 Brandom a Relativist?

Rorty evaluates Brandom’s relativism with regard to an unnecessary notion of progress towards reality:

[T]he intuition that we are making intellectual progress is simply the intuition that, in respect to self-consciousness and intellectual responsibility, we are getting farther and farther away from the cavemen; it does not need backup from notions like ‘closer to Reality’ or ‘more nearly universally valid’. This would be analogous to saying that the intuition that inquiry is in touch with reality is simply the intuition that it is constrained by reality; it does not need backup from notions like ‘corresponding’ or ‘mapping’ (Rorty 1997, 176).

Rorty denies that we can get closer to reality, while, according to Sellars, we make progress in getting closer to reality. Therefore, we can call Rorty clearly anti-Sellarsian. If Rorty, however, is right, then Brandom cannot be a real follower of Sellars, which he, however, is.

In this regard, Brandom states that there are objective criteria of how we should apply concepts, as he indicates in many passages of Making it Explicit:

It was pointed out […] that it is a critical criterion of adequacy on any account of concepts that it make sense of a distinction between how they are applied in fact, by anyone or everyone, and how they ought to be applied – how it would be correct to apply them (Brandom 1998, 593).

Indeed, the foundation for this statement is Brandom’s denial that meaning depends on a correct reference between concepts and things, which is compatible with Rorty’s statement. Correct application and the mastery of concepts produce meaning. Meaning would then depend on the norms of how to apply concepts.

Even though this resembles Rorty’s relativism, at the same time, Brandom argues against regularism. The behaviorist or naturalist idea that we follow norms depending on the authority

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100 Rorty further concludes that philosophy should rather ecumanize than revolutionize (see Rorty 1997, 176).
that establishes them. So, in this case, norms would depend on the current authority and hence they would be relative. For Brandom, however, there must be still “an objective sense of correctness that governs their [concepts] application – a sense of appropriateness that answers to the objects to which they are applied and to the world of facts comprising those objects” (Brandom 1998, 594). This means Brandom includes a sense of correctness as much as a world of independent things, as demonstrated above. Both qualify as different kinds of realism. How Brandom tries to avoid relativism must therefore be the goal of the following paragraphs. Rorty obviously misinterprets Brandom on this issue. I will show that Brandom assumes that we make progress with respect to reality.

2.3.2.2 Rules and the Progress towards Reality

Already at the beginning of MIE, Brandom implies that he is concerned with an anthropological question. Specifically, he wants to clarify the meaning of the word ‘we’. His work does not include a historical, sociological discussion of this aspect, but focuses on the central activity of humans that is undertaking commitments. Furthermore, he claims that we can describe this normative activity objectively. The attention to commitments entails also Brandom’s defense of a grounding propositional structure. Though it is true that, according to Brandom’s framework, these commitments are fundamentally bound by rules, he rejects the historical dependence of rules. They rather respond to how the world really is.

Wittgenstein already explicated rule-based approaches: any rulebound understanding runs into an infinite regress of rules because we need meta-rules of how to apply rules, rules of how we apply these rules of rules, and so forth. Historically and socially, it is clear that the regress has stopped, since action took place. Brandom’s solution for the infinite regress of rules on the
theoretical level acknowledges therefore that rules do not come from the internal source of thinking itself. Rules are not explicit. Rather preexisting human communities established them with preexisting understandings and without interpretation necessarily involved. For Brandom, this is practice: “grasping a rule without interpreting it is grasping it in practice, rather than by substituting one expression of a rule for another” (Brandom 1998, 65). This, in his words, pragmatist approach\textsuperscript{101} raises the question of how we follow performative rules implicitly. In other words, Brandom suggests that following rules is necessary in order to have discourses at all. He denies, however, that we can make them entirely explicit (see Brandom 1998, 23). Since he, however, repetitively states that “[t]he book is an attempt to explain the meanings of linguistic expressions in terms of their use” (1997, 153), he argues that understanding, committing to, and “[…] grasping a concept is mastering the use of a word” (Brandom, 2000, 6). Yet, mastering implies to do something objectively better. If this is true, then Brandom replaces the question of non-perspectival knowledge of the world, by a realism of objective procedures. Then he might be a relativist with regard to the contents that we discuss, but, on the procedural side, he would still be a realist, which means that the truth of these procedures is independent from the historical, or social contexts, and that we get closer to reality. This is the notion of progress that Rorty denies.

In Brandom’s theory, mastery of a concept is accordingly a “kind of know how rather than knowing that” (Mosteller 2014, 81). This means still that a so-called normative pragmatics is supposed to avoid problems of externally approached meaning, but Brandom claims that an

\textsuperscript{101}Brandom writes: “The conclusion of the regress argument is that there is a need for a pragmatist conception of norms – a notion of primitive correctnesses of performance implicit in practice that precede and are presupposed by their explicit formulation in rules and principles.” (Brandom 1998, 21).
objective, specific form is necessary for us to make a system of inferences work.\textsuperscript{102} This means that even if Brandom’s system did not presuppose a naked reality, it would approach persons as juggling formal, propositional meanings, and objectively becoming better at it as they acquire mastery over these procedures.

There is a further tension in Brandom’s work. On the one hand, Brandom refers to Sellars that “[a] rule is lived, not described” (according to Brandom 1998, 25); on the other hand, Brandom describes the “primary task” of his book as making these norms explicit: “The pragmatist starts rather with a notion of norms implicit in practice and is obliged then to develop an account of what it would be for such things to become propositionally explicit, as claims or rules” (Brandom 1998, 26). As stated above, persons establish norms through the acknowledgment of the commitments of other persons while, according to Brandom, both participate in a formal game of exchanging reasons. The possibility of explicating implicit rules is a presupposition and the question remains whether we can address the entirety of the human animal with a formal semantics. It seems to me, according to Sellars’ expression of a lived rule, we should then rather describe ways of how we live together instead of seeking for an entirely objective explication. Brandom’s idea is “navigating among perspectives without sharing contents” (see Mueller 2014). This is what makes us, according to Brandom, rational.

Problematic is that this navigation is ultimately guided by ahistorical formal rules depending on a propositional structure. Brandom assumes then that the possible form of content restricts our interaction. In this particular case, Brandom sees persons not as metaphysically involved in various contents and as persons also shaped by these discussions, but reconstructs persons as ahistorical, objective entities in a community. These objective members play formal language

\textsuperscript{102} This disattachment of form from content is incompatible with a Hegelian approach.
games of exchanging reasons. This is clearly anti-Hegelian. Not only that persons are determined independently from their history, but Brandom also assumes the possibility of separating form from its content once and for all. Another assumptions to which Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is opposed.

Giving and asking for reasons demands for an underlying structure and raises the question of what good reasons are. Or in Brandom’s words, it raises the question of what are good, and what are better moves. Good moves depend for Brandom on the mastery of the game, while the mastery of the game has an objective justification. This ‘better’ must mean that by playing the game more appropriately, we express in a better way how things really are. Due to such implications, I cannot follow Rorty’s claims that Brandom does not commit to the idea of getting closer to the truth.
2.3.2.3 Anti-Realism in Brandom?

I admit, however, that the reconstruction is difficult, as it is not entirely clear whether Brandom commits to realism or whether he is an anti-realist. In his response to Taylor, for example, Brandom affirms the question of whether there could be “rational creatures who are not logical creatures” (Brandom 2010, 304). He then affirms that there could be creatures who do not use “expressive resources provided by propositional-attitude ascribing locutions” (Brandom 2010, 304). Finally, he even agrees that there could be meaning without cooperation, which, according to him, would distinguish him from Habermas (see Brandom 2010, 304). These statements make Brandom’s account very hard to understand because if there are other attitudes or techniques in order to approach meaning, then the question of why Brandom’s method is better than another one emerges.

Brandom responds to Wittgenstein’s claim of language as a city without a center: “But I think language does have a downtown, and that it is the practice of giving and asking for reasons” (Brandom 2010, 301). This downtown is for Brandom the assertion with its propositional structure. Nonetheless, if communication is possible in various sorts of ways, as Brandom admits above, why then should we be committed to his propositional language at any given moment? Once we have given up on the idea that there is only one objective universally, valid procedure, then our objectivity consists only in the fact that we have agreed to accept a conventional procedure in our current, historical community, let us say, to do analytical, formal, Brandomian semantics. This agreement, however, would be fragile. A brief research in so called Discourse Analysis, a branch of General Linguistics would reveal that speakers do not communicate in clearly identifiable packages of assertions. The content of communication cannot always be revealed in clear propositions. Rather, most of our daily communication in life is directed by coordination. It seems to me that only in sciences, we want to commit to a rigid
paradigm. But even visiting a philosopher’s conference, as a meeting of a sort of scientists, leaves sometimes the question of whether propositions are communicated at all, or whether the content is fuzzy and negotiated. It is rather only the intention, if not only the claim to be more rigorous.

Now, we could read the idea of a downtown of language as expressing that Brandom’s approach is better than the other approaches to communicate, better than the people from the village. Then he must claim that other approaches are either incapable of certain insights, or that they work less efficiently than his proposed inferentialist pragmatic, formal semantics that is erected in the downtown of language. Again, at its core, Brandom claims that our communication in terms of formal semantics is correct because it refers to how things really are. At the same time, Brandom claims that there is a possibility to communicate. Somehow Brandom wants to hold on to the possibility of a pluralist epistemology, yet, at the same time, he wants to restrict it. The concept of language varieties, however, suggests that our language is in a flux, constantly mediated by the cooperative efforts of different speakers. There is not one language we choose. Instead, we accommodate our practices with regard to the sufficient success in a communicative situation. It would be hard, if not impossible, to decide whether Brandom’s downtowners can cover all the problems that might occur. The fact, that there is no pre-established form of discourses, no downtown, would certainly be a problem, but it does not make communication impossible.

Even though it is true that Brandom does not commit to a direct referential approach, his objective proceduralism is realist. Procedural realism means here that the objectivity of the procedures must be independent from our historical activity. Brandom seems to claim that there are many ways to truth, but that effectively people from downtown speak better language. This,
besides the problems mentioned above, presupposes to know that truth is, and that truth is one. If, however, Brandom’s approach guarantees truth as knowing mind-independent reality progressively, then we should dismiss any approach that has not guaranteed truth. Then, however, Brandom must ultimately dismiss his relativist remarks and reject the villagers that do not live in downtown. This seems to indicate that Brandom is not entirely certain about his claims.

My argument needs more explanation: Since, according to Brandom, the final result of all our efforts must be one, namely one reality of determinate objects, and since the final result is independent from the method, our approach to truth, the method, would ultimately not matter. This has the consequence that if Brandom claims that he is successful in securing truth, then he must obviously dismiss all other approaches because they are simply unnecessary. Again he must dismiss the villagers. The independent truth that he assumes to be an independent reality of objects, however, is constructed within his system. It is the world-view of a downtowner. If the idea of reality is generated within this method, then it would not be mind-independent, or, at least, the result would be dependent on his method. If truth, however, depends on method, then there is no possibility to ultimately exclude other methods.

In all of its instances it rather occurs that Brandom simply presupposes a mind-independent reality than dealing with this problem. So far I can abstractly summarize this as Brandom’s overall account. In the following, I will reconstruct, and test his arguments for his realism with regard to the specific terms he employs in his work.
2.3.2.4 The Reality of Deontic Score-Keeper

We have to look at Brandom’s argument in more detail. For this, it is important to understand Brandom’s idea of deontic score-keeping and how it relates to his conception of reality. Levine reconstructs Brandom’s language game as played with regard to different scorekeepers that charge contents normatively by committing and by acknowledging entitlements: “On this deontic scorekeeping conception of our discursive practices agents can have commitments and entitlements only if they are taken or treated as having those commitments and entitlements by other scorekeepers” (Levine 2007, 9). So far, this is the idea that meaning arises from the intersubjective dependence of language-users. It seems then that it is the subject, in Brandom’s terms, the scorekeeper, who obliges others to play his particular game of propositional truth. Levine explains this further: “This is so because without other scorekeepers attributing normative statuses to them, whatever commitments and entitlements that seem right to them would be right” (Levine 2007, 9). This idea of Brandom’s reciprocal deontic scorekeeping introduces the other as an instance of necessary correction. Without the other my perspective would always be right, which would consequently annihilate the idea of correctness or at least make it useless. In a word, everybody is always correct with respect to himself. For Levine, the idea of correctness must therefore have a relation to discourse itself:

But if whatever seemed right to an agent were right, then the notion of being right would have no sense because there would be no way for an agent to be wrong about the commitments and entitlements they take themselves to have. For one to have a sense of incorrectness, and therefore of correctness, concerning one’s commitments and entitlements an agent must therefore take part in a social practice that ‘essentially involves a distinction of social perspective, between what one is doing in acknowledging a commitment (to oneself) and attributing a commitment (to someone else)’ (Levine 2007, 9).
So correctness depends on multiple players. Such a navigational, pragmatic account of meaning-production, however, does not have to be related to an external, mind-independent reality. Since we introduce the game of truth obliging each other to play this particular game that other rational life-forms might not play, truth depends on each particular game. Taking somebody as correct depends under these premises on further cultural norms of playing these truth-games at all. Attributing correct beliefs is then no more than a particular, historical practice related to how truth is for us.

Brandom conflates normative, regulative ideas of how to intersubjectively produce knowledge of truth for us with knowledge of a metaphysical, mind-independent reality. Yet, our practices are not necessarily arranged with regard to how things really are, but according to how we take things to be in an experiential, historical process. This is even the case, if we assume how things really are in the agreed game of truth. The real is then still normatively charged, and only a theoretical conception within this specific framework. Hence, it is relative to this framework. The chosen game that Brandom is interested in is the specific form of the propositional language game, which should be formalized, or, in Brandom’s words, made explicit. Brandom believes that the achieved notion of truth can be justified as related to an external reality, if we reconsider the different roles that speakers obtain with regard to content. His argument extends to his concept of de-re and de-dicto ascriptions. I will explain these two concepts and the related argument for realism in the following subpoint.

2.3.2.5 De Dicto- and De Re-Scores

Brandom repeats in multiple passages that his approach depends on how things really are. For this reason it is odd that Rorty calls him a relativist. With his idea of how things really are,
Brandom assumes a stable world that verifies our beliefs and he assumes that all different methods must presuppose this stable, mind-independent reality. Whiting is then right if he refers to this as “a semantic externalism”: This, Brandom states, amounts to a semantic externalism according to which ‘what we mean depends on how things actually are, whether we know how they are or not’ (Whiting 2008, 584).\(^\text{103}\) Brandom’s claims for reality are spread out all over his book, and he even makes the challenge of proving objectivity as related to mind-independent reality central to his approach:

One of the central challenges of an account of conceptual norms as implicit in social practice is accordingly to make sense of the emergence of such an *objective* notion of correctness or appropriateness of claims and application of concepts (Brandom 1998, 594).

As mentioned above, Brandom already states this as the main challenge with regard to “attitude-transcendent facts” (Brandom 199, 137), “the idea of how things actually are” (Brandom 1998, 137). In *Articulating Reason* Brandom replaces the formulation of how things really are with “transcending the attitudes of practitioners” (Brandom 2000, 198):

So the challenge for assertibility theories is to start with a notion of propriety of assertion that is grounded in and intelligible in terms of the practice of speakers and audiences, and yet which is rich enough to fund normative assessments that are objective in the sense of transcending the attitudes of practitioners (Brandom 2000, 198).\(^\text{104}\)

The main problem of assertibility theories is the idea that we gain truth through processes that are secured through the majority of people, but that we have no other means of correction. For the “*objective correctness*” of norms, Brandom, however, introduces a further criterion (see


\(^\text{104}\) Brandom begins to consider metaphysical questions: “Traditionally philosophy says that beliefs are many, but the truth is one” (Brandom 1998, 594)
Brandom 1998, 594-595). He suggests that we can distinguish between “claims or applications of concepts that are objectively correct and those that are merely taken to be correct” (Brandom 1998, 595). He further claims that this “is a structural feature of each scorekeeping perspective” (Brandom 1998, 595). With regard to this, he then distinguishes between de-dicto-ascriptions and de-re-ascriptions that we as language-users keep track of in different books. Chung I-Lin writes on this: “The *de dicto* book distinguishes and inferentially correlates the commitments the interlocutor is disposed to acknowledge by overt performances; contents so specified are correspondingly what the interlocutor takes himself to be expressing (Chung I-Lin 2008, 107). So ‘de dicto’ is something that somebody has said and thus was expressed as a clear commitment, while ‘de re’ expresses the consequents and antecedents that the speakers objectively commit to (see Chung I-Lin 2008, 107). ‘De re’ is thus the question of what inferentially follows from the statement. In a word, ‘de dicto’ stands for the statement *of* somebody, while ‘de re’ ascriptions stand for what the statement is *about*.

Brandom does not introduce these terms dialectically. Instead, he grounds them on plausibility. Here, it becomes clear that, for Brandom, all terms are only tools employed in a

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106 This distinction is similar to Hegel’s investigation of the in-itself and the for-itself. Hegel, however, remarks that this distinction is produced by consciousness itself and thus Hegel conducts a dialectical investigation, which results in his circular, epistemological strategy that finally extends itself to an anthropological investigation of self-consciousness in its historical development in a society as spirit. Hegel’s strategy is overall circular because we must understand the distinction between a presupposed, external reality and reality for us as a distinction that is only for consciousness. In this sense, Hegel does not defend a mind-independent reality, but focuses on truth for humans. Brandom, on the contrary, introduces this distinction without such a reflection. His structure is foundational, since he claims that we need these structures in order to say something significant at all. He thus does not fulfill the standard of a philosophical investigation that Hegel has already achieved. Beyond Brandom’s foundationalism, a possible deduction of the term ‘objectivity’ remains also unclear. Hegel discusses this problematic term in his chapter on objectivity in the *Greater Logic*. Hegel agrees that objectivity is necessary. The argument resembles Brandom’s argument for objectivity, since subjectivity taken only for itself would annihilate its meaning; then, a subject could not claim anything. Brandom, however, presupposes that objectivity is concerned with the relation of
discursive machinery to get closer to the mind-independent real. On the grounds of the
distinction between de-re and de-dicto, objectivity is then nothing but a “structural aspect” of our
communication:

On this account, objectivity is a structural aspect of the social-perspectival form of conceptual contents. The
permanent possibility of a distinction between how things are and how they are taken to be by some
interlocutor is built into the social-inferential articulation of concepts (Brandom 1998, 597).

This statement makes clear that objectivity must depend on the afore-mentioned distinction of de
re and de dicto. In particular, Brandom claims that by virtue of this distinction the possibility of
error becomes intelligible. Accordingly, “it is possible that (I believe that
 It is not true that
p)” (Brandom 1998, 604). The ground for this possibility of error is our capacity of rehearsing
and taking over others perspectives: “[I]f you want to understand what I say, you have to be able
to associate with it a sentence that in your mouth expresses the same claim as the sentence
uttered expresses in mine” (Brandom 1998, 510). From this perspectival view of Brandom,
Whiting is falsely correcting his perspective that Brandom is a semantic externalist. Brandom is
a semantic externalist. Whiting gets as much confused as Rorty and so he writes:

In fact, on closer inspection, Brandom's version of IRS [inferential role semantics] does not any way appear
to provide a genuine externalism. According to it, the meaning of an expression or the content it expresses
is determined by how things objectively are according to the one ascribing or attributing that meaning or
content. It is, then, still the case that, on Brandom's theory, meaning is determined in the first instance by
the attitudes of each speaker, not by extra-linguistic reality (Whiting 2008, 593).

But if Brandom, is not an externalist, why then does Brandom refer so often to how things really
are? Whiting points out some passages that are in favor of Brandom as a relativist:

our statements and a mind-independent reality. Furthermore, he claims that we have to speak in propositions, if we
want to say something significant.
Indeed, this is evident from careful attention to Brandom's actual formulations. On his view, the correct use of an expression (and thereby its meaning) is not determined, as he often suggests, by objective matters 'transcending the attitudes of practitioners' (AR, 198), but rather by 'how things objectively... are taken to be' (MIE, 498, my underlining; cf. AR, 183). Hence, this aspect of Brandom's IRS does not really provide a determinate of meaning that is unaffected by differences in inferential profiles, and so does not circumvent the communication problem (Whiting 2008, 593).

It is true that Brandom also includes formulations that suggest an account of how truth is for us, but from the other passages quoted above, we can conclude the opposite as well. The principle of charity turns Brandom into an anti-realist for some, and a realist for others. On the basis of my arguments, however, we have to conclude that Brandom is unsure about what his realism entails, while he is a semantic realist.

In order to make his realism more prominent, I will reconstruct his central proof of the real in terms of the objectivity of procedures. His central proofs for objectivity in relation to a mind-independent real are found in Chapter Eight of Making it Explicit and repeated in his discussion of objectivity in Articulating Reasons.

2.3.2.6 Objectivity

In the subpoint, I will explore how Brandom attempts to prove objectivity by demonstrating that we necessarily use mind-independent objects in our communication. To discern his proof of objectivity, we need to understand his “linguistic rationalism” (Brandom 2000, 189).

In order to reconstruct Brandom’s proof of an objectivity, I will, firstly point out the problem of incompatibility-difference that assertibility theories face. Secondly, I will explain that
Brandom does not solve this problem, but that the problem is rooted in a misunderstanding of what statements are really about. A propositional statements depends for him on mind-independent objects that transcend the context of their utterance. Thirdly, I will attempt to construct an argument of how truth is guaranteed according to Brandom’s approach. All of this will demonstrate that Brandom, contrary to Rorty’s interpretation, can be clearly identified as a realist.

2.3.2.6.1 The Problem of Assertibility Theories

For Brandom, assertibility theories face the problem of an incompatibility-difference, if equal propositional sentences are transformed into an explicit formulation. To explain incompatibility difference Brandom uses the following examples:

1. “The swatch is red.” (Brandom 2000, 198)

2. “The claim that the swatch is red is properly assertible by me now.” (Brandom 2000, 198)

The two claims are related, since the second claim is an explicit version of the former one. Thus, as Brandom argues further, the assertibility conditions are the same. The truth conditions, however, are not the same (see Brandom 2000, 199). Brandom claims that if both statements were the same, then both of them would be equally incompatible with other claims. In case of the claim ‘rational beings never evolved’, however, the first claim that the swatch is red would be compatible with it, while the second claim could not be stated (Brandom 2000, 199). Obviously humans have to exist in order for this claim to exist. The difference of the explicit version in (2) of the former proposition (1) poses a troubling problem for assertibility theories, because it seems that ultimately we cannot have a viable theory of assertions that can consistently explain how to make a proposition and its context of utterance explicit. Brandom wants therefore to
prove the point that the truth of a statement does not depend on the person uttering it. He states that:

[…] the commitments and entitlements they associate with ordinary empirical claims such as ‘The swatch is red’ generate incompatibilities for these claims that differ suitably from those associated with any claims about who is committed to, entitled to, or in position to assert anything (Brandom 2000, 204).

In other words, the objectivity does not depend on the community that makes it true or not. It involves further conditions that constitute the possibility of objective errors of the speakers. For Brandom, these further conditions depend on how things really are. I will discuss this subsequently as the reference-dependence of assertions.

2.3.2.6.2 The Reference-Dependence of Assertions

Brandom suggests that there are incompatibilities that are independent from utterances. He further suggests to discuss these context-invariant truths through his distinction of de dicto and de re. As explained above, de dicto are claims that I am committed to and de re are claims are claims that I am entitled to by virtue of objective entailments of the included propositions. He writes, “[…] those contents display objectivity of a particular sort: they are not about any constellation of attitudes on the part of the linguistic practitioners who produce and consume them as reasons” (Brandom 2000, 190). It is not correct that this distinction will solve the aforementioned problem of incompatibility-equivalence. Rather, Brandom claims that the original sentence ‘the swatch is red’ cannot be simply transformed into the assertion of claiming without noticing that it changes from a de re claim into a de dicto claim. This is because our original claims are, according to Brandom, about a mind-independent reality. Hence, they should
be discussed as de re claims and not as de dicto claims. This mind-independent reality is a feature of our discourses that governs our discourses. He argues:

The point of all this is that the objectivity of propositional content [...] is a feature we can make intelligible as a structure of the commitments and entitlements that articulate the use of sentences: of the norms, in a broad sense, that govern the practice of asserting, the game of giving and asking for reasons. (Brandom 2000, 203).

So Brandom takes the incompatibility-inadequacy as an indication for the fact that we refer in our statement to how things really are. This is distinct from our de dicto claims. By ‘objectivity’ he understands then “something that could be true even if there had never been rational beings” (Brandom 2000, 203). In Brandom’s words this means more explicitly “that in claiming that the swatch is red we are not saying anything about who could appropriately assert anything, or about who is committed or entitled to what” (Brandom 2000, 203). For Brandom, the content of a claim is different from our navigational efforts and the position of the speaker. He argues that only by virtue of accepting propositional content our claims gain objectivity. Thus, it is the mutual acceptance of a mind-independent reality that is necessary for language games. This is, of course, not yet a proof, for the mind-independence of objects. It is only the formal description of the conditions of language games. Therefore, Brandom needs to provide a better argument. I attempt to reconstruct such an argument derived from his theory in the following point.

2.3.2.6.3 Brandom’s Truth-Guarantee

The argument that Brandom presents is incomplete. It only presupposes that we talk about mind-independent objects, but this does not say that we actually relate to mind-independent objects. Brandom, however, argues further that there must be something that
grounds our assertions. This something must be the way of how things really are. Brandom uses for this proof his normative vocabulary of commitment and entitlement. He firstly observes that the simple ‘enhancement’ of the explicit form of our sentences does not alter incompatibility-differences:

2’. “I am now committed to the claim that the swatch is red.” (Brandom 2000, 200)

2’’. “I am now entitled to the claim that the swatch is red.” (Brandom 2000, 200)

Both of these claims are still incompatible with the claim that ‘rational beings never evolved’. Nevertheless, they indicate how the speaker’s position in a community depends on more conditions than the conditions for asserting. The first claim depends on the speaker’s attitude, while the second claim depends on the reasons for the speaker believes to be entitled. With regard to this, Brandom wants to make the following point:

Put another way, looking at propositional content in terms of incompatibilities, themselves defined in terms of the fundamental normative statuses of commitment and entitlement, provides the expressive resources to distinguish between the sense of ‘assertible’ that falls short of guaranteeing truth […], and the sense […] that would guarantee truth (Brandom 2000, 203).

So, secondly, by using the normative vocabulary of commitments and entitlements we can, according to Brandom, identify assertions that guarantee truth. This prepares the ground for a possible-worlds-semantics. All possible-world-semantics must presuppose something that is independent from rational beings because, since otherwise we could not make rational assertions. For example, there is a “consequential commitment” so that the interpreter of the claim can conclude from the assertion ‘the swatch is red’ that ‘the swatch is colored’ (Brandom 2000, 191). Communicators must commit to this model. Brandom explains this again with regard to parrots. Parrots respond by virtue of a stimulus. There is no further consequential commitment to the fact
that the swatch is colored. Sapient animals, on the contrary, answer in terms of inferences. We therefore agree that there is something connected to our assertion. Only on this basis, we guarantee truth for our statement. Yet, this is still not a proof for a mind-independent reality. We claim only that something else has motivated the claim.

Thus, thirdly, assertions possess “inferential consequences,” and “inferential antecedents, relations to contents that can serve as premises from which entitlement to the original content can be inherited” (Brandom 2000, 193-194). So we are committed to an assertion because it entails something and we are entitled to our assertions because they depend on antecedents. The idea must be that without such commitments to entailments and without entitlement by virtue of antecedents, we would not have assertions that could be taken seriously. We would not be able to play language games.

Fourthly, we have to consider that in order for something to count as an antecedent or an entailment it must be propositionally structured, since otherwise we could not pick it up in our assertion. Therefore, a mind-independent reality must be structured conceptually. So Brandom deduces a concrete structure of mind-independent things, since otherwise our discourse would be impossible.

I suggest that we reconstruct the complete argument as follows: we need to assume objectivity in our inferential exchange of reasons. I must ask what does the other speaker infer with regard to the content of his statements. This exchange has to include propositions, since otherwise our statements would be incomprehensible to each other. Furthermore, propositions are a requirement for inferences and inferences are part of the game of giving and asking for reasons. From this follows that we all presuppose one reality that resembles the inferential structure of our discourses, if we communicate. This secures a procedural objectivity. However,
we have not yet secured contact with a mind-independent reality. If this were the argument, then it is only securing a relativist, procedural truth. The fact that we assume an assertional force that is independent from us does not yet prove that we have contact with a mind-independent reality that could not be otherwise.\textsuperscript{107}

Brandom does not ask for the conditions of assertion anymore, but he asks for the circumstances that entitle us to claims (see Brandom 2000, 196). These conditions are not context variant, but are assumed as stable, based on mind-independent facts, since without these there would be no rational way to communicate. I must conclude that this is his proof. In other words, all rational communities follow the pattern of assertive speech, since otherwise there would be no communication. According to Brandom, our assertions are related to a mind-independent reality:

I have tried here to explain how we can begin to understand the objectivity of our thought – the way in which the contents of our thought go beyond the attitudes of endorsement or entitlement we have toward those contents – as a particular aspect of the normative fine structure of rationality (Brandom 2000, 203).

Objectivity consists consequently in the fact that our games of commitment and entitlement presuppose a propositional syntax that resembles the structure of the world. Without this syntax we could not be rational. The syntax, however, would also not be rational if it did not relate to the world. Brandom’s argument is therefore a transcendental realism for the stable objectivity of how to play language games and how we can only justify our claims through a contact with a mind-independent reality.

\textsuperscript{107} Brandom further defines then: “commititive (that is commitment-preserving) inferences, a category that generalizes deductive inference,” and “permissive (that is, entitlement-preserving) inferences, a category that generalizes inductive inference; and incompatibility entailments, a category that generalizes modal (counterfactual-supporting) inference” (Brandom 2000, 195). For Brandom, this is the “normative fine structure of rationality” (Brandom 2000, 196). Overall, this means that he transforms assertibility theories, but it still does not mean that he proves a mind-independent reality.
This cannot be a completed proof, since the assumption of a reality in order to communicate does not guarantee knowledge of the mind-independent world. However, we can answer the question of whether Brandom a realist? He is a realist. He says that without the assumption of a mind-independent reality, rationality would not be possible. Since we acknowledge each other as rational, we must acknowledge that there is a mind-independent reality that is for everyone the same. It is not only the truth for the players within their language games, but it is the truth for all meaningful language games. If there were not an underlying reality, we could not be rational, which, according to Brandom, would be incompatible with the fact that we are rational. Given these arguments it is justified to call Brandom not only a procedural realist, but an external realist. I do not think that the argument is convincing. For this reason, I will attempt to reconstruct further proofs from the corpus of Brandom’s works.

2.3.3 From Endorsements to the Objectivity of Entitlements

Above, I have discussed the relativist tendencies that Rorty sees in Brandom. I have demonstrated that Brandom, on the contrary, pursues a procedural realism that ultimately converges into an external realism. I summarized his proof of objectivity with regard to Articulating Reason, which can be read in parallel to his proof of Making it Explicit. The proof turned out to claim a necessity of the mind-independence of objects, since otherwise rational

108 The problem is that Brandom makes contradicting statements. First he claims that the recognition of propositional contents that are objective is open to any community whose inferentially articulated practices acknowledge the different normative statuses of commitment and entitlement (Brandom 2000, 203). So it seems that Brandom suggests how we should lead our discourses. Then however, Brandom states, contrary to such an epistemological pluralism: “I argued […] that this includes all rational communities – all of those whose practices include the game of giving and asking for reasons. According to the thesis of linguistic rationalism, this is all linguistic communities whatsoever” (Brandom 2000, 203).
discourse would be impossible. The argument presupposes that one form of rational discourse and its occasional success justify the concept of a propositionally structured, mind-independent reality. This proof is weak, since there could be other forms of discourse. Success of our current discourse model is not entirely guaranteed.

Despite these problems, I still need to investigate Brandom’s employment of the terms ‘commitment’ and ‘entitlement’ that are the main tools, in order to justify our relation to an objective, mind-independent reality. It might be that Brandom claims that there are other proofs possible.

I will firstly summarize how Brandom’s linguistic theory and its ‘fine-structure of rationality’ contributes to models of communication. Then, I will explain the structure of commitments, and finally on the basis of his linguistic model discuss a further possible argument that endorsements, commitments and entitlements must correspond to mind-independent objects.

2.3.3.1 Brandom’s Linguistic Model as Opposed to Philosophy

Brandom follows the main idea of the linguistic turn that the way of how we can believe something must be related to claiming (see Giovagnol 2001, 53). Beliefs are then not justified by references. Rather, they are connected to an “inferentially articulated commitment” (Giovagnol 2001, 53). Content is consequently formally defined within the discursive boundaries of the propositional structure of these commitments (see Giovagnol 2001, 53). Though I do not endorse Brandom’s claim to know a mind-independent reality, Brandom’s conceptual role semantics is, in fact, a desideratum of discourse theory. According to Habermas’ approach, I can

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claim something to be true, but, at the same time, my invitation for critique seems then to be incompatible with my claim that this is true. How then could I claim something to be true and say, at the same time, that my claim is worth of critique? Brandom’s solution is supposed to discern between absolute and limited truth claims in linguistic terms. His idea is that we cannot decide whether a specific content is absolutely true, but that the way we communicate can be objectively related to mind-independent objects. It is possible to explain the moves of a language game that is related to claiming and the possible critique of these claims by virtue of Brandom’s terms ‘commitment’ and ‘entitlement’. I can be committed to a claim, but the entitlement is another question. According to Brandom, our activity is then guided by the idea of deontic score-keeping which includes “attributing those statuses [commitment and entitlement] to others and undertaking them themselves” (Giovagnol 2001, 53). “Assertional commitment” introduces a discourse that demands a justificatory, propositional structure of all our commitments. Commitment and entitlement, which are practical attitudes and the corresponding “deontic attitudes of attributing” will reveal themselves as the ground for Brandom’s understanding of truth (see Giovagnol 2001, 53). Brandom defends this as a propositional, discourse realism that I discussed as anti-historical. I claim, however, that this particular discourse that Brandom defends is based on a historical agreement of how we lead discourses.

There is, moreover, a seemingly important shift in Brandom’s thinking. Brandom’s strong objectivist, semanticist claims seem to transform in recent years. In between Saying and Doing (2008),\(^{10}\) he describes his future project as, on the one hand, to preserve the analytic enterprise,

and, on the other hand, to explain the vocabulary of the pragmatic and the analytic vocabulary in one possible but not conclusive meta-vocabulary. He writes:

For thinking of the metaphysical enterprise in semantic terms, as seeking to establish distinctive sorts of relations among vocabularies, opens up the possibility of considering in this case, too, pragmatically mediated semantic relations between vocabularies, in addition to the traditional kind (Brandom 2008, 230).

Despite this metaphysical commitment to a kind of universal, pragmatic vocabulary, Brandom admits that this is not to express everything through this vocabulary. He specifies his project with regard to use:

In particular, we can lay alongside the aspiration to find a vocabulary in which everything can be said, the aspiration to find one in which one can say everything one must be able to do in order to say anything, that is to use any vocabulary whatsoever. This is just the idea of a universal pragmatic metavocabulary (Brandom 2008, 230).

This means that we still follow the idea of a universal, pragmatic metavocabulary, but Brandom limits its range. We ask for a vocabulary that expresses the practical actions that are necessary for saying something to be meaningful at all. It is the task of specifying what it means to produce determinate content. Brandom is, indeed, conservative about a possible success. He denies that “regimented de facto universal pragmatic metavocabulary” is as powerful as a universal semantic language (Brandom 2008, 230). The latter would explicate all possible contents, the former explicates all necessary actions for expressions, which is, in this sense, universal for actions (see Brandom 2008, 230). But even for this universal vocabulary of necessary actions, Brandom claims that success is not necessary:

I have already suggested, however, that the real payoff from the metaphysical enterprise should not be thought of as consequent upon the anticipation of complete success at producing a regimented semantically expressively universal vocabulary. In place of such a wholesale cognitive reward, we should think of the
accumulation of retail rewards. Each only partially successful try at a universal metaphysical vocabulary
draws a line between those antecedent vocabularies it can reconstruct, and those it cannot. And each such
endeavor will draw a different line (Brandom 2008, 230).

With this emphasis of partial success, Brandom contextualizes, and relativizes his universal
claims. It is a strategy of falsification to see what we cannot do. Still, however, the claim that
there are particular actions necessary in order to say anything at all, can be grasped as the
classical foundationalism. The metaphysical implications of Brandom’s endeavor are blurred by
his shift from inferentialism to this kind of neo-pragmatism. These metaphysical implications
decide, however, whether Brandom is doing philosophy or linguistics. In light of his analysis, I
tend more and more to read Brandom as a model-theoretician of linguistics. His endeavor turns
out to be linguistics rather than philosophy. On the basis of this, it is reasonable to talk about
Brandom’s account as a linguistic model of how we produce meaning under agreed conditions in
particular situations, while the following ethical, religious, metaphysical consequences have to
be linked to this historical agreement in a particular situation. We cannot derive metaphysical
implications that are unhistorical from such a linguistic model. However, Brandom still intends
to ground all philosophy on the foundation of our communication, which is a philosophical
claim, but ultimately only justifiable if he can prove the objectivity of his linguistics as related to
a mind-independent reality. Then, all philosophy would, indeed, be linguistics.

I will discuss Brandom’s linguistic model and ask whether it is philosophy. I will present
the supposed “fine-structure” of rationality and then attempt to reconstruct his proof of mind-
independent objects with regard to the terms ‘endorsement’, ‘commitment’ and ‘entitlement’.
This will be the last form of a proof for a mind-independent reality that I will investigate in
Brandom.


**2.3.4.2 Preserving Relations - First Dimension of Semantics**

In particular, Brandom’s linguistic model distinguishes the dimensions of inferential practices. In *Between Saying and Doing* (2008), the semantics is drawn in a more concrete shape.\(^\text{111}\) Here, Brandom elaborates his semantic views of use in three dimensions. We are already familiar with the first dimension from *Making it Explicit*: commitment preserving, inferential relations.

In order to introduce a notion of propositional truth the first dimension should be understood according to two relations:

1) commitment-preserving, inferential relation

2) the permissive or entitlement-preserving inferential relation

For 1), it is clear that if I say that all humans are mortal, and Socrates is a man, then I am committed to the conclusion that Socrates is mortal. In this sense, a commitment stands somehow in a relationship to deductive inference. If I want to preserve my commitment, then I have to agree to deductive consequences. Of course, the question remains why our commitments transition from universals to individuals, but I agree that we can observe such commitments in our natural languages.

For 2), my commitment to certain statements is based on entitlement. Brandom gives here the example of a red sky in the morning that the sailor takes to be a sign for an uprising storm (see Brandom 2008, 120). I am entitled to this claim, though I cannot express it with certainty. The

\(^{111}\) Although the whole account of propositions depends on what Brandom calls material incompatibility, which is, according to Brandom, a Hegelian notion, the offer to hold the John-Locke-Lectures (published as *Between Saying and Doing*) interrupted his work on this Hegelian concept.
conclusion is not in contradiction to the premises, and the premises somehow support the conclusion. Apparently Brandom believes that the concept of material incompatibility follows from this approach:

Two assertible contents are incompatible in case the commitment to one precludes the entitlement to others. Thus commitment to the content expressed by the sentence ‘The swatch is green’ rules out entitlement to the commitment that would be undertaken by asserting the sentence ‘The swatch is red’ (Giovagnol 2001, 53).

The principle of non-contradiction is fundamental for Brandom. I cannot hold two ground-level experiences at the same time. He, however, does not explain this by experience, but solely by the logical commitments of different speakers and their entitlement. The principle of non-contradiction is based on how semantics work for Brandom according to his linguistic model. This means that he presupposes non-contradiction that, however, is not necessarily observable in experience. Graham Priest, for example, argues that it is reasonable, to have contradictory commitments (dialetheism) that are meaningful. The principle of non-contradiction is not abstracted from our phenomenological experience, but it is a helpful distinction on the level of logic. Since it is not derived from experience, I therefore claim that it might not always hold. Priest, for example, discusses the question of whether we are in a room or outside of a room, if we are standing in the door and gives various other examples, in which the principle of non-contradiction is not followed in natural languages (see Priest 2017). Because of the feared, ‘logical Armageddon’, the idea that commitment to p and not p, will make q true in any case, because of this principle of explosion, paraconsistent logics were held not to be possible. The discussion around this is complex, but the insight that a theory does not necessarily have to be

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built upon the principle of non-contradiction is not entirely absurd. This is independent from the Aristotelean question of whether such a first principle can be rich enough to derive all possible phenomena from such a foundation.\textsuperscript{113} It occurs to me that Brandom makes non-contradiction central to his approach, but, in fact, it is justified within his linguistic model and, thus, not context-invariant.\textsuperscript{114} My point on the first semantic dimension is therefore that Brandom presents a linguistic model with its own limitations that without a dialectical discussion lacks philosophical importance.

\textbf{2.3.4.3 Entailments of Commitments - The Second Dimension of Semantics:}

Here, Brandom distinguishes between “concomitant”, and “communicational […] inheritance of deontic statuses,” the way of how we adopt statuses (Bavaresco 2001, 53). From the concomitant follows that we agree with a certain coherent structure that comes with the claim. So, for example, if I say that something is red, I am also committed to the fact that it is colored. The corresponding interpersonal use means that my commitment licenses others to attribute these claims (see Brandom 2008, 121).

Brandom discusses these relations of individual language entries in their relation to universals in his yet unpublished analysis of Hegel’s chapter on perception. The dialectical relation between universal and individual has to be investigated. Contrary to Brandom’s argument that we somehow commit to a logically consistent semantic whole, the phenomenon of metaphors suggests that the consequences cannot always be easily traced. If I say, for example, that a piece of music occurs to me as rather yellow than green, I play with the extremes of the

\textsuperscript{113} It is disputed, in which sense Hegel affirms the principle of non-contradiction. Though it has a certain validity, Hegel denies that it can be foundational.

\textsuperscript{114} Hegel does not make a semantic claim about the material incompatibility as a foundational principle.
application of the concept of yellow. The association of yellow and color might be more complicated and this is a simple example. From saying that a piece of music is yellow, however, it does not follow that it is an object that possesses colors in the narrow sense. So the commitment to an individual statement is not necessarily a force that relates me entirely to other consequences, neither pragmatically nor semantically. For this reason, it is unclear what my commitments really entail.

I do not disagree that Brandom’s conclusions are plausible, but I do not see that the force he describes as a relation between individuals and universals is necessary. This indicates that Brandom discusses rather the characteristics of a linguistic model than that he follows a philosophical, dialectical discussion, which would qualify as philosophy.

2.3.4.4 The Third Dimension of Semantics: Responsibility

Brandom claims that commitments stand in relation to responsibility. The main form of the assertion does two things: It authorizes for further assertions, but more important by virtue of it we take over responsibility. Brandom writes: “The responsibility emerges from the entitlement to the commitment expressed by the performer’s assertions” (see Brandom 2008, 121). I am not entirely sure whether Brandom intends to reduce normativity to propositional commitments. If so, then this formalism needs to be criticized, because responsibility induced by commitments and entitlements is an abstraction and does not include the full range of human responsibility. This means that responsibility does not only depend on explicit assertions expressed in claims. The limits of the model become clear if we consider the example of a judge. A judge can also assume a certain commitment of a person without this person having uttered his intentions explicitly. Responsibility is not only introduced by utterances in the form of assertions, but can
also be concluded from practices that consist or have consisted. Then, responsibility is not only a
matter of the objective and ‘freely’ uttered commitment. To reduce responsibility to
propositional claims would therefore be a mistake. Responsibility does not only depend on
formal actors and their choice of participating in discourse, but is beyond this tied to us as
humans who live in communities with various forms of discourse, and possibly non-discursive
forms of living. It is also a stretch that language implicitly includes all of these normative
obligations. Instead, we could also say that it is people in their specific historical moment who
perform relationships of responsibility. For our historical moment, we might do this mainly in
the form of language. This leads to the thesis that expressions of language might only be the
momentary surface expressions of an underlying dialectical structure of reason/spirit, or even the
determined symbols of an underlying, existential paradox that is expressed in our history. A
formal structure of commitment and entitlement misses the openness of human history; it
attempts to bring history to a closure by bringing language to a closure.115

2.3.4.5 Conclusions on Brandom’s Linguistic Model

We can conclude that Brandom develops his linguistic model, which in itself might be a
valuable suggestion to pragmatics and linguistic theory. Yet, it fails to develop the claims from a
systematic, historical perspective, which I regard to be an important philosophical standard. This
includes to justify the different, introduced criteria of entitlement and commitment. ‘Entitlement’
and ‘commitment’ serve as tools in order to explain different problems of assertoric theory.
Brandom justifies them by a relation to propositional structures and deduces different, debatable

115 Looking at Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, it should be clear that responsibility is not simply induced by language
commitments but that it is a relation between the abstract concept (the law) and its realization in the state.
consequences from them. It is a way of how we trace truth values by ascribing roles to actors in our language games. This, however, leaves open an investigation of propositions that Brandom might justify by the idea that only propositions can serve as reasons, and which finally reveals a further commitment to inferential holism. With regard to this lack of justifications, it occurs that the standpoint of science has to be achieved by a phenomenological investigation of us engaging in sciences, starting with natural consciousness that attempts to explain meaning. On the opposite side, Brandom’s kind of transcendental pragmatics of assuming the possibility of truth-talk, and then demonstrating the necessary conditions is insufficient and certainly not Hegelian. Hegel, as I will show later, follows a dialectic phenomenology. Brandom, however, presupposes, firstly, that we actually talk about a mind-independent reality. And, secondly, he deduces this presupposition from the idealizations of a semantic language. With regard to Hegel’s starting point, we can say, furthermore, that Hegel does not believe that content requires material incompatibility as Brandom presupposes. He does not develop a semanticist vocabulary. He also does not introduce different actions like commitment and entitlement. Rather, he points with his dialectic to contextualism which converges in all of its instances into a conception of history. This means that if there is a semantic theory, then this theory is a product of its history, but not a universal foundation for all theories that will emerge.

According to Habermas, Brandom’s theory does not yet achieve an ontological status of what is, but only a formal, probably empty talk of theoretical observers. In a word, it is a linguistic model. This model cannot yet give us insights into metaphysical questions. A too strong commitment to formal pragmatics rules out a way back into the ethical, substantial questions that have to be answered. Brandom’s philosophy desubstantializes, for example, responsibility that is reduced to the attribution of different commitments in language games.
Despite these well-known problems, there are many philosophers who believe that Brandom’s model can open a path to reality. Stout mentions in his *Introduction to Pragmatism* that we can achieve objectivity for our communicative practices by Brandom’s model. He writes:

> For the same reasons that baseball can be played on the sandlots and soccer can be played in the streets, ethical discourse can retain an objective dimension without there being a single authority on questions of truth and falsity. In ethics, as in most other forms of objective discourse, we are all keeping track of our interlocutors’ attitudes, as well as our own (Stout, 2004, 272).\(^{116}\)

As already pointed out before, however, a coherent system, does not qualify to be a true system expressing a mind-independent reality. This is because there are many systems possible. We still need a criterion why this system is supposed to be better than others. A baseball game that Stout uses as an example, moreover, is not inherently related to morality and is quite different from moral questions of just actions. We can play many games and agree on many rules. All these games would be coherently played. So it is not only the question of how to play an arbitrarily chosen game. There is not much a difference of whether we prefer to play baseball or basketball. It matters, however, if we decide to do genetic engineering or whether we decide against it. During a baseball game, it only means that we accept something to be an authority for playing a game. Whether this authority that we accept is ultimately correct or wrong remains undecided. The metaphor of a game is therefore too limited for discussing responsibilities in a society. It would be cynical to argue that the war in Syria, for example, is only a particular form of language game like baseball.

The idea that we are only keeping track of our competitors in a game is, moreover, a too shortened understanding of how societal interaction occurs and it is also a too short answer for

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what is a just rule of action for mankind. The question is: what are the substantial ontological entailments that we can derive from Brandom’s position? What are the normative obligations and how do they influence questions of morality? Either Brandom’s theory remains empty, or, as Habermas assumes later, it leads to an annihilation of individual responsibility, since it overemphasizes arbitrary, theoretical communication without considering the historical, substantially contingent position of the participant.

Before, I come to these questions, however, I will demonstrate the ontological entailment that Brandom assumes for his model. This entailment is his semantic realism. I attempt to reconstruct a final proof of reality from the presented fine-structure of rationality.

**2.3.3.6 Realism and Brandom’s Linguistic Model**

Once more, the question is: what follows ontologically from Brandom’s conclusions? Beyond the question of the productivity of his vocabulary for explaining certain target vocabulary, it is questionable which normative force can be applied to this theory of use, and what Brandom thinks reality is. Brandom seems to claim that we can somehow construct the ontologically rich notion of a real world by looking at the use of our language. I will reconstruct his argument in more detail, especially with regard to Bransen’s’ interpretation of Brandom’s realism-argument.

The argument begins with an analysis of endorsements. An endorsement is, according to Bransen’s interpretation, a “way of how we take the world to be” (Bransen 2012, 6). Endorsing doors means, for example, that we could walk through them, in order to leave or enter

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117 Published in Inquiry, Vol. 45(3), 2000, 373-392. Normativity as the Key to Objectivity An exploration of Robert Brandom’s Articulating Reasons* Jan Bransen, University of Nijmegen
a house. The next step follows the insights of the linguistic turn. Bransen thinks that these endorsements are conceptualized in language and are not an independent work of the mind: “Many philosophers now tend to think that language is the fundamental locus of intentionality, and that thinking comes in late as a kind of inner saying” (Bransen 2012, 6).

In other words, expression comes before meaning. This actually reverses the order of explanation. It is not that doors simply exist, but that we interpret them by an integration into our practical net of language. Bransen stresses here that the utterance of a concept is an invitation for endorsing the commitments of actors (Bransen 2012, 6). They are language-entries. The speaker emphasizes how the world looks to him, according to his use of language. So the speaker assigns a space for something in his net of inferential reasons. In the instance of endorsing a door, it is not only an event, but an inferentially understood reason that makes other moves possible (see Bransen 2012, 7). In this sense, intentional content has to be articulated in linguistic terms (see Bransen 2012, 8). The content, however, is not yet explicated in a propositional structure so that we can commit to various consequential reasons. Endorsements are expressions of entering a language, while commitments are the explicit versions of the implicit structures of endorsement.

**Commitments:** A commitment is the explicit acknowledgment that something is in a certain way. It is embedded in an underlying ontological structure of reasons so that it actually is assertible (see Brandom 1998, 157). These structures can be traced in different directions, since they can serve as a premise or as a conclusion. So the task is to describe how observational reports that we endorse are expressed in commitments (see Bransen 2012, 7). This means that I am inferring somehow that my endorsement is not only a semblance, but that it also relies on a world in which things appear. Commitments express a justifiable content with regard to the order of a world (see Brandom 1998, 157).
With regard to commitment and endorsement, we can find a problematic connection to linguistic consciousness. If it is true that expressions precede thinking, why then are we entitled to ascribe awareness to, for example, sticklebacks, who do not express commitments in language (see Bransen 2012, 7)? The ascription is relative to our language. It is because we only attribute awareness from our perspective (see Bransen 2012, 7). Animal consciousness is therefore concluded from our sphere of discourse. The particular awareness expressed in endorsements needs to be characterized as a “discursive entry transition” that leads us to commitments (Bransen 2012, 9). Bransen explains this transition from endorsements to commitments.

Observing a sunset, or a door, or a trespasser over there, in the conceptual mode, is a matter of being committed to certain discursive inferences. The fact that the perceptual state is a receptive, or affective, state just means that it is an entry transition: by being in this state one enters the game of giving and asking for reasons with a specific ‘deontic score’ (Bransen 2012, 9-10).

In other words, we transition from a mode of observation to a language that explicates nets of reasons. The observation has no independent status. Rather, it is interpreted and integrated in our net of reasons. Thus, the world is not represented, but interpreted. The question arises again: what can be identified as realism here?

**Brandom’s realism argument:** Bransen claims that only on the basis of these common commitments we can share endorsements. Now, uttering that something is a door is not only an observational report, it, moreover, embeds an action into a net of inferential relations. We open a space of reasons “in which entitlements can be one’s share — and this means that there are doors!” (Bransen 2012, 11). Somehow our entitlement is supposed to justify the real existence of something that our interpretations are about. Without such a fundamental aboutness, our endorsements would be meaningless. In order to support this thought, Bransen claims therefore
that somehow our communication is only instrumental and its particular structure makes a mind-independent reality necessary.

Brandom has, however, different strategies in order to prove the mind-independent reality. So, for example, he also criticizes a mere phenomenalism that cannot successfully establish a relation to the reality (see Brandom 1998, 294). He makes this clear with regard to the claim that the world is a constellation of facts: “[T]hose facts are structured and interconnected by the objects they are facts about; they are articulated by the properties and relations the obtaining of which is what we state when we state a fact” (Brandom 1998, 333). So Brandom thinks that our commitments only make sense if they are about objects that are “propertied and related” (Brandom 1998, 333). Brandom further elaborates that we cannot understand endorsements, if they are not supposed to relate to a mind-independent reality. In other words, this means that even though all of our assumptions about the real object might be wrong, the endorsement of a commitment means to assume the entitlement that at least these assumptions are about something real that is mind-independent (see Bransen 2012, 11). His idea is that without any entitlement justified by something that is mind-independent, there could be no normativity and even endorsements could not be understood as endorsements. So the argument is that only if all three, endorsement, commitment, and entitlement are given, each one would have justification. Bransen gives an example:

‘Thunder will be heard soon’ or ‘The streets will be wet’ or ‘That is a door’, then this means, truly and objectively, that there is thunder and that it will be heard soon, that there are streets, and that they will be wet, and that there is a door (Bransen 2012, 11).

I do not disagree with a phenomenal experience. If an alcoholic, for example, claims that he sees white mice, he probably sees white mice. However, this does not mean that there are white mice.
Bransen’s attempt becomes clearer if we consider so-called seems-talk. If I say, for example, that there *seems* to be a door, I would withhold to assign an absolute truth value to my argument. If I used the seeming-operator in any situation, I would never commit to any content that would be traceable in a discourse. Brandom notices this problem, too. According to him, a first analysis would bring us to the absurd idea that something seems to seem. So, at least, we had to accept the phenomenalist perspective. Brandom argues further that the withholding of an endorsement (it only seems) stems from a former experience of failed beliefs (see Brandom 1998, 293). Seems-talk therefore presupposes an original aboutness. Brandom thinks that this is where the “subjective phenomenalism” of the classical pragmatisms fails (see Brandom 1998, 212).

Brandom elaborates here in more detail that ‘seems’ is a result of experiential episodes:

[T]hese locutions are introduced *after* such a practice is under way, as a way of dealing with systematic sources of perceptual error that one becomes aware of through having to withdraw unreflective, noninferential claims on the basis of their incompatibility with commitments one is otherwise entitle to […] (Brandom 1998, 293).

In other words, that something seems a certain way comes from an experience that things are different from how we take them to be. For Brandom ‘seems’ expresses a “withholding” of an endorsement (see Brandom 1998, 293). He explicitly formulates: “Because in order of understanding, grasp of what is expressed by concepts of the form ‘seems-*K*’ presupposes grasp of what is expressed by corresponding concepts of the form ‘is-*K*’” (Brandom 1998, 295). The discovery of a relation between semblance and reality, nevertheless, is not such an overwhelming insight. In fact, it is very similar to Hegel’s insight that something is, on the one hand, for consciousness and that, on the other hand, something can be taken as in-itself. Hegel, however, discovers both of them as dialectically related, and argues further that the distinction itself is for consciousness. On the contrary, Brandom’s discovery that seems-talk is related to a concept of
reality fails to understand this relationship as dialectical and presupposes the thought of reality as prior.

We can argue, moreover, that also the term of reality itself is meaningless, if there is not a possibility of semblance. By this I mean that we would never talk about an ideal of reality, if semblance would not always be a possibility. According to my view, both terms are then equiprimordial and need another grounding in order to be discussed appropriately. Thus, phenomenalism, which Brandom explicitly rejects, is an equal choice compared with Brandom’s semantic realism (see Brandom 1998, 296). Thus, we have to investigate the dialectical relation between semblance and content.

However, Brandom claims that for each phenomenalist claim there is a corresponding “realist” (Brandom 1998, 296)\(^{118}\) claim, since semblance is grounded in ‘real’ experiences. In other words, Brandom wants to trade in phenomenalism for an account of linguistically “undertaking and attributing commitments” (Brandom 1998, 297). Brandom reduces therefore the problem of a genuine phenomenology to a linguistic confusion that only needs to be clarified by the “fine-grained” terms of commitments and entitlement (Brandom 1998, 297).

My argument is different: even though seems-talk is a talk that we utter after disappointments, truth-talk would be talk that we utter after knowing that disappointments are possible. As a result both talks mean that the object that natural consciousness attempted to grasp might finally not correspond to the theory that we have generated. I do not see, however, how we could ever verify our theories. Rather, I do acknowledge that our theories result from experience and our reflection on those. After all, all our theories start with experience.

\(^{118}\) One of the only passages where I could find Brandom referring to ‘realism’. The rare use might explain why Rorty does not interpret Brandom as a realist.
Proving the reality of experiences, and proving that there are consequents, and antecedents does not prove a mind-independent reality. It only explains the structure of having experiences so far. I do not deny that this analysis can be meaningful. It, however, does not give us a clear realism in exchange. I agree with the argument that there is no experience of something immediate that is not mediated. To claim, however, that these real objects are mind-independent and not a result of our interaction is the point of debate. ‘Reality’ in its dialectical relation to semblance remains a subordinate term of a broader epistemology. In fact, Bransen does not demonstrate reality with his examples, he demonstrates that we justify and associate our endorsements with a certain structure of the world that is expressed here in terms of commitments and entitlements, a linguistic model. To do so is not wrong, but it does not cover all possible communicative or non-communicative problems. For these reasons, there remains a very pragmatic question: can the proposed structure of Brandom’s inferentialism support such an experiential structure without failure?

Now, it is right that there is a problem of communication that Bransen summarizes:

That is, we need to be able to relate the inferential relations that characterise particular conceptual contents from our own perspective to the inferential relations that characterise these same conceptual contents from other perspectives. (Bransen 2012, 18).

I agree with Bransen. This is the problem of communication. How do we relate to others?

Bransen’s conclusion, however, is problematic:

And we can only succeed in relating to one another in this way – and that means we can only succeed in playing the essentially social game of giving and asking for reasons – if we have the capacity to individuate conceptual contents that are de re, that are “objective in the sense of transcending the attitudes of practitioners (Bransen 2012, 19).
Since Brandom’s arguments are not successful in proving reality, since he also does not say what he understands reality to be, I suggest to read his theory as a linguistic model, while its philosophical claims are too bold. With regard to the presupposed solutions, I can agree that we might become better at playing baseball. Nevertheless, I do not see how we approach with his communicational model any mind-independent reality. ‘Endorsement’, ‘commitment’ and ‘entitlement’ are terms that are introduced in reference to problems of experience that occurred in our history. This history focused more and more on formalizing our language and abandoned the concepts of consciousness. Can we justify beyond our experience that the propositional standards of analytic philosophy bring us closer to a mind-independent reality? I could not find sufficient arguments for this in Brandom.

In general, I have to say that I do not reject the term of reality. I argue, however, that reality is a subordinate concept that I needs to be reconstructed within a historical model of how we express ourselves during the course of our historical development.

2.3.4 Anaphors and the Problem of Communication?
I have demonstrated firstly that Brandom’s semantic realism remains unclear. Secondly, that his idea of normativity is vague and that its objectivity cannot be secured. Thirdly, that the ontological consequences from his distinctions are not carrying beyond linguistics. Despite these difficulties, I still would like to ask whether we may identify meaning only on inferentialist grounds. For doing so, I will first discuss how the so-called communication problem is related to Brandom’s inferentialism. The communicational problem describes the difficulty to explain communicational success without references to individuals. After having reconstructed this problem, I will discuss Brandom’s substitutional semantics that is supposed to access the
problem of individuals by anaphoric structures. Anaphors are used, in order to explain how communicational success is possible without referencing such individuals. First, however, I will clarify the main terms that are guiding Brandom’s endeavor. This is his inferentialism in relation to a meaning holism.

2.3.4.1 Inferentialism and Meaning Holism

Inferentialism is the idea that we know objects by virtue of inferences. It goes hand in hand with the assumption that speakers can always hold different opinions based on the possibly different inferences that constitute an object for them. It is consequently unclear of how we communicate about given objects if they are based on different, experiential systems that are rather accessible to the speaker than for the communication-community. Lacking a stable point of reference, we face the problem of skepticism again, here the impossibility to communicate exhaustively our different cognitions about objects. The problem can also be phrased in terms of the communication problem: what does it mean to have shared determinate objects in a community in which each individual has different access to objects?

A meaning holism assumes, in contrast to an atomism, that the meaning of all words is interconnected. This means that there are no stable reference points, but that we point out structural, and partial relations between objects that we have determined. It is also different from molecularism according to which words are bound to small groups of meaning. In this case ‘kill’, for example, would be bound to ‘die’ and ‘cause’ (see Jackman 2017). This means that each word is composed by smaller parts that in composition can provide meaning. Meaning holism goes far beyond this. We can find the first traces of meaning holism in analytic philosophy with regard to Quine’s famous rejection of the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgements
which brings him to the following conclusions: “[I]t is misleading to speak of the empirical content of an individual statement” (Quine 1951, 40), and that “[t]he unit of empirical significance is the whole of science” (Quine 1951, 39). In these two statements Quine expresses that there is no simple reference of an individual statement, but that it is instead the whole of science that is captured in each statement because each statement is made on grounds of a possible whole. Hempel comes up with a similar idea: “the cognitive meaning of a statement in an empiricist language is reflected in the totality of its logical relationships to all other statements in that language” (Hempel 1950, 59). This means that each statement is bound to a systematic whole that is implicitly presupposed by the speakers. Meaning holism means therefore that each individual statement refers to language as a whole. Both meaning holism and inferentialism lead to the communication problem, since a possible whole might be structured differently by each individual speaker (see Jackman 2017).

Brandom follows an inferentialist, meaning holism, as exemplified in the following statement: “For the content of each concept is articulated by its inferential relations to other concepts” (Brandom 2009, 15). So content is understood by inferences, and since every concept is understood by inferences that direct us beyond the immediate, concepts are determined by their relationship to a whole of concepts. Brandom claims more explicitly that “inferential articulation broadly construed is sufficient to account for conceptual content” (Brandom 2008, 28) and that such an „inferentialist semantics is resolutely holist” (Brandom 2008, 15). This means, moreover, that knowing one concept requires knowing many, since each concept is generated on the basis of other concepts (see Brandom 2008, 15). Finally Brandom states:

“Conceptual holism is a straightforward consequence of that approach” (Brandom 2008, 16). So Brandom sees a close relation between inferentialism and holism. Many, if not all concepts, are involved in the constitution of the content of one concept. If, however, all concepts are involved, then the question of successful communication becomes problematic, since we can refer to one concept in many, and possibly infinite ways. I will explore this problem in the following subpoint.

2.3.4.2 Navigational Semantics – Sharing Content without Content

According to Mueller, Branden defends a navigation-model. This means that we do not share contents, but give information on how to navigate around contents. There are some premises for understanding this. Most important, we communicate because we have different perceptions and conceptions of objects, since we interpret objects with regard to different inferences that we draw according to a holistic, conceptual, and individual network that each speaker possesses. In a word, we have a different understanding for each object. Thus, Mueller points out: “Brandom considers the systematic difference in information among individuals as the ‘point’ of communication” (see Mueller 2014, 141). This point of communication leads to the necessity of navigating “among perspectives without sharing contents” (Mueller 2014, 141), since we cannot refer to one and the same content by using different concepts. In other words, we do not have the correct content in our mind, just because somebody utters a word that is associated with a content in their mind. On the grounds of this, Mueller defines the relation


\[122\] Mueller defines the communication problem: “Wird Signifikanz oder Gehalt von verwendeten Ausdrücken, Gedanken und Handlungen inferentialistisch als Rolle in einem gegebenen Folgerungssystem charakterisiert, aber zugleich bedeutungsholistisch keine noch so wahrnehmungsrelative Festlegung oder Folgerung eines kognitiven
between meaning holism and meaning with regard to Brandom’s approach: “Welchen Gehalt ein bestimmter Ausdruck (im Gegensatz zu anderen gehaltvollen Ausdrücken ähnlicher grammatischer Art) hat, ergibt sich wiederum vollständig aus der Rolle, die der Ausdruck für das Gesamtsystem guter Schlussfolgerungen spielt, dem er angehört“ (Mueller 2014, 146). So the content of an expression is defined by the singular role it has in a complete system of conclusions to which the expression belongs. Since, however, an expression can be interpreted in dependence of the language-user, there is no single determinate role and thus also no single determinate content. There are only users who attempt to agree on the content they discuss.

Let us say, for example, I see an object and call it a plane, while another person sees it and says it is a car. Now both of our statements are interpretations depending on the contextual conditions. We both might have reasons to call it this or that. Now, if any interpretation were possible, so that somebody else could call it a mule, or another person could call it a planet, then we face the problem of contributing meaning to something at all. It is reasonable to assume that something restricts our approach to the world. So how are we forced to specify the meaning of our sentences? We can also find an example that is more understandable. If I say ‘I see a bird’, then ‘bird’ can have a very different meaning for different people. It might mean an object that can fly, or I might mean a bird that cannot fly such as penguins. In one instance, I could refer to something that is capable of flying. In another instance, I might not refer to this feature of flying. The main problem is that referring to something does not mean to refer to its essence, but referring to its construction. That, however, means that referring is preceded by certain types of inferences. And this means that we are not talking about objects as existing in an external reality,
but about how we agree to construct something. Thus, there are two questions: firstly, how to construct an object for our mind? Secondly, how do we construct objects that can actually be shared with others, so that we do not merely construct objects for ourselves? Agreement on construction can guide us to come to an agreement on shared, determinated contents.

The form of these questions, however, already implies my constructivist grasp of the communicational problem. In my mind, it is a mistake to distinguish these questions, since we could assume that the formal construction of objects in the mind (the method) is never independent from its referent (the content) that we discuss between communication partners. It is necessary to develop a phenomenological account of how something appears to us, and how formations of identity are involved in this process. As discussed before, Brandom, however, distinguishes the formal method of rationalism, which is the normative discourse between speakers, from determinate objects and how they really are. He avoids, therefore, a dialectical investigation of content and method.\(^{123}\)

My thesis is that Brandom, in order to escape the problem of explaining the ontological difference between things and language, and their dialectical relation as content and form, introduces anaphora. Anaphora are means that always refer to something that preceded them. By virtue of the mechanism of anaphora, we could reasonably pick up content without representing it. The main question is then: Are these anaphoric backward inferences rich enough to guarantee the exchange of content between speakers so that communication is successful? The other important question is: Are anaphora really inferential structures? In order to investigate these questions, I will introduce the idea of anaphora in more detail in the following.

\(^{123}\) Since Hegel, however, denies a sharp distinction between content and form, Brandom cannot be called Hegelian.
2.3.4.3 A Relativizing Note of Brandom on his Solution

Before I will present Brandom’s inferentialist solution to the communicational problem, I have to emphasize Brandom’s self-critical remarks about the inferentialist account. After releasing *Making it Explicit*, Brandom seems to have come to a different position, or, at least, he implicitly acknowledges that inferentialism and representationalism might be a problem of a hidden dialectic. Already in *Making it Explicit* Brandom writes:

> Other possibilities include treating neither representation nor inference as explanatorily prior to the other. One might then go on to explain both in terms of some third notion, which is treated as more fundamental. Or one might eschew reductive explanations in semantics entirely and remain contented with describing the relations among a family of mutually presupposing concepts (Brandom 1998, 669, footnote 90).

This footnote already reveals that it is less a question of either one of two theoretical approaches. In one of his later responses to problems of his inferentialism, Brandom relativizes the meaning of inferentialism further:

> It may be, after all, that neither can be understood apart from the other — that reference and inference come as an indissoluble conceptual package that cannot be analyzed reductively, but only relationally. I agree, of course. Looking for a way to get an independent theoretical grip on one range of concepts, and then explicating the other in terms of it is only one strategy for illuminating the relations between the representational and inferential perspectives on semantic content (Brandom 2008, 215).\(^\text{124}\)

Brandom opts indirectly for a dialectical solution, which then, however, relativizes his foundationalist claims with regard to an inferentialist, formal semantics. His inferentialist strategy aims to develop a structure of reasons that provides a notion of objectivity. If this

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objectivity, however, is only one side of a dialectical coin, then it is not objectivity in the sense that our discourses bring us closer to external reality. This is because in this case we would not have yet considered the whole, but only the dialectical side of inferentialism and thus statements about its striking power would be too early.

As already pointed out, epistemologically, the problem of the existence and access to an external world is based on a major rejection of the Idealist framework of Hegel. Though proofs of the external world do not play a role in Brandom’s framework anymore, he follows the remainders of this tradition. The question is transformed. Now, it is the question of whether the external world, which is presupposed, is immediately approachable or whether it is only mediated by concepts. The recent neo-pragmatist epistemology transformed analytic approaches into contextualism. This means, immediate contact with reality was given up. Brandom follows the line of Sellars’ and proposes the extreme of this perspective on mediation, a merely inferentialist account. As already pointed out, the term ‘experience’ does not belong to his vocabulary anymore. Giving up on immediate references, a concrete contact with an outside world, such an inferentialism encounters the communication problem, the problem of how we share contents. Brandom wants to solve this problem by using the idea of anaphora.

Overall, the contribution of anaphors explains to us interesting structural relations of how we construct, transport, and extract meaning during communicational exchange in terms of a linguistic model. Even though Brandom considers a hidden dialectic theoretically, as seen above, he treats anaphora as the overall solution to the problem of reference. As a consequence, the role of experience, which includes the problem of how to construct objects at all, is only partly taken into consideration. So, for example, Brandom constantly presupposes the existence of
determinate objects in an external reality, but does not discuss how this is also an inference. I will explain this problem and his solution of anaphora in more detail.

2.3.4.4 Substitution

Before I can discuss anaphora, I have to explain once again Brandom’s substitutional semantics, in order to assign the theoretical space for anaphora. This involves discussing the problem of a merely substitutional account and its relation to the problem of individuals.

According to Brandom’s linguistic model, content is understood by virtue of coherence. More concretely, Brandom states: “To be propositionally contentful is to be able to play the role both of premise and of conclusion in an inference” (Brandom 2009, 167-168).\(^{125}\) This means that semantic identity does not depend on the accurate representation of an outside world, but depends on how much a term alters the coherence and interrelations within a constituted system. Knowledge, for Brandom, is then about our mastery of treating something inferentially within the systematic boundaries of a coherent system. This coherent system is established by a community of speakers, and their normative, objective rules. Their normative, objective rules are guided by the only way of how they can have meaningful discourse, according to Brandom’s linguistic model. Brandom’s model is supposed to work without the representationalist repertoire, thus it operates only with so called norms of coherence.\(^{126}\)

Substitution is here the most important tool for Brandom. This means that in order to know a term, we need to be able to substitute it salva veritate. In other words, the overall


\(^{126}\) Mueller states on this: „inferenziell durch Kohärenznormen vollaufl bestimmten und gehaltsbestimmenden Überzeugungssystemen hinweg“ (Mueller 2014, 143).
inference remains the same. These rules of substitution are borrowed from Sellars, and Frege, as demonstrated above. If we identify content correctly, then we can find cases in which we can substitute its term by another equivalent term. This, however, means only that we must be capable to apply such a substitution according to a criterion of prior, correct identification. In fact, a merely substitutional account faces the problem of how we come to concepts empirically. How do we possess concepts that are substitutable? This further implies that somehow the content of our empirical experience must be translated into inferential structures. However, we have to keep Brandom’s restrictions in mind: without substitutions there are no inferences. So if there were something that preceded the idea of substitution, then this preceding object would be meaningless. The complicated question is then: how do we refer to objects that cannot be simply referred to as being outside of the inferentialist structure? It seems that we cannot avoid reference here because we cannot give any identity criterion for determinate objects that are not part of our inferentialist chain. This is at its core the problem of singular terms, which I will explain in the following subpoint.

2.3.4.5 Singular Terms and Individuals

Singular terms are subsentential expressions that, according to a descriptivist account, refer to individuals. Accordingly, they build a relation between word and world by picking out an individual object that is unrepeatable and not universal. Thus, it seems that we refer to individuals by using singular terms. This, however, faces the problem of an ontological difference, the question of how to translate something of the ontologically causal world order into the conceptual order of the mind. This could also be signified as the problem of representationalism.
For Brandom such subsentential expressions could not be inferential, since only a proposition can function in a syllogism (see Brandom 1998, 335). According to this model, it seems then that individuals could be known only aposteriori through experience, which would imply that we think them in an extensional order. According to its extension, a term would have many objects that fall under it, while a singular term would have only one object that can be pointed out and signified with a singular term. Such accounts usually lead to paradoxes of different beliefs. For example, Londres, which is the French word for London, is said to have bad weather, while London, which we know from personal experience, might be quite nice. As a consequence, we would hold contradictory beliefs about the same object. Brandom’s anaphoric account is supposed to solve, or rather to avoid such contradictions, also known as the Kripke puzzle. How does Brandom, therefore, solve this problem?

Brandom’s main thesis is that an object that can only be referred to in one individual way does not bear any universal characteristics, and thus there is nothing that can be referred to. This thesis therefore rejects the representationalist strategy for relating individuals and singular terms by a simple reference. It is similar to my analysis above. For Brandom, singular terms are only comprehensible if they are grasped within a network of substitutional inferences. This means that a singular object that is pointed out to me as a concrete object is not perceived as a unity without difference. The singular object has features by virtue of which I must be able to identify it. For

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127 As I have already discussed before, I reject the presupposition of having determinate, mind-independent objects, and regard such a presupposition only as useful for certain practical tasks. Brandom, on the contrary, constantly presupposes determinate objects, and might also believe in individuals. His strategy for the problem of individuals occurs to me as nominalist, while his realism, the presupposition of objects, is, of course, not nominalist. Nominalism implies that I cannot know an individual by only having an explanation for it, since an explanation uses universals. The object, however, is individual. Singular terms that are repeatable, and thus universally describe the occurrence of individuals, can therefore not establish a relation to a concrete, individual object. From a nominalist perspective, however, singular terms are used in a construction that refers to something that is supposed to be an individual, but only from a theoretical standpoint. Practically, we treat the object as that which will inform us at some point about its status. Such a pragmatist, and constructivist method, however, is incompatible with Brandom’s realism.
Brandom, objects are the same, or reidentifiable, if they follow the same rules of substitution that means they must be related to predicates. Or, in other words, they must be part of a network of syllogisms.

If we, for example, refer to a man wearing a military uniform, and I point him out with my finger, the problem of reference comes to the fore. This is similar to Quine’s famous Gavagai example. It means that perceptions are not inferential. Yet, they are meaningless without their integration into the inferentialist structure. So I perceive this man, but it is unclear whether I refer to this man in his capacity of being a soldier, whether I refer to his uniform, the color of his uniform, his reoccurrence, or whatsoever. Only if I make the rules of his appearance explicit then I will produce an information package about an object. Rules of its appearance make objects determinate for me, and the idea is that I transport these rules of appearance to others by making the rules explicit. Thus, singular terms are not describing the object directly, but are indirectly used to locate the event according to our method of construction. This is Brandom’s solution. Prima facie, it looks like a nominalism, but it will turn out to be a realism and we have to demonstrate this with regard to anaphora in more detail later.

Brandom wants to demonstrate that demonstratives depend on substitutions.\textsuperscript{128} The model of substitution might allow us to refer to something without repeating its complete meaning. If I, for example, see a specific color, and I only relate it to a preexisting network of semantic relations, I do not mean this individual color. Instead, I substitute this experience with a higher formal term that belongs to a class of similar substitutions. The main idea is that something is not properly described, if we only refer to its occurrence and how it only occurs to us individually. If there are unrepeatable events, then we cannot substitute these events by other terms, since they

\textsuperscript{128} As already stated above, Brandom justifies this intuition, since otherwise we would run into various paradoxes of the unrepeatability of the content.
are unrepeatable. In this sense, we cannot simply introduce them as the experience x. To know, means rather to utter in a way that somebody else could receive information about the object. According to Brandom’s model, the interpreter does so by reconstructing the meaning conditions of one’s use of singular terms (see Mueller 2014, 147). He basically concludes how the speaker refers to something that is unrepeatable.

For Brandom, there is a decisive problem left. If there is no individual that motivates singular terms, what entitles us to make a claim? According to Brandom’s approach, we can only claim something, if the consequences of our statement line up with a certain coherent structure that we have committed to. How do we, however, incorporate a new object reliably? According to Brandom’s model, we are constrained by the fact that our coherent systems somehow respond to reality, and that, overall, we get closer to reality by greater mastery of our inferential commitments. In order to demonstrate that “[t]he way the world is, constrains proprieties of inferential, doxastic, and practical commitment in a straightforward way from within those practices” (Brandom 1998, 332), Brandom uses the example of litmus paper. A sour-tasting liquid can be perceived as acidic, and thus it should turn litmus paper red. If it does not turn the litmus paper red, we have to acknowledge our “practical failure” (Brandom 1998, 332). Our perception must have been wrong. We are corrected by the way the world is. For this reason Brandom is not a nominalist as, for example, discussed by Habermas, but a realist.

Mueller criticizes Brandom because without a determined meaning of the words there is no necessary “incorporation of the causal order” (Mueller 2014, 155). It is true that we have two incompatible commitments according to his example, but the unexpected perception of blue litmus paper can be interpreted either way (see Mueller 2014, 155). Either we change our idea of litmus paper, or we change our idea of this being an acid. It is a mistake to assume that
falsification alone will lead to better theories, since obviously we could always choose the wrong route.\footnote{This is also the main reason why falsificationism cannot work. A scientist whose thesis meets contradictory results either has to dismiss his overall theory, reduce the informational value of his theory by introducing further hypotheses, or replicate the test. Accordingly, there are more criteria for scientific investigation than merely falsification, because he has to make a choice between at least these three options.} This means that there have to be more determining factors that influence the speaker in order to create a coherent worldview (see Mueller 2014, 153).

In my approach, we also have to consider the view that we are not approaching an external reality, but that we significantly construct realities by our conceptual activities. Since Brandom’s semantics, however, are purely inferential, and are supposed to refer to only one reality, he needs to find another mechanism that deals with the problem of new objects, and initiating events for his system. Of course, he cannot skip the phenomenon of individuals, even though it is interpreted inferentially. His claim is therefore that anaphora are non-referential and that they are also sufficient for transmitting interpretable information. Anaphora are components of a sentence that relate to another content, an antecedent, that precedes the anaphoric expression. The meaning of a word (semantic) is decoded by a backward inference (a conclusion back to the premises of a word). This backward inference is of a specific type that resembles anaphora. Mueller, however, is skeptical:

Regarding the latter, a new argument based on context-sensitive semantic phenomena in anaphoric settings shows that the crucial distinction between initiator or anaphoric antecedent and anaphoric dependent cannot be drawn according to Brandom’s own premises without overt and irreducible referential premises (Mueller 2014, 141).

These claims of Mueller that anaphoric chains have irreducible referential premises have to be demonstrated later. For now, I would like to summarize. Brandom’s solution is to work without the representationalist repertoire, but to operate with so called norms of coherence. His main idea
is that singular terms cannot be without reasoning activities, and that they are bound to the use of anaphora. In this sense, a singular term does not have a meaning by itself, but by virtue of a language that surrounds it. We will have closer look at this surrounding language in the following subpoints.

3.3.4.6 Anaphora
So Brandom grasps singular terms by anaphoric initiators. And he thinks that deixis, referentially picking up individuals or complex entities, is only possible if there are anaphora. Thus, he writes:

[...] the capacity of pronouns to pick up a reference from an anaphoric antecedent is an essential condition of the capacity of other tokens (which can serve as such antecedents) to have references determined deictically. Deixis presupposes anaphora. No tokens can have the significance of demonstratives unless others have the significance of anaphoric dependents; to use an expression as a demonstrative is to use it as a special kind of anaphoric initiator (Brandom 1998, 462).

This means that demonstratives are only meaningful by virtue of their relation to a coherent structure of one’s language. It is a language entry-condition. Deictic expressions are therefore particular moments that are understood by the virtue of coordinates for the entry into language. So their main task is not to transport the complete richness of the original event. They rather introduce an anchor for a backward inference to the initiating event. This means that the richness of a possible experience is reduced to the communicational means and their expressive power.

Anaphoric expressions, however, only introduce us to the substitutional relevance of such a language-entry event. It creates a relation between “repeatables and unrepeatable tokenings” that the speaker commits to (Brandom 1998, 476). With regard to their opening, anaphora create a relation of how we commit to unrepeatable tokenings expressed in a structure that can coordinate
these language entry-events. Anaphors are, furthermore, nothing more than a recurrence of a precedent occurrence. We can trace them back and create their meaning by understanding possibly incompatible commitments that might contradict former language entries. Thus, language means to narrow down meanings by virtue of our substitutional coherence structure under the use of anaphoric coordination. The more we communicate, and thus navigate, the smaller the field of possible interpretations becomes. If we master the possible conclusions that follow from the assumption of such language entries, we will get closer to reality. This means that our language is more structured by coordination than by original events.

Brandom’s main goal is to justify inferentialism, particularly that deixis presupposes anaphora. So let us look at the example of Nickel which exemplifies Brandom’s strategy best:

(A-i) Jane is tall. (A-ii) She is young. ∴ (A-iii) Somebody is young and tall.

(D-i) [pointing at Jane] She is tall. (D-ii) [pointing at Jane] She is young. ∴ (D-iii) Somebody is young and tall (Nickel 2011, 19). 130

Deictic references allow for no connection of the deictic claims as we see in (D). Each signification is a moment of its own. Anaphora, however, provide a structure of transition, so that a syllogism is possible. By anaphoric chains, contents are preserved and connected in a meaningful way. The main idea is therefore that without anaphora there would be no meaning overall, but only random moments of pointing out something undetermined.

Brandom delivers here an inferentialist explanation for the necessity of such an asymmetrical substitution by virtue of anaphora. 131 He supports the arguments further: “A

131 ‘Asymmetric’ means that not all of the content is important. The equivalent term will lose some of the original meaning. Brandom distinguishes two forms of substitution, symmetric and asymmetric substitution, which will be important for his concept of anaphora. An example for asymmetry would be: Concluding from the syllogism ‘This man is tired. A man is an animal. Therefore, an animal is tired.’ that we talk about an animal that is tired.
language cannot refer to an object in one way unless it can refer to it in two different ways” (Brandom 1998, 425). This means that if we just picked out the object in only one possible way, there would be no possible connection of one fact to another. We would pick out an isolated fact that has no inferential relation to anything. From an epistemological standpoint, we could also say that there would be no communicational problem, because we would have a designator that is clearly linked to what is real. Since there is, however, a communicational problem, our access to the world must be restricted. Since, moreover, communicative success occurs, we must have picked out things not in only one way, because then they would be unrepeatables, but in one way of many accesses to the object. We make then one possible interpretation explicit. Anaphora, in this sense, are a place holder for the original experience, but different from demonstratives or singular terms. They are determined and enriched by the individual inferences that the speaker relates them to, and so they allow for many interpretations. They link back to something that is coordinated in our language. Brandom discusses this further:

Understanding an expression’s purporting to refer to an object in terms of its use being governed by the properties articulating its significance according to substitution-inferential commitments dispels the puzzlement that can otherwise attend this phenomenon. An object that can be referred to in only one way is the sound of one hand clapping (Brandom 1998, 425).

So reality itself does not have individuals that we pick out, but delivers events that we anaphorically relate to in many ways. Brandom claims that this approach solves the puzzle of individuals by ultimately dismissing it. Moreover, Brandom points out that information gains are justified by the anaphoric argument:

Nevertheless, we will have lost some of the original meaning. The guiding thought is here that we substitute asymmetrically an original event with regard to a structure.

This is, of course a nominalist interpretation of Brandom that I introduce. This means that we neither grasp the individuals directly, nor do we claim that the universals of language are what is real. Brandom, however, presupposes the existence of determinate objects, which then distinguishes him from a nominalist and makes him a realist.
When such a simple material substitution-inferential commitment linking two expressions is made propositionally explicit (as an assertible), it takes the form of a nontrivial identity claim (Brandom 1998, 426).

So our activity expressed in a claim achieves meaningful identities. I assume that he means by a non-trivial identity claim a progression in our knowledge of ‘a’ towards ‘b’ (a=b), instead of just saying ‘a’ equals ‘a’ (a=a). In this sense, we can guarantee a progression of claims, instead of only reclaiming tautologically what has already been stated. With regard to this interpretation, singular terms express a more complex process involving anaphora. They are condensed expressions of how we relate to the world. Relating to the world as described above is then the use of singular terms. This further means that: “mastery of the use of one expression as a sentence [...] involves mastery of the use of many” (Brandom 1998, 426). So singular terms are only the condensed expression of having already mastered many of similar questions of coordination. This means further that the “the conceptual content expressed by a sentence depends on its place in a network of inferences relating it to other sentences; the terms” (Brandom 1998, 426). In other words, Brandom secures the transition from representationalism to inferentialism, from individual terms to more universal terms.

Again, how can one element be individuated? It is interesting that Brandom quotes Davidson in this regard:

Why say the stimulus is the ringing of the bell? Why not the motion of the air close to the ears of the dog - or even the stimulation of its nerve endings? Certainly if the air were made to vibrate in just the way the bell makes it vibrate it would make no difference to the behavior of the dog. And if the right nerve endings were activated in the right way, there still would be no difference.” Typically there is a whole causal chain of covarying events culminating in a response” (Brandom 1998, 426-427).

The main idea is that there is no originating causal event that can be clearly located. And this is coherent with Brandom’s account: since the world is inferentially structured, terms of causality
are problematic. One event that we individuate is connected to all other possible events, but our explication is only one interpretation. The object is picked out, and presented in one perspective of many. Anaphora provide the information for the minimal, necessary location in an inferential network. Brandom writes:

[…to pick up a speaker’s tokening […] and so to connect it to their own substitution-inferential commitments is part of what makes it possible for them to understand the speaker’s utterance by extracting information from it (Brandom 1998, 475).

In other words, the speakers, “connect it [an initiator] to their own substitution-inferential commitments” (Bavaresco 2001, 56), which allows them to extract information. The speakers basically demonstrate their relation to such an event, and can thus compare their events to the events of other speakers.

Finally, Brandom refers to anaphora as a tactile model of understanding, which frees it from the representationalist paradigm: “Conceptual […] contents […] are therefore best thought of on a tactile rather than a visual, model” (Brandom 1998, 583). This switch from the representationalist model to the tactile model is also supposed to support his realism, a last connection to reality, but this reality is not represented but grasped conceptually (see Brandom 1998, 583). I will discuss this realism, which is problematic, in the following.

3.3.4.7 The Meaning of Anaphora for Inferentialism and Realism

With his approach to anaphora, Brandom makes empirical content available for an inferentialist program without importing the empirical content itself. There is no problem of empirical importation, but only a question of navigation. Our interactions with an environment entitle for certain vocabulary (see Brandom 1998, 596), and we justify these interactions as long
as they do not contradict former expressions (see Mueller 2014, 160). The question remains whether there is a contact to a mind-independent reality that can be justified. Brandom writes:

The possibility of incompatible commitments arising from the cycle of perception, inference, action, and perception reflects the way the normative structure of perception and action incorporates elements of the causal order (Brandom 1998, 332).

So, according to Brandom, nature as an objectively independent instance, can be incorporated by understanding ourselves basically by navigating through nature. Our way of doing it incorporates then the causal order. Brandom makes this incorporation of the causal order very explicit:

“Normative statuses are domesticated by being understood in terms of normative attitudes, which are in the causal order” (Brandom 1998, 626). Due to the socially interdependent influence that speakers exercise on each other, discourses build up semantic norms of how a certain object is constituted with regard to anaphoric commitments (see Mueller 2014, 11). These anaphoric commitments are restricted by the language initiating event.

I have criticized above that Brandom’s dualistic conception of history and nature is not clarified. As already explained above, anaphoric commitments restrict more and more the possibility of commitments that are incompatible with regard to former assertions (see Mueller 2014, 11). Mueller calls Brandom’s approach therefore “sozial-inferentialistisch”, but it would probably be more correct to call it a realist inferentialism. If we called it “sozial-inferentialistisch”, then the interpretation is possible that we commit more and more to a way of how the world is supposed to be, which, however, is in contradiction with Brandom’s realism that presupposes a definitive way of how the world is. His realism is not about a commitment to a paradigm of our worlds that is achieved, but a commitment to how the world really is.
Despite his realist comments, there are some passages that support a sozial-inferentialistische interpretation:\textsuperscript{133}

For information (whether true or false) to be communicated is for the claims undertaken by one interlocutor to become available to others (who attribute them) as premises for inferences. Communication is the social production and consumption of reasons (Brandom 1998, 474).

In this understanding truth is non-existent and there are only the normatively produced inferences, so that “truth and reference are philosopher’s fictions, generated by grammatical misunderstandings” (Brandom 1998, 324). In other words, all conceptual content is inferentially articulated, which depends on normative attitudes of inferential substitution. Bavaresco writes on this deflationism: “Speakers’ attitudes, through the mechanism of anaphora as the structure of a repeatable token, confer conceptual contents on singular terms and predicates” (Bavaresco 2001, 56). Conceptual content depends then entirely on its place in a network (see Bavaresco 2001, 56). All in all, this means that content can be described differently by different speakers. From that follows that there is no content that is neutral. For speakers, it is irrelevant who has uttered the expression, since they uttered it with regard to formal semantics and without formal semantics there would be no determinate objects that they could discuss. I assume, to put it metaphorically, that without an inferentialist structure, there would be flashes of events without any meaning. But even such an assumption would be assuming too much. There would be, to use a Kantian expression, a “Gewühle von Erscheinungen” (Kant, KdrV A111).\textsuperscript{134} Anaphora is therefore not a reference but a form of asymmetrical substitution that inherits and is inheriting content. Brandom makes this very clear:

\textsuperscript{133} I have already discussed these issues with respect to Rorty.
It permits each interlocutor to produce utterances employing tokenings that have been stipulated to be recurrences of arbitrary tokenings by others. […] Such recurrences provide the basic points of contact between different repertoires of commitments […]” (Brandom 1998, 458).

As I will discuss in further detail later, Habermas will criticize this coherentism. There is strong tension between realism and constructivism. Giovagnol refers to Habermas:

> The perspective of the participant who reconstructs from the inside the linguistic practice doesn’t allow the speaker to talk about truth, but about how truth appears to him (Giovagnol 2001, 54).

Brandom, however, does not address this problem of the relation of an inside of language to an outside of language, which would be the most important point of his book to make. What is this nature that our utterances are about? Anaphoric relations are only necessary conditions for having content, but they do not give us a necessarily correct identification of what really is (see Mueller 2014, 160). Anaphoric chains would only adopt the content of former sentences (see Mueller 2014, 160). If there is no stable anchor, then the following expressions would not constitute an equivalent class (see Mueller 2014, 160). This, however, is Brandom’s claim: we will know better by greater mastery of our inferences. Again, the question remains: what do we know? So the remaining criticism must then be that anaphora cannot build the stable link to reality that Brandom desires because we ultimately do not know what this reality is. It seems also a definition of nature must remain in the inferentialist, navigational sphere. This problem should be pointed out last.

As presented above, anaphoric expressions are related to an antecedent expression, or an anaphoric initiator. If the last antecedent, the anaphoric initiator is, however, only partially determined, then communication would still fail in terms of getting closer to reality, since possible variations of interpretations would be possible (see Mueller 2014, 162). We could not
decide whether we got closer to reality. Since the anaphoric initiator is for Brandom a connection to reality, such an ambiguity would undermine his project. Brandom writes that these anaphoric initiators, however, are non-inferential:

Since recurrence and inheritance of substitutional commitments is transitive, so is anaphoric dependence.

[...] They [anaphoric chains] can be anchored or initiated by tokenings that are not themselves anaphorically dependent on other tokenings. These are anaphoric initiators (Brandom 1998, 458).

So there is a first tokening that does not depend on something else. It is somehow outside of language, yet it is inside. Now, it is problematic that the anaphoric initiators are not part of the chain itself. They fulfill the following functions:

„anaphorically structured constellations of tokenings [...] are like Fregean senses in that they determine the referents of the name tokenings whose significance they govern. They [...] provide cognitive access to the particular objects [...] via intersubstitutability equivalence classes of token-repeatables, some of which include demonstrative and indexical tokenings. Such chains anchor our thought and talk in particular objects [...]. They determine [...] what we are thereby talking and thinking about” (Brandom 1998, 582)

So real content is the relation between an initiator that functions like Frege’s reference, a real object that can be referred to in different ways, and its anaphoric relator. Thus, an anaphoric initiator is supposed to build a link to an unalterable reality and is thus “inferenzkorrektheitsnormierend” (Mueller 2014, 166). Mueller discusses here two problems that demonstrate the difficulties with such anchors.

First, kataphers, anaphoric expressions in which the pronoun is preceding the initiator, create ambiguities. This is the case, if I say ‘his wife loves Ed’ (the example is borrowed from Mueller). In this case, there exist two possibilities. First Ed could be the husband. Or, second, Ed could be a person with whom his wife has an extramarital affair. Since there is no more
information, we cannot unambiguously understand the content with only anaphoric means (see Mueller 2014, 168).

The second problem that Mueller discusses reveals the ambiguities in a clearer sense. For him „Informationsextraktion“ is not only a „mapping of your tokens on mine“ (Mueller 2014, 168), but also depending on further contexts to which we can relate only because there are hidden references involved (see Mueller 2014, 168). This would mean that anaphora do not necessarily guarantee a link back to reality, but need to be complimented by further linguistic means.

Mueller’s consecutive example is the following: Let us assume Sigrid says ‘It rains again’, and Herbert answers ‘It is cursed.’ In this case, Mueller emphasizes that the utterance could be understood as deictic, or as anaphoric. On the one hand, Herbert’s answer could be seen as an anaphoric relation to the utterance of Sigrid. On the other hand, it could also be that Herbert looks at a picture that represents another location. Then, it would be an initiator of a new discourse topic. ‘It’ would be a demonstrative. So how do we identify correctly which meaning it is (see Mueller 2014, 169)?

The point of these examples is to demonstrate undecidable cases for anaphora. Anaphora might not be as successful in providing an anchor in reality as Brandom assumes. Since they are supposed to represent a link to reality, on which our mapping of substitutions depends. They are supposed to create an equivalent class of objects. In the examples above, we cannot substitute one term for the other without changing the meaning of the sentences. The salva veritate rule

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135 Mueller’s example goes further: „Nehmen wir an, Sigrid sagt „Es regnet schon wieder“, und Herbert antwortet darauf mit „Dieser Ort ist wirklich verflucht“ und Sigrid bestätigt dies, indem sie sagt „Ja, hier fahren wir nie wieder in den Urlaub hin. Jedes mal, wenn wir in Bad Breckenreuth Urlaub machen, regnet es.“ Was Herbert mit einem unwirschen „Bad Idenhausen, nicht Breckenreuth“ kommentiert, worauf Sigrid mit „Ist doch egal, Du weißt schon, was gemeint ist.“ antwortet.“ (Mueller 2014, 169).
does not apply. Therefore Brandom’s solution fails in these cases. From this follows that anaphora are not the last bits of our semantic world order. Rather, they are another pragmatic mean that serves us in order to create meaning in particular situations. Often they might be successful, but sometimes they fail and we have to find other means in order to successfully communicate.

2.5 Conclusive Remarks on Brandom

I have not discussed Brandom’s view on Hegel’s historicism in particular. Brandom discusses Hegel concretely in *Tales of the Mighty Dead*.136 There, he argues that Hegel is an inferentialist with holistic intentions. Brandom, however, reads Hegel so that he can fit him to his own theory. For this, he mostly utilizes the chapters that he can identify as semanticist. Brandom promised, moreover, a book on Hegel that is not yet published. The major resources for Brandom’s Hegel interpretation are therefore unpublished word-files online. In these documents, he mainly interprets Hegel’s chapters on sense-certainty and perception with regard to his semantics. I pointed out before that Hegel is an anti-semanticist. Brandom’s Hegel interpretation that reality is all the way down contradictory is an ontological misinterpretation of Hegel’s epistemological project and applies Brandom’s own incompatibility-semantics to Hegelian thought.

Though Brandom cannot simply apply his semantics to Hegel, my main criticism is Brandom’s lack of awareness of the problem of history. Brandom writes rarely on this significant

aspect of Hegel’s theory. One of the few passages is a discussion of history starting with an imprecise definition of noumena and phenomena. He writes:

His [Hegel’s] answer is that the idea of noumena, of things as they are in themselves, the reality that appears in the form of phenomena, can be understood practically in terms of a distinctive role in a recollectively rationally reconstructed historical sequence of phenomena.” (Brandom 2009, 100).

Brandom grasps history therefore not as reality for us, but as a secondary phenomenon that serves us to understand the relationship of phenomena to a noumenon, namely to the way of how things really are. Brandom proceeds:

One of the senses in which what he presents is a phenomenology is that he starts with an account of phenomena (what things are for consciousness) and seeks to reconstruct the notion of noumena (what things are in themselves) out of the resources it provides (Brandom 2009, 100).

This is obviously false. Hegel does not attempt to recognize the noumenon or to give a concept of it. Instead, Hegel attempts to answer how a phenomenology without a noumenon can be objective.

Brandom proceeds by applying his technical jargon. According to him the “rational integration into the constellation of one’s prior commitments of some new commitment […] is intelligible as one’s commitments as to how things really are, objectively, in themselves” (Brandom 2009, 100). In other words, our main intention is to relate to how things really are.

History is then a process of different commitments that are replaced by new commitments. In other words, there are no paradigm shifts in one rational history, but there is one evolving net of semantic commitments. The underlying basis for this must be one form of communication that never changes (see Brandom 2009, 101). Brandom writes further: “This means—as being what one takes to be not just an appearance of that reality, but a veridical appearance, one in which
things appear as they really are—when it is accompanied by the right kind of rational recollection of the process of experience that produced it” (Brandom 2009, 101). Basically, he expresses the thought that there is a communicative form that can guarantee progress for all past events and all future events. Instead, as I will show later, Hegel defends a process of reflection that is related to experience and which depends on the history of how we experience. In contrast, Brandom commits to the reading of Absolute Knowing as ahistorical. Brandom thinks further that such a kind of correct, formal process would bring us closer to reality:

The right kind of recollection is one that picks out a trajectory through the previous results of one’s actual integrations that is expressively progressive. That is, it must exhibit a history that both culminates in one’s current view and has the form of the gradual making explicit of what can now retrospectively be seen all along to have been implicit. Doing that is showing for each previous episode (of those that are selected as, as it were, precedential, as revelatory of what one now takes always already to have been there) how that set of commitments can be seen as a partial, and only partially correct revelation of things as they are now known (or at least taken) to be. That is, one must show how each of the recollectively privileged prior integrations made progress towards one’s current constellation of commitments—both in the judgments that are endorsed and in the consequential and incompatibility relations taken to articulate the concepts applied in those judgments (Brandom 2009, 101)

Brandom develops here an idea of progress. It is not false to apply this idea of progress to Hegel as long as it is shown as progress with respect to former views and their standards. Yet, according to Brandom, our views are ultimately responding to reality. In this sense, progress means to relate to a mind-independent reality in a better way, a claim that Hegel would not defend. Brandom further claims that this presupposition of progress is part of our communication:

In taking one’s current commitments as the standard to judge what counts as expressive progress, one is taking them as the reality of which previous constellations of endorsements were ever more complete and
accurate appearances. That is the lesson that the normative understanding of the representation relation teaches: what is represented is what serves as a standard for assessing what thereby, in this normative sense, counts as a representing (an appearance) of it. (Brandom 2009, 101).

As a result Brandom does not develop a concept of history. History is for him embedded in his overarching theory of communication that is ahistorically grounded in semantic communication about how the world really is. He proposes an ultimately ahistoric model that is supposed to secure a better grasp of reality. Since Hegel’s account, however, is historicist, which means that all our first-order knowledge claims are limited to the historical moment, Brandom’s theory is entirely different from Hegel.

This explicit ahistoricist position is already recognizable in Brandom’s Articulating Reason. There, Brandom introduces things that have “natures rather than history” (Brandom 2000, 27). He is careful insofar as he notices that this distinction is itself a “cultural formation” (Brandom 2000, 27). He evaluates this formation, however, as a “thing that itself has a history rather than a nature” (Brandom 2000, 27). This means that instead of acknowledging the dialectic between the concepts of history and nature, Brandom thinks that the distinction is unreliable because the distinction itself is only historical. Brandom obviously thinks that nature is independent from history.

Despite Brandom’s assumption that this distinction is itself a historical formation, I therefore cannot avoid interpreting Brandom within a naturalist paradigm; a paradigm that he explicitly wants to avoid. Indeed, he explicitly denies “naturalistic vocabulary”, since it cannot explain what we mean by our statements, or how we make statements at all (Brandom 1997, 154). In this sense, Brandom also acknowledges that “even concepts such as electron and aromatic compound are the sort of thing that has a history” (Brandom 2000,27). Yet, he
proceeds, “they are not purely historical” (Brandom 2000, 27). However, without a discussion of the dialectical relation between nature and history, this distinction remains unclear. His realism is simply based on the idea that concepts are not “purely historical,” which implies that there is a strong remainder of naturalism in Brandom’s thought (Brandom 2000, 27). This becomes even clearer in the following statement:

    For the proprieties governing the application of those concepts depend on what inferences involving them are correct, that is, on what really follows from what. And that depends on how things are with electrons and aromatic compounds, not just on what judgments and inferences we endorse (Brandom 2000, 27).

Using the word ‘really’ relativizes all other theory that relies on inference and historical formation. Instead, it assumes something as a foundation that must have a nature and is ultimately ahistorical, and probably also not inferential. Brandom does not clarify what his realism about electrons entails with regard to ahistorical natures and what exactly is historical. In this specific case, Brandom might even suggest that Being is composed from beings or that Being is not one. I assume this because he suggests a real existence of determinate objects such as electrons that have a particular ahistorical nature. The fact that we deal with determinate objects, however, does not mean that reality is ultimately grounded in determinate objects. Our perception of determinate objects might be a human confusion, not capable of accessing the universal order of the one.137 Brandom indirectly presupposes that our concepts must be grounded in outside things that are real and determinate and thus have a nature. He thus would reject oneness without discussion and he would assume that things have their own, independent nature.

137 I do not subscribe to this concept of oneness, but I point out the problem of assuming the former side without considering the latter.
Overall, it seems that Brandom says that we cannot step outside history, but that there is something underlying history that must have an ahistorical nature and is determinate. Something that is real. Though it is hard to deny an external reality, it is as complicated to simply assume a determinate reality as the ground for our histories and systems of knowledge. Brandom does not discuss the concept of history in his philosophy. Instead, he simply claims that there are things that have no history. Contrary to Brandom, Hegel claims that all that we can investigate is ultimately within history. Thus, Hegel and Brandom are incompatible. Before I come to Hegel, however, I will introduce Habermas’ criticism of Brandom.

3. Habermas’ Marxian Approach without Marxism and the Pragmatic Turn

I regard Habermas’ criticism of Brandom’s approach as striking. In particular, he criticizes the presupposition of a formal, mind-independent reality. This criticism, however, also reveals a significant change in Habermas’ own approach. At the end of Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung, after criticizing Brandom’s approach, Habermas surprisingly suggests a desubstantialized relativism.138 Yet, even though he changes the outcome of his Discourse Theory and distances

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138 With regard to the relativist position of philosophy, Habermas writes: “Hier begegnet uns der eigentümliche Zug einer Vielsprachigkeit, welche die Philosophie instand setzt, in den auseinandergetretenen Vernunftmomenten eine Einheit zu wahren, ohne die Geltungsdifferenzen einzuebenen. Diese formale Einheit einer pluralisierten Vernunft kann die Philosophie nicht etwa dank eines inhaltlich gefüllten Begriffs des Seinenden im ganzen oder des allgemeinen Guten aufrecht erhalten, sondern dank ihrer hermeneutischen Fähigkeit, Sprach- und Diskursgrenzen zu überschreiten, während sie gleichzeitig für holistische Hintergrundkontexte empfindlich bleibt” (1999, 328). Habermas is probably not clear about his position, since he returns to a substantial, non-relativist position in the
himself further from the transcendental realist account of Apel,\textsuperscript{139} he does not see parallels to Hegel’s relativist account. This is because Habermas misunderstands Hegel as an ultimately ahistorical thinker.

While Habermas’ criticism of Brandom’s semantic realism is concise, his criticism of Hegel is a result of his imprecise understanding of Marxian theory. Seen through the lens of Marxism, Habermas believes that Hegel suggests an ahistorical solution to the problem of human development by implementing the concept of Absolute Knowing. Absolute Spirit occurs here as an ahistorical goal for human development by which Hegel’s theory remains in the paradigm of consciousness-philosophy. On the basis of this interpretation, Habermas rejects a possible return to Hegelianism in order to solve the problems of analytic contextualism. Thus, he also rejects Brandom’s conceptual realism as Hegelian.

Habermas’ criticism of Brandom is an important moment in the debate. Habermas’ theory is at its core Continental. Yet, he also claims to follow the insights of the anti-metaphysical, linguistic turn. For its Continental core, Habermas develops, according to his own claims, a Marxian theory without Marxism. In this regard, Habermas assumes to “surpass an earlier position“ of Marx and Critical Theory (Rockmore 1989, xi).\textsuperscript{140} On the basis of this, he rejects Hegelianism as a subjectivist, ahistorical philosophy that commits to the paradigm of a non-empirical self-consciousness. Habermas’ theory can be consequently divided into two parts: on the one hand, a strong epistemological endeavor that proceeds with the Kantian, critical project


\textsuperscript{139} Apel’s theory follows the idea of securing an objective ground for discourses with regard the performative contradiction that occurs if we deny truth.

through an analytical, philosophical approach after the linguistic and pragmatic turn, and, on the other hand, a Marxist background, in contrast to which Habermas focuses on language that works as an alternative superstructure to labor in our society. Habermas wants to secure the epistemological foundation in a communicative situation and to apply these insights to the development of social interaction on the large scale of societies. Accordingly, language presupposes the assumption of an ideal that, if followed, will provide a pathway to a just society. With his continental-analytical approach Habermas stands, therefore, as a mediator between Continental and analytic philosophy. With his flawed interpretation of Hegel, however, Habermas cannot bridge the divide and stands rather in the formalist tradition after the pragmatic turn.

In order to understand Habermas’ criticism of Brandom and also to understand his intervention historically, I will reconstruct Habermas’ overall position. In the first part of this chapter, I will discuss his method of reconstruction, since ‘reconstruction’ is Habermas’ essential method in order to improve former theories. My thesis is that his method of reconstruction is flawed, since it identifies a goal before the theory is reconstructed. I will demonstrate this with regard to his reconstruction of Marx’s theory. Habermas claims, for example, to have the same goal as Marx, but in his reconstruction he never lays out a detailed analysis of Marx’s goal. Instead, he presupposes that Marx wants to achieve a reflection of presuppositionless self-consciousness.

After discussing this methodological problem, I will explain in the second part of this chapter the relation between practice and theory that Habermas derives from a Marxian standpoint. Due to his flawed method of reconstruction, however, it will be problematic to identify how much his position is supposed to be Marxist or Marxian. I will first demonstrate in
the second part of this chapter that Habermas does not read Marx as a philosopher who relates to the Hegelian tradition, but as an empiricist, perhaps as an unusual kind of socialist scientist. Habermas’ understanding of Marx’s goal is therefore distorted by his unclear notion of German Idealism and Marx’s relationship to this tradition. I will develop an interpretation of Marx that grasps his theory as a result of German Idealism, which is different from Habermas’ understanding.

Even though I will not entirely clarify why Habermas understands his goal as Marxian, it is fairly clear that he argues against positivism. After having falsely identified Marx as a positivist, Habermas can easily reject his paradigm. As a consequence, Habermas proposes an alternative model of social evolution, which I will discuss secondly. This alternative model is supposed to include the communicative contributions that, for example, family-structures made for our community. Thus, the superstructure of society does not rely only on labor, according to Habermas, a Marxian position, but is also substantiated by positive functions of language that can be defended and should be preserved.

Though Habermas argues against positivism and its instrumental interpretation of language, he is also critical of hermeneutical methods, because they presuppose a covert consciousness paradigm. Habermas wishes to eradicate the relationship to consciousness, since it is not metaphysically justifiable. I will therefore show thirdly how this denial of consciousness leads his theory to a non-substantial philosophy. His philosophy is supposed to secure the conditions for fair communication in concrete, discourse situations. This anti-metaphysical shift brings him closer to the analytic programs, but distances him from Hegel. In terms of the relation between theory and practice, Habermas attempts to deliver the theoretical foundation of discourse in the form of a discourse method that he believes is socially relevant for societies. I
will show that the social relevance of his theory for our societies is problematic. His account presupposes that the micro-sociological relations of communication can be replicated on the macro-sociological level of societies and that macro-structures follow the same conditions of success. Thus, I am going to contest the assumption that epistemology derived from the constitution of language between members of a society can be entirely foundational or even justify large scale processes of history.

After having clarified Habermas’ Marxist background and the relation between practice and theory in Discourse Theory, I will present in a third part the relation of Habermas’ Discourse Theory and the pragmatic turn. I, furthermore, will discuss how Habermas gives up his former model of truth as justifiability. Instead, he will introduce a concept of truth based on practice. This change in his theory will prepare his criticism of Brandom.

In the fourth part, I will discuss Habermas discussion of Brandom’s approach in detail. His criticism focuses on Brandom’s presupposition of a mind-independent reality, his theoreticism and his equation of facts and norms, which represents his cognitive realism. Habermas’ criticism of Brandom is similar to my arguments above. Unlike my arguments, Habermas does not consider Hegel’s account as a viable alternative. In the final part of this chapter, I will therefore discuss Habermas’ criticism of Hegel. Habermas identifies a Hegelian motivation in Brandom’s conceptual realism. His final rejection of Hegel as a future of the philosophical debate is, however, based on the miscomprehension of the Hegelian problem. All

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of this will lay out the ground for an appropriate discussion of Hegel’s historicist account, which will follow in the fourth chapter of my dissertation.

3.1 Reconstruction with regard to Marx and as a General Method
Habermas’ methodological problem with reconstruction can be demonstrated with regard to his interpretation of Marx. I will firstly give an interpretation of Habermas’ relation to Marx. It will reveal that Habermas cannot clearly express what makes his approach specifically Marxian, neither with regard to the means, nor with regard to its goal. This will lead to the conclusion that his method of reconstruction must be flawed. Secondly, I will discuss Habermas’ methodological problem with reconstruction from a rather formal perspective.

3.1.1 The Means of Habermas and the End of Marx
My argument is that Habermas does not ‘reconstruct’ Marx adequately, and that this is related to his flawed method of reconstruction. ‘Reconstruction’ means to take another theory apart and then to put it together, in order to achieve the theory’s intrinsic goal. It will turn out, however, that Marx probably has a different goal than Habermas. For demonstrating this, I will focus on Marx or Marxism and its relation to practice. It is well known that Marx is critical of the theoretical attitude of philosophers before him. Marx prefers practice over theory. Habermas’ philosophy is a reaction to the Marxist problems of historical materialism. In identifying Marx, however, Habermas conflates a Marxian approach with Marxist historical materialism and positivism. His denial of the Marxian method and the Marxian goal is therefore false. I attribute this mistake to the failure of Habermas’ method that assumes a goal before it has reconstructed the philosophy itself.
With regard to Habermas’ reaction against Marxist historical materialism and positivism, Rockmore draws the same connections between Habermas’ overall goal of a theory of language and his rejection of this positivist, historical materialism. In particular, Rockmore sees Habermas “leading to his own theory of communicative action, consisting of the interpretation, critique, reconstruction, and rejection of historical materialism” by discussing a strawman (Rockmore 1989, 169). With regard to the “rejection of historical materialism,” Habermas proposes the aforementioned theory of communicative action as an alternative framework to all former approaches of philosophy (see Rockmore 1989, 169). In these former philosophies, there are two methodological paradigms that Habermas fights against: a hermeneutics that relies on a paradigm of consciousness and a positivist account that is too empirical. Firstly, he believes that earlier theories fail to surpass the paradigm of consciousness. Thus, they rely on a hermeneutics that still uses an empirically unjustifiable, teleological goal of human development. In this sense, Marx can only produce a distorted goal for human societies. Secondly, Habermas interprets the Marxian approach as an empirical theory that, despite the non-empirical, metaphysical presupposition of consciousness, remains overly empiricist. Thus, for Habermas, Marx’s approach results in a positivist paradigm that reduces all human interaction to a materialist mechanism.

Methodologically, Habermas situates his philosophy between these two paradigms, which results in a problematic interpretation of Marx, since Marx is neither empiricist nor does he simply reduce his theory to the paradigm of consciousness. Marx introduced an economic interpretation of modern societies on the basis of capitalism. It is therefore true that his approach has empirical roots. He is, however, still a philosopher who reinterprets the Hegelian tradition.

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142 We find the first indication in *Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus* (1976).
Habermas wrestles with this tension between empiricism and philosophy, which comes to the fore when he rejects the means of Marx, but not Marx’s ultimate end (see Habermas 1976, 9 and Rockmore 1989, 169). Marx’s goal is about resolving the conflict of the distorting, unrecognized relationship that members of a society have to themselves and to others through alienating labor. In this sense, Habermas claims to surpass Marx’s position by applying a better method. I will study Marx’s goal in more detail.

With regard to his goal, it is clear that Marx, according to his *Early Manuscripts*, rejects the misshapen communisms that still rely on a concept of property. This reliance on property is a covert bourgeois concept that hinders societies’ attempts to break with self-alienating forms of consciousness. The alienation caused by property will finally result in the estrangement of classes, namely individuals who oppress themselves and others in different value relationships. While Marx argues against the distorting influence of property, Habermas’ goal suggests a preservation of at least some economical processes that rely on property, since they help to unburden [entlasten] us from existential threats. Habermas wants to protect a fundamental life-world sphere as an unburdening institution. For Habermas, the social phenomenon of the colonization of the life-world needs to be encountered with a protective space for genuine human interaction. Habermas’ defense of our current system focuses therefore on the fact that these systems unburden the individual, and free the individual for genuine interaction. Habermas is thus a conservative thinker who defends the constitutional state, and who wants to only draw limits for the colonization of the life-world by instrumental, capitalist agendas.

It is questionable whether this conservative goal of preservation can be identified as a goal of Marx or Marxism. What is more problematic, however, is that for Habermas reconstruction means to identify the goal of a philosophy before the philosophy is reconstructed.
With regard to Marx’s method, Habermas’ main criticism of Marx is that he emphasizes the influence of labor too strongly by expressing it as a superstructure that governs all other human relations. According to Habermas, Marx does not see that the psychological development of humans already includes a history of emancipation that is independent from the superstructure of labor. Consequently, Habermas’ theory appears to be entirely different from Marx’s, since he replaces both its means and its ends by rejecting the materialist method and by adopting a more conservative goal. If Habermas’ theory is supposed to be an alternative to Marxism, then its goal must obviously be to replace Marxism (see Rockmore 1989, 169). Then, however, Habermas cannot justify that his theory advances beyond either Marxism or Marx.

Before I will study these questions in further detail, there are some problems that we have to identify with regard to Habermas’ own method of reconstruction. Habermas’ ‘reconstruction’ does not explain how the intrinsic goal of a theory is obtained. The goal of a theory is constituted by its means, and the means are constituted by the goal. In other words, identifying the goal of a method cannot precede the reconstruction of its means. Such a method would mean to know what a theory is about before we know the theory. Habermas can therefore only claim to have the same goal as Marx; but, if he does not reconstruct the original goal, then his claim to have the same goal is meaningless. I will demonstrate this thesis in the following part.

143 Rockmore emphasizes Habermas’ concern with the distinction of work and interaction at several occasions. Habermas’ critique of the uncritical attitude of Marx becomes a lesser concern for Habermas. Thus, Rockmore senses a further conflict in Habermas’ critique: “If the epistemological problem is not a central concern, then there is no reason to criticize Marx for his possible failure in this regard. Second, it would be inconsistent to continue to scrutinize Marx’s view as the necessary source of a theory of knowledge in the Kantian sense since Habermas is here mainly concerned to criticize historical materialism as an economic theory” (Rockmore 1989, 92).
3.1.2 Habermas’ Concept of Reconstruction

The lack of clarity of Habermas’ relation to Marx is caused by Habermas’ unclear method. Pedersen, for example, states: “[…] it is surprising that his method, rational reconstruction, has not caused more debate” (Pedersen 2008, 457). In the following, I will therefore look at Habermas’ method.

In theory, we can distinguish different models of historical development. We can deal with a theory of entire replacement, or with a theory of continuation, in which we somehow preserve the intrinsic goal and replace mistaken arguments of the theory. Habermas proposes a variation of the latter: “Rekonstruktion bedeutet in unserem Zusammenhang, daß man eine Theorie auseinandernimmt und in neuer Form wieder zusammensetzt, um das Ziel, das sie sich gesetzt hat, besser zu erreichen“ (Habermas 1976, 9). In this sense, Habermas’ reconstruction is supposed to reconstruct Marx’s means without, however, replacing the goal. It also suggests that something of the method will be preserved. In this sense, it must mean a theory of continuation. With regard to this, however, Rockmore, finds the following passage that, according to him, alters Habermas’ idea of reconstruction and makes it thus more problematic:

With the preceding investigation I want to introduce a theory of communicative action, which clarifies the normative foundations of social theory. The theory of communicative action should offer an alternative for the no longer defensible philosophy of history [die unhaltbar gewordene Geschichtsphilosophie] to which the older critical theory was still bound. It puts itself forward as the framework within which the interdisciplinary study of the precise model of capitalist modernization can again be taken up [wieder aufgenommen werden kann] (The Theory of Communicative Action, II, pp.342-343, according to Rockmore 1989, 95).

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Looking at this passage, Rockmore emphasizes the following problem: if Habermas aims to replace something called “philosophy of history”, then his reconstruction cannot be read as a theory of continuation, but must mean a theory of replacement (see Rockmore 1989, 95). Furthermore, if reconstruction is supposed to take another theory apart and then to put it together in order to achieve the theory’s intrinsic goal, then the question of whether the goal can be clarified before we reconstruct the theory itself remains. In order to explain this argument, I need to introduce some general points about the idea of continuation.

Kant believed in the idea of replacement as it can be demonstrated with regard to his Copernican Turn (see Rockmore 1989, 2). It is a “shift from one epistemological model to another”, according to Kant, an entire transformation of the direction of explanation (Rockmore 1989, 2). Hegel, on the contrary, approached philosophy in a sharp contrast to Kant. He believed that a theory as the result of a historical compression of thoughts has to be worked out with regard to its historical presuppositions. Rockmore writes: “As a result, he [Hegel] substitutes a view of theory reconstruction for the more widely prevalent view of theory replacement” (Rockmore 1989, 3). Thus growth is […] an ongoing process of the reconstruction of earlier, imperfect theories in order to better attain their goals. His goal is not simply to replace one theory by another one, namely his own; it is rather to carry forward the aims of prior positions in his own thought” (Rockmore 1989, 3). So Hegel focuses on a synthesis of historical ideas, and, according to Rockmore, this includes exegesis, a standard that Habermas dismisses: “Mein Interesse an Marx […] ist […] nicht historisch-philologisch“ (Habermas 1976, 9). In other words, Habermas does not seek to provide a detailed study of the works of other philosophers, but more so a synthesis of different core concepts that he identifies as important and that
represent his theory rather than the theory of others. Reconstruction, in this sense, must mean being inspired by the arguments of others and bringing them together under one’s own agenda. Furthermore, philosophy, as Hegel defends, is a history of attempts to prove that being and thought are the same (see Rockmore 1989, 3). This includes that “it [i.e. philosophy] is rather to bring together in a single analysis all that is of value in the preceding tradition, in order to prove, and not merely assert, the identity of thought and being” (Rockmore 1989, 3). In other words, it is the question of how a method should be possible, before we have started the process of investigation. The more important question is thus the relation of epistemology to history. Identifying the goal is, if this is accepted, a lesser concern, since a goal can vary largely depending on the status of working out the theory. Habermas, on the contrary, includes a goal that he, according to his denial of teleological positions, should avoid. He must be clear that setting up a telos is by no means an activity without interest. Moreover, even his method of critique does not ultimately derive such a goal. The problem of the historical continuation is also related to a denial of the “doctrine of the incompatibility of opposites” (Rockmore 1989, 3). This means that in a historical progression the opposite view sharpens the theory and thus belongs to the theory itself, or, if we accept that theories are relative to their history, the opposite view must be somehow acknowledged on a historical basis. For this reason, a historical approach to philosophy appears to be incompatible with the idea of incompatibility. I say this, because I want to raise not only the question of whether a goal can be identified beforehand, but because I also want to raise the question of determining the overall goal of a theory itself. This means, if the goal is expressed in a proposition, it will still have a relation to other goals that are

\[\text{\textsuperscript{145}}\] If this is not a contradiction in itself.
contradictory with respect to the goal itself. Such problems can only be addressed with a method that accepts that goals are open to change.¹⁴⁶

Certainly, the distinction between a theory of so-called continuation and abandonment draws a sharp contrast, which is unlikely to occur empirically.¹⁴⁷ For Habermas’ concept of reconstruction it is hard to determine how the relation to former theories must be grasped (see Rockmore 1989, 5). But it is clear that his theory presents itself with regard to two self-proclaimed goals, namely to “develop a reconstruction of historical materialism”, and “developing a theory of communicative action” (Rockmore 1989, 5). The question emerges whether a theory of communicative action is a consequence of historical materialism, or whether it replaces or is intended to replace its predecessor (see Rockmore 1989, 5).

In any case, even more problematic is the assumption of identifying someone’s goals correctly. Rockmore writes with this regard: “But it is doubtful that the goal of a theory can be unambiguously identified” (Rockmore 1989, 11). In fact, most readers vary in their interpretation. The Neo-Kantians, for example, display an enormous variety of interpretation (see Rockmore 1989, 11). Yet, they all claim to be direct followers of Kant. Given these few indications, it is at least questionable whether Habermas’ reconstruction can identify the “intrinsic goal” of a historical materialism (Rockmore 1989, 11).

Obviously in his book “Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus”, Habermas presupposes a clearly identified Marxian goal, without explicitly saying what this goal is. If, however, Habermas theory is composed holistically, it will be hard to identify the goal in a

¹⁴⁶ Dialectics might be necessary here, but Habermas discourse theory relies more on the objections of discourse participants.
¹⁴⁷ See Rockmore: “So far we have been treating the notions of theory of reconstruction and theory of replacement as alternative views of conceptual progress. But it would be an error to regard the distinction between these concepts as absolute” (Rockmore 1989, 17).
single, atomistic phrase. For this reason, Habermas theory of reconstruction is ambiguous right from its beginning, since, according to the paradigm that Habermas defends, a goal is worked out in its relation to history, as opposed to being presupposed or identified.

The general goal of Habermas’ theory can be described as relating theory to practice, but, of course, it needs more elaboration. It would be, however, absurd to read each sentence of Habermas under the premise that it is supposed to relate theory and practice. It is as much absurd as relating every single sentence of Hegel to the ultimate goal of absolute spirit, or to presuppose a clear goal for Marx.

Reconsidering the arguments that I have given above, paraphrasing goals right from the beginning should serve only as a heuristic, in order to reconstruct the theory itself. What does Habermas therefore pursue in his theory? In the end, the question comes down to investigate the means that Habermas employs. With regard to the means, it is fairly clear that Habermas wants us to detach from the perspective of consciousness and shift to a theory of communication. This shift to an anti-metaphysical philosophy might explain models of emancipation on a small, individual scale. Is this, however, also true for a theory of emancipation on a larger historical scale? I claim that this is the question that the Habermasian theory sets for itself. So far, however, I cannot entirely clarify the goal of Habermas’ theory for reasons mentioned above.\textsuperscript{148}

Now, there are different consequences of how to proceed with an analysis of Habermas’ theory. First of all, I will focus on his concrete steps toward replacing Marxian means with his idea of relating theory and practice through communication. Without presupposing the final result of either Marx’s or Habermas’ theory, we need to look at both thinkers concretely.

\textsuperscript{148} Firstly, identifying the goal of a theory is a historical task, so that it is questionable if we can identify it before we deal with the theory. Secondly, every definition of such a goal must demonstrate this goal with regard to the means that are used.
Afterwards, I will come back to the epistemological part of his theory and its relation to the linguistic turn.

3.2 Theory in Relation to Practice and Marx

The relation of theory and practice is one of the major topics of Critical Theory. It reaches back to an original conflict that Marx identified in Hegel. Habermas wants to go beyond Marx and Hegel (see Rockmore 1989, 51). He attributes, however, a positivist approach to Marx, while actually Marx’s position emerges from the Hegelian position. Marx is a materialist who still deals with the problem of identity, inaugurated by Hegel. I will therefore demonstrate that Habermas’ perspective on Marx is distorted.

In broad terms, it comes down to the question of whether the Hegelian approach can demonstrate the identity of subject and object, a project that was inaugurated by Kant’s Copernican turn, and one that Marx will criticize later. Yet, Marx will not reject it in terms of a positivism, but develop a materialist idealism. This is the idea that we have to approach the question of identity through an analysis of the society and not as a question of the mind. Kant wanted to prove that the subjective conditions of sensibility and understanding can be justified as constitutive for knowledge. Hegel, who does not assume a subject that can be thought without its origination, and thus has a different approach from Kant, approaches the question of identity with regard to the development of experiencing humans in their civic societies through ethics, art and religion. Habermas assumes that Hegel presupposes a successful demonstration that subject and object are identical, which is sometimes described as Idealism (see Rockmore 1989, 53). If such an identity between subject and object is ascribed to Hegel, we can say that positivism is a direct rejection of Hegel’s idealism. For Hegel, nature, however, is more complicated than being
merely the result of the mind and thus it is not easy to claim that positivism rejects specifically Hegelian philosophy. Rather, it rejects what it takes to be Hegel’s idealism. Marx can be seen as dealing with the complications arising from Hegel’s perspective and he does not simply switch to positivism, which is also falsely identified as his materialism.

With regard to such a mistaken interpretation of Hegel, Rockmore identifies the following position in Habermas: “For Hegel nature has mind as its presupposition, whereas for Marx, who supposedly inverts this relation, nature is the ground of mind” (Rockmore 1989, 53). This position is a simplification and we need to have a closer look. According to his Early Manuscripts, Marx has certainly a critique of Hegel in mind:

Hegel’s Encyclopedia, beginning as it does with Logic […] and ending with Absolute Knowledge – with the self-conscious, self-comprehending, philosophic or absolute […] abstract mind – is in its entirety nothing but the display, the self-objectification, of the essence of the philosophic mind, and the philosophic mind is nothing but the estranged mind of the world thinking within its self-estrangement – i.e., comprehending itself abstractly. Logic […] is alienated thinking, and therefore thinking which abstracts from nature and from real man (Marx 1978, 146).149

Marx’ view relies on an observation that the Hegelian endeavor, if it started with the Logic, would start with an abstract identity achieved in the type of a logic that grasps all development solely in logical categories. His argument is that abstract thinking itself depends on historical conditions of production, and without acknowledging this premise the theory would start on the wrong foot.

If, however, we do not accept that Hegel achieves identity in the absolute idea, but only points out the self-othering that requires further proof [Bewährung], then the anthropological

account of the *Philosophy of Spirit* would be primary. Hegel’s *Logic* would then only be a specific realm of pure thought, but that needs to be applied to nature as approving its value (Hegel uses the term ‘Bewährung’). Since Hegel’s account is circular, it would also be false to accuse him of starting with wrong foundations, because he then does not have foundations.

But Marxian critique is not so simple as to criticize Hegel for starting with logic. Marx basically takes a turn that is Hegelian by understanding objects “as arising from objective activity, rooted in the real labor process” (Rockmore 1989, 53). For Marx, it is not logic, but work/labor\(^{150}\) that is the fundamental, epistemological category of all philosophical inquiry. Marx develops this materialism from a rather idealist conception. Idealism and materialism might therefore not stand in the strongest contrast, which Habermas assumes in accordance with positivism and later with respect to the analytic tradition. On the contrary, Marx’s concept of social labor is inseparable from the question of the identity that is achieved in the object. By this I mean that the achieved and acknowledged object is part of a subjective activity that is a result of the current superstructure in which humans are living.

Rockmore attributes a materialist interpretation of Marx to Habermas: “In a word, Marx’s materialism is said to consist in the fact that for the activity of thought he substitutes material production, in which political economy replaces formal logic” (Rockmore 1989, 54). Before, we come to a conclusion about the relation of theory and practice, we have to see whether this sort of materialism is Marx’s intention. I will make a series of remarks about Marx’s unclear relation to materialism in the following point.

\(^{150}\) I use both of these terms interchangeably, since the literature translates the term “Arbeit” differently.
3.2.1 Marx’s Idealist Materialism or Materialist Idealism

The holistic philosophy of Hegel accentuates the priority of thinking as an ongoing critique. In this sense, it is rather difficult to ascribe a final position to Hegel. Thus, the question of the status of nature is already two sided for Hegel. We can approach nature with regard to the \textit{finite} ends of man. Then, nature itself is the trivial object of human interaction. At the beginning of his \textit{Philosophy of Nature} Hegel, for example, states:

But if this way of considering the matter starts from particular \textit{finite} ends, on the one hand it makes them into presuppositions whose contingent content may in itself be even insignificant and trivial (Hegel, PoN §245, 3).

So considering the starting point from merely finite ends, makes nature trivial and all that matters is the mind. Nevertheless, Hegel sees human beings in their nature as included in nature. In this form human nature presents itself as a riddle:

Nature confronts us as a riddle and a problem, whose solution both attracts and repels us: attracts us, because Spirit is presaged in Nature; repels us, because Nature seems an alien existence, in which Spirit does not find itself. (Hegel, PoN §245, 2).

As Hegel describes this riddle, it is actually the problem that nature is taken to be outside of us, but at the same time it has to be a part of us. It is in the first instance contingent, but also part of our production and thus not merely contingent. It is a product of our objective forces that are controlled and are not controlled by ourselves. Hegel investigates this as the self-positing of the concept that grasps content as in-itself and for-itself, and its own activity according to the same distinction. In the \textit{Logic} and in the \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit} this self-positing causes a cascade of self-moving conceptual experiences and reflections that will be grasped in Hegel’s dialectic as forms of a mind-internal or phenomenological investigation.
Marx underlines this achievement of Hegel’s philosophy. He sees Hegel’s “outstanding” in the fact that Hegel grasped this human condition as the dialectic of negativity:

The outstanding thing of Hegel’s Phenomenology and of its final outcome - that is, the dialectic of negativity as the moving and generating principle - is thus first that Hegel conceives the self-genesis of man as a process, conceives objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and as transcendence of this alienation; that he thus grasps the essence of labour and comprehends objective man – true, because real man – as the outcome of man’s own labour “ (Marx, 1978, 112).

Marx acknowledges this important labor of spirit, which is also the experience of consciousness that every discovered immediacy turns into a mediated cognition. According to Marx, man grasps himself as this production that produces him as an object and a subject. Marx, however, underlines that this self-alienating split can be just mediated within a society by labor. According to Marx, “[t]he real, active orientation of man to himself as a species-being”, namely to identify himself, must be related to an act that is in his species “powers” (Marx 1978, 112). For Marx species power is labor and only possible “as the result of history” (Marx 1978, 112). However, this “only possible form of estrangement”, labor, is the substance that we are confronted with as human beings, because we are the self-produced products of difference towards a pursued identity (Marx 1978, 112). The focus for Marx shifts, therefore, from a unification of a self-estranged mind that can, according to Marx, only give a self-estranged identity, namely abstraction, to the real products of what mind produces. We shift from the internal experiences of consciousness to the material differences that are in our society. The resulting material difference of this production is man himself. It is not about the mind-internal completion of the circle that is important for Marx, but rather the riddle that human beings come up with themselves as products in their history, certainly an objectifying history that produces classes. Here, humans cannot
entirely unify themselves for themselves, but they have to seek for a solution in their history of production, which includes the production of themselves.

This short interpretation positions Marx in between what is called materialism and idealism, but also highlights Hegel from another perspective. Hegel, as much as Marx, is, in fact, interested in this movement of man in history who is in nature and yet beyond it. If this is true, it is hard to make the ultimate distinction between materialism and idealism, meaning that either nature depends on the mind or mind depends on nature. Nature, for Hegel, is rather the self-positing of spirit (or the concept) and Marx, in contrast, does not want to describe this self-positioning abstractly but concretely in societies.

Besides the social rupture of man in his double-nature, I would like to emphasize again that Marx takes labor as the epistemological foundation for what we grasp as reality or materialism. He writes:

Whenever real, corporeal man, man with his feet firmly on the solid ground, man exhaling and inhaling all the forces of nature, establishes his real, objective essential powers as alien objects by his externalization, it is not the act of positing which is the subject in this process: it is the subjectivity of objective essential powers, whose action, therefore, must also be something objective (Marx 1978, 115).

So Marx clearly focuses on “the subjectivity of objective essential powers.” This means that the subject produces objective results by being its own result, not as an abstract mind, but as an experiencing human being who is embedded in societies. This holds also true for our theoretical reasoning, since we usually claim intuitively that our subjective claims can be demonstrated as objective. In other words, we claim that subjective production relies on something that is not subjective and can therefore be demonstrated as objective. This means our double-nature, or in Hegelian terms the self-positing of the concept, desires ourselves as an objective product of our
own subjective production. In this production our nature turns out to be not having a nature, because it is subjective, but also as a nature that is not relying on ourselves and is thus somewhat objective. Thus, it is correct to focus on the process of this ongoing objectifying labor that means nothing else than producing objects in the form of an eternal recurrence of our double-nature. Therefore Marx proceeds: “his \textit{objective} product only confirms his \textit{objective} activity, establishing his activity as the activity of an objective, natural being” (Marx 1978, 115). So the subjective activity can be reinterpreted as an activity that produces objects and is therefore objective, but it also confirms itself by doing so in the produced object. This object can be a product right in front of us, but as Marx shows later in the forms of self-estrangement, the object can also be man who produces himself and is produced as, for example, a class object.

This self-production is what I will also grasp as the truth of the Hegelian open historical system: the subject in its production of its subjectively objective reality, namely its being part of the objective production, is itself the production. This production which must be the final result of all absolute thinking is at the same time idealist and materialist, because by searching for a whole it constantly brings up its double-nature of having a nature of not-having a nature in the historical products and even as history itself. It posits itself in difference to itself. Marx’ hassle with this phenomenon is then expressed in his idea of alienation.

When thought therefore reconsiders its own thoughts as objective products, the question of idealism and materialism (or realism)\textsuperscript{151} suddenly disappears and our riddle, as Hegel described it above, emerges. The unity of estrangement is therefore not found in abstract thinking, but in the most original production of a double-natured being. On this ground the key passage of the Hegelian philosophy in his Logic becomes clearer. Hegel states:

\textsuperscript{151} Marx uses the term ‘real’ which I interpret as close to ‘material’.
“The absolute freedom of the Idea, however, is that it does not merely pass over into life, nor that it lets life shine within itself as finite cognition, but that, in the absolute truth of itself, it resolves to release out of itself into the freedom the moment of its particularity or of the initial determining and otherness, [i.e.] the immediate Idea as its reflexion, or itself as Nature. (Hegel EL §244, 307) 152

This passage of Hegel’s Logic is well known. After having subordinated every determination to the power of the idea, the idea has to release itself freely. Here, Marx remarks that the common Hegelians suffered “terrible headaches” (Marx 1978, 123) in interpreting the question of idealism and realism (I intend to use term ‘materialism’ for ‘realism’ here), which probably was most prominent here (I add, if it were a question of idealism and realism). Instead, the focus was always on the products that confirm the objectivity of labor of spirit that would be otherwise without meaning.

Marx denies that Hegel was clear enough to grasp this objectivity of the subjective production within a double-nature. Hegel’s release of the idea was “nothing else but abstraction” (Marx 1978, 124) and it is questionable what ‘freely’ means. Particularly, the “self-absorption” of the idea releasing something that was “hidden in itself only as an abstraction” is for Marx a turn into idealism and thus a turn into abstract ideology not recognizing its underlying concepts (Marx 1978, 123). It is also clear that the idea without anything more than itself is nothing more than mere fantasy. Therefore, Marx identifies the negative consequence of a philosophy that is merely lost in empty thinking: It is boredom that he defines as “the longing for content” (Marx 1978, 123). Being condemned to think emptily the same again and again without taking notice of its real production is a problem of idealistic thought that needs a solution, because it does not grasp the real problems at hand. Marx’s

solution is therefore to focus on the products, instead of just releasing them, while the product is a part of a double-nature. So Marx underlines that the focal point is to look freely at ones abstractions as the real objective product (Marx 1978, 124). The most objective product, as I add, however, is man himself in his double-nature.

To summarize: for Marx, Hegel’s objectification of self-consciousness has led to alienation. So the work of the mind should not be uplifted as the highest result, but as, I would say, the most problematic result. For Marx, man is a natural product that is the objectification of his spirit-labor and so he is finally confronted with the open question of what to do with his nature as the product of his labor. The question of mankind is left open and is thus not teleological. If my interpretation is correct and not only controversial, then it is more difficult to propose a goal of Marx’s philosophy, as Habermas does. In other terms, we are confronted with the question of an open, historical system, namely our society of producers that has to be guided within the processes of production regarding their nature by respecting their nature of not having a nature. I take this production of man to be history.

3.2.2 Habermas’ Empirical Interpretation of Marx

As already pointed out, Habermas follows a different interpretation of Marx. For him, Marx simply focuses on the empirical fact of production that is an expression of the current system in a given society. Thus, he quotes Marx: “Wie die Individuen ihr Leben äußern, so sind sie. Was sie sind fällt also zusammen mit ihrer Produktion, sowohl damit, was sie produzieren, als auch damit, wie sie produzieren.“ (cited in Habermas 1976, 146). While I would interpret this passage as a moment of Marx’s materialist idealism or idealist materialism, Habermas detects a rebuttal of the ‘phenomenalism’ of subjects that are not understood with respect to their development in
their societies. He also detects a connotation of Marx’s turn towards mere materialism as a kind of positivism. Marx, according to Habermas, favors interest over ideas (see Habermas 1976, 146). Humans are not abstract, but social beings. With respect to this, he quotes Marx again: “Das menschliche Wesen ist kein dem Individuum innewohnendes Abstraktum. In seiner Wirklichkeit ist es das Ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse“ (cited in Habermas 1976, 146). At the same time, Habermas sees here a rejection of a so-called methodological individualism, which is later also his main criticism of Brandom in Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung. For Habermas, Marx’s rejection of Hegel’s abstraction is a turn toward empirical sociology. This suggests that Marx is more an empirical revolutionist, an interpretation which is also mentioned in the Stanford Encyclopedia: “Karl Marx (1818–1883) is best known not as a philosopher but as a revolutionary, whose works inspired the foundation of many communist regimes in the twentieth century” (Wolff 2017).153 Habermas’ treatment of “historical materialism […] as an empirically based philosophy of history, susceptible of empirical refutation” (Rockmore 1989, 33) takes away the philosophical dimension in Marx. For Habermas it is, however, also a fact that historical materialism does not rely on first principles, but relies on practice, which makes it “empirically rooted” (Rockmore 1989, 33). Rockmore identifies here the main problem:

The result is a tension, which Habermas is unable to resolve, between the approach to historical materialism as an empirically based form of philosophy, and the insistence on its ‘location’ between philosophy and science. Certainly, Habermas’ later tendency to refer to historical materialism as a social theory does not resolve this issue, since it leaves open the problem of the status of social theory (Rockmore 1989, 34).

If philosophy were empirical, then we would certainly deny any discussion of its normative status, because then it could only describe. We need, however, guidance for moral questions that

we cannot simply decide by the current theories of observation. Since history is, moreover, not only an objective fact, but a result of human production, we need to become aware of its course in terms of concepts and not observations. So Habermas pushes our interpretation of Marx in a problematic direction. By his focus on the empirical side of Marx, Habermas loses the original connection to the Hegelian project.

Habermas proceeds with his rather empirical interpretation of Marx: “[...] die spezifisch menschliche Lebensweise läßt sich erst hinreichend charakterisieren, wenn wir das Konzept der gesellschaftlichen Arbeit mit dem des familialen Organisationsprinzips verbinden“ (Habermas 1976, 152). Habermas perceives the family not only through its a relationship to production and thus attempts to broaden what he takes to be Marx’s empirical approach. Yet, he overlooks that Hegel already worked out these relations in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and that Marx maintains this relationship to Hegel on a philosophical level. Moreover, the concept of labor that Habermas uses, in order to distinguish it from family structures, is not the labor that I attempted to explain above as the philosophical problem of consciousness approaching itself, but the plain labor of people who are immersed in a historically, exploitative, but in the long run improving structure. On the basis of these observations, Habermas claims that the broader structures of history are not entirely related to these laboring subjects (see Habermas 1976, 154). His criticism is then that there is no discrete series of social forms of production that Marx can derive. In other words, Marx’s history is not based on the ‘real’ development of “hominids” during their differentiation into humans. Habermas claims that, unlike Marx, he defends a weak naturalism, namely that the development of our culture is only contingently related to our natural constitution. The analysis of the empirical subject of Marx is therefore not sufficient in order to
explain all societal structures. So Habermas rejects Marx as a positivist, which neglects his philosophical effort of relating to Hegel by a rather philosophical concept of labor.

For Habermas, progress of both forms, labor and family, are then measured in terms of truth values and moral correctness [Richtigkeit] (see Habermas 1976, 156). These two forms of discourse are established in society, but have also no universal justification. They are weakly justified by virtue of our nature that we can observe empirically. So Habermas expects that these presuppositions of a historical materialism can be justified by means of sociology. Consequently, he directs us into a non-philosophical, but empirical analysis of the relationship between theory and practice. In other words, Habermas wants to reject Marx’s supposed positivism and wants to renew the empirical dimension of sociology.

It comes down to a correct interpretation of Marx and Marxism. Marxism, according to Rockmore: “[…] was invented by Friedrich Engels, Marx’s close friend, staunch political colleague, longtime financial supporter, and tendentious editor of his unpublished writings. […] There is no alternative to distinguishing between Marx and Marxism in order to understand philosophical Marxism” (Rockmore 2008, 54). This major distinction that Rockmore stresses is the problem of holding Marxism and Marx apart. According to him, Marx himself was probably a trained Hegelian, which would move him into the direction of German Idealism. While Marx has, at least, some kind of affiliation to Idealism, Engels interpretes Marx as a positivist. Rockmore writes on this problem: “It is a major mistake to conflate the doctrines of the disciple and the master. In the same way that Kant is not a Kantian, nor Plato a Platonist, Marx is not a Marxist, as he is reputed to have observed” (Rockmore 1989, 6). Marxism is instead the discipline that was started by Engels (Rockmore 1989, 6). According to Rockmore, Habermas is
unclear on the “degree of the continuity of Marx and Marxism” (Rockmore 1989, 7). So Habermas comprehends “Marxist theory as a philosophy of history formulated with an explicit political intent, and scientifically falsifiable” (Rockmore 1989, 34). The problem that Marx identifies is that “ideology rests on […] a socially distorted form of society” (Rockmore 1989, 37). This has the consequence of “a distorted apprehension of itself on the level of consciousness” (Rockmore 1989, 37). The problem of a subject that is not outside of its historical production and the distorted consciousness creates the problem of the possibility of a historical or immanent critique. In this sense, Marx is not a materialist in the sense of positivism, but he acknowledges the empirical conditions that form the subject. We should not commit to an entirely materialist interpretation and at least acknowledge the philosophical elements that are based on non-empirical observation, namely the distinction between subjects producing objects and subjects producing themselves in the process of production. This is necessary, since a theory of self-alienation cannot be observed empirically. Rather, it is a condition of cognition, more precisely, an investigation of what must have preceded cognition. Habermas, relying on the superstructure argument of Marx, neglects such philosophical arguments. With regard to this superstructure, Marx states, however:

“In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness” (Marx 1859/1978, 4).

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154 “what he calls historical materialism is clearly Marxist” (Rockmore 1989, 7).
The argument for a superstructure expresses the belief that economic relations build the foundation for how humans perceive their society and themselves. The superstructural claim is controversial, since it is unclear whether the whole of human consciousness is constituted by these relations or only distorted. Having a distorted self-relationship, however, does not mean that this blocks all self-recognition or the social development of life-forms besides production. Whether Marx claims that such a superstructure is the fundamental, anthropological condition, largely determines whether he is read as a philosopher or as social scientist close to an absolute, social constructivism. By ‘absolute, social constructivism’ I mean that the human being in its mental constitution is entirely composed from its social interactions.

Moreover, it is also not entirely clear whether Marx plans to achieve presuppositionless phenomenological self-reflection that is independent from the society. Rather, he says that we are at least partially immersed in society and cannot escape this fact. Rockmore summarizes this as follows: “As noted, Habermas here attributes to Marx the intention to provide a presuppositionless phenomenological self-reflection. The result of Marx’s failure is a supposedly positivist reduction of the act of the self-production of the human species to work” (Rockmore 1989, 55-56). In other words, all these unclear interpretations form a certain direction that Habermas needs for distinguishing his approach from a positivist, historical materialism. This, however, is done at the expense of discussing Marx.

What follows from all of this? Habermas asks which sort of recognition is possible in historical materialism, but he presupposes that materialism and idealism are clearly divided in Marx’s theory. According to the Early Manuscripts, this is difficult to defend. Habermas believes that we should not fall into a naïve scientific scheme (see Habermas 1976, 10), which he supposes is the case for Marx’s “materialist concept of synthesis” (Habermas 1976, 10). So what
is the foundation of a Marxist sociology for Habermas? It is the normative foundation of claims
that we make if we communicate, and this can also be demonstrated for the natural sciences.
Since there is a history of these normative foundations, Habermas’ further complaint about Marx
is that he did not analyze the cultural superstructure of the economic relations. These, however,
would also play a role in the cultural development of societies and their normative constitution
(Habermas 1976, 12). In other words, Habermas reduces Marx to a materialist in the positivist
sense. If Marx, however, has another foundation or ground than Habermas assumes, then
Habermas’ argument is directed against positivism, but not against Marx. Altogether, the
position on Marxism will complicate Habermas relationship to Hegel who he rejects as an
idealist who commits to an ahistorical paradigm of conscioussness.

3.2.3 The Relation between Theory and Practice for Habermas

After discussing Habermas’ ‘reconstruction’ of Marxism that underestimates the relationship
between materialism and idealism, the question remains as to whether accounts of knowledge are
socially relevant (see Rockmore 1989, 171). There is a tension between Habermas’ empiricist
‘Marxian’ goal of human emancipation and his Kantian, rigorously epistemological program
according to which knowledge is constitutive for emancipation (see Rockmore 1989, 174).

In Knowledge and Human Interest (1968),155 Habermas wants to replace the positivism
that he identifies in Marx by a non-causal interpretation of knowledge that leads us to
emancipation. It is not simply nature that guides us towards better societies, but a capability of
critical self-examination or reflection. Knowledge and Human Interest represents, therefore,

155 Habermas, Jürgen. Knowledge and Human Interest. Translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro. New York: Polity Press,
1987.
Habermas’ anthropological investigation before he comes to his theory of communicative action. In *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981) Habermas will replace the merely anthropological discussion of emancipation by a discussion of an ideal communication model that guides our practical discourses and finally leads to emancipation. He thus cures a problem that has revealed itself in his earlier theory of emancipation, namely to expose the correct normative basis of emancipation. His approach is quasi-transcendental, since he attempts to work out the conditions that guide our current communicative situation.

On the basis of this communicative model, there is seemingly no need for substantialism. By ‘substantialism’ I mean the assumption of universally valid metaphysical principles for our societies. Habermas’ anti-substantialist emancipation and his subscription to Kantian rigor, however, create a problem. If we deny substantial truths, then the question remains how we secure the procedures that guide our societies. In other words, how can a desubstantialized philosophy clarify what we have to do in our society in order to achieve emancipation?

With Habermas’ pragmatic turn, he further turns away from the consciousness paradigm and turns toward a formalism. Habermas’ method is therefore not a dialectical consideration of the content of our current, historical society that would be open to historical change. Instead, he follows a quasi-transcendental demonstration of the linguistic preconditions of our communication. Emancipation is hidden in our linguistic capability. This means by entering a discourse, we produce, at the same time, an ideal of how to communicate. This ideal should guide our society.

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156 In his work *Erläuterungen zur Diskursethik* (1991), it will become clear that ethics has to be universal, formal, cognitivist and deontological (Habermas 1991, 11). Habermas, Jürgen. *Erläuterungen zur Diskursethik*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.
Before Habermas works out the linguistic theory of emancipation, he already introduces the third interest of humans in *Knowledge and Human Interest*: “Orientation toward technical control, toward mutual understanding in the conduct of life, and toward emancipation from seemingly ‘natural’ constraints establish the specific viewpoints from which we can apprehend reality as such” (Habermas 1987, 311). The balance between our interest in social harmony, our interest of knowledge and our interest in emancipation create apprehension of “reality as such.” The idea is that neither representation, nor social harmony create objective standards of knowledge, but that a critical attitude of reflection will balance both former interests. The critical attitude will not “outwit” our natural interest, but it will make it transparent. By this emancipation of humans, nature obtains autonomy in us (see Habermas 1987, 311). Our nature therefore strives for emancipation through reflection. Habermas introduces this third form of interest, namely emancipation, that is supposed to bridge the tensions between our interest of social harmony and our interest in knowledge. This is not the Kantian idea of uninterested reason. Obviously, Habermas accepts that we are human beings with interests. In this sense, Habermas acknowledges the problem of ideological discourses, as discourses that are governed by hidden interests. The third form of critique is supposed to distinguish itself from the capitalist framework by virtue of reflection (Bohman, Rehg 2017). Particularly, this means that we have to make interests transparent. The critical self-investigation shall then eradicate power structures that were established during an overemphasize of the former interests.

I am going to discuss this third form of interest by introducing the three knowledge constitutive interests that Habermas identifies. I will briefly discuss all three interests with regard

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to Peirce’s semiotic triangle, which already combines Habermas’ early theory with his later theory of communicative action. This semiotic triangle postulates three semiotic relations that a subject experiences: the relation of a subject to a referent, the relation of subjects to subjects, and the relation of subjects to signs. However, before I focus on Habermas’ linguistic solution to the problem of theory and practice, I will explain the problem of theory and practice in more detail.

For Rockmore, epistemology and theories of social interaction stand in a tension to each other: “The problem is the real possibility of a view intended to be both epistemologically rigorous and socially relevant” (Rockmore 1989, 173). How can this tension be explained? We might, for example, have a clear account of what triangles are in trigonometry. But even if we had, it would be unclear how this knowledge should contribute to our understanding of history and human development. Does our enhanced knowledge of triangles lead to a better life or even to better politics? Even though we might work out the smallest parts of knowledge, the idea of leading up from small bits of knowledge to a theory of a whole is a bit optimistic. If, for example, our endeavors in such theoretical subjects as mathematics are guided by the theoretical conditions of success, then it is unclear if the criteria for success in small epistemological endeavors are the same or even similar at the macro-level of societies and their history. In conclusion, the first problem is to identify the criteria for success on the macro-societal level.

What can count as a success? To identify an idea of emancipation or even to point out an emancipation in our social form of communication provides such a criterion for micro-societal interactions, but the question remains if this criterion is applicable to the macro-levels of society. Indeed, it is a problem of sociology.

The extension of individual discourse structures into the sphere of larger societies is questionable. There is a tension between: “a micro-theory of rationality based on communicative
coordination and a macro-theory of the systemic integration of modern societies through such mechanisms as the market” (Bohman, Rehg 2017). So the goal is to “to overcome its one-sided version of rationalization” by implementing a sociological approach (Bohman, Rehg 2017). The theory of communicative action deals with a social problem and tries to introduce a sociological, empirical perspective on phenomena. This includes a rejection of large-scale explanations that was common for the Marxist theories before. Their comprehensiveness in terms of a story of reason lacks the “explanatory power” to explain phenomena all the way down (Bohman, Rehg 2017). They only expose a certain story of reason under which macro-scale phenomena are subsumed. Only interpreting society on the macro-level, however, makes theory not socially relevant, or does, at least, not show how it is socially relevant.

A second problem emerges with regard to the predictability of social change on the macro-level of societies. Theories of social change are hard to test. This means that a theory works best if we break it down to the most universal hypothesis. In other words, we might attempt to find something like the underlying cause for all occurrences. If we have one universal cause that gives sufficient explanation to the greatest amount of occurrences, we will have a theory with high informational value. Looking at theories of social change, however, we find that most of the time they are reflective. This means that we look at history or societal change only after the change has occurred. After the fact, we try to universalize principles from our observations. These principles are often very vague and do not qualify for absolute universals that predict further occurrences. They rather understand than explain. So, for example, students of the causes of World War I disagree broadly whether the assassination of Franz Ferdinand of Austria, the economic recession, or other events qualify as the cause of World War I. The understanding of our past is already difficult. If we, however, cannot even understand the past,
how then can we predict the future? If we cannot produce hypotheses that are applicable to the future, our theory is not socially relevant in the sense that it helps us to predict. I claim that reflections on the past help us to forge new concepts to understand the present. Yet, I think it is more complicated to claim that these concepts can guide our present moment. Habermas’ theory of emancipation might simplify this aspect. The question is whether the communication model can not only deliver an understanding of past social changes, but also whether the communication model can predict future change.

Third, a multitude of actors might have different features than the underlying behavior of a single actor. This can be expressed as the problem of emergence, or the so-called phenomenon of a third kind. This means that actors do not intend results on the macro-level, but that they unintentionally cause phenomena at the macro-level by their individual behavior. This further means that the individual reason of the micro-level might have different effects for societies on the macro-level. It is therefore unclear whether the improvement of individual discourse conditions will lead to better societies overall. It might even worsen the situation.

Habermas seems to have a link in mind that shall solve these problems of epistemological rigor with regard to communicative situations and their application to societies. Rockmore states:

In his theory of communicative action Habermas proposes a position which is obviously intended to combine the social relevance of Marx’s thought with the epistemological rigor of the critical philosophy. […] On the one hand, there are those, such as Plato, Kant, Husserl and even Whitehead […] on the other hand there are those, such as Aristotle, Hegel, and Marx, who are concerned to limit, or even to reject, some claims for the relevance of reason (Rockmore 1989, 173).

This means that Plato, for example, clearly assumes a final congruence of the good and truth as expressed in the ideal state. The question of the criteria of success, however, remains. So in this
case Plato’s theory of the ideal state appears to current readers as a fascist or inhuman state. His assumption that he in fact found a pathway from epistemology to a theory of the good can be doubted by looking at his results. This means that even if the leaders of societies were wise men, who achieved a perfect balance in their soul, it seems that at least their state is problematic. That knowledge makes better leaders is therefore an assumption that is not yet proven.

The problem reoccurs in Habermas who wants to secure the conditions for communicative success. He argues that this securing will lead to more just societies. In other words, better communicators achieve more truth, and better discourse societies achieve better social societies. Yet, it is hard and perhaps simply not possible to prove that a non-substantialism has these desirable results. I claim that without a criterion of success that is provided on a historically reflective basis, Habermas’ theory will encounter tremendous difficulties to demonstrate the validity of his theory. If he relies, for example, on empirical tests of his theory which he described in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962), and which should validate the new forms of public communication, then his theory seems to be outdated. The systems of power have become successfully immunized against the new and open democracy of the 1950s. It is not only that many leaders have found a way to assure their power democratically in a public sphere. It is more so that the free information that people share is equivalent to the misinformation people also distribute. The amplification of knowledge by new techniques is followed by the amplification of misinformation. The debate on climate change can be taken as such an example. Even though the discourses are free, that simply means that more people have access to the scientific information, and even though scientists become more and more certain about anthropogenetic climate change, the belief in climate change is declining. The number of climate
change deniers in the U.S. is a clear mismatch with regard to the beliefs of most scientists. Better conditions for discourse lead therefore not to better social results.

Habermas believes that a critique must be formulated on the basis of an interest in emancipation: “Knowledge-constitutive interests mediate the natural history of the human species with the logic of its self-formative process […]. But they cannot be employed to reduce this logic to any sort of natural basis” (Habermas 1987, 168). Here, Habermas identifies the “technical interest” that serves as a means for controlling our relationship to nature (Bohman, Rehg 2017). Yet, this technical interest cannot be the only interest that guides human lives. With regard to Peirce’s semiotic triangle the technical interest expresses the subject-reference-relation. The empirical sciences, based on this relation, aim to achieve testable hypotheses in order to create correct descriptions of experienced phenomena.

[…] the empirical-analytic sciences are distinguished by their treatment of the object domain as governed by predictable law-like regularities that allow for certain types of methodologically controlled techniques of inquiry that would be inappropriate for the interpretive sciences (Bohman, Rehg 2017).

The idea of such clearly distinguishable interests is problematic, even though Peirce’s triangle suggests that they are clearly separable. A simple linguistic discourse analysis will reveal that people rarely clarify truth-claims. The claim that every utterance can be transformed from an implicit utterance to an explicit utterance of the form ‘I claim that p is true in front of the current and whole future humanity’ is difficult to defend on the practical, linguistic level. This is not only problematic in terms of cognitive sciences. With regard to the cognitive sciences, our brain is too inert to produce explicit performatives that are hidden in implicit structures all the time.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Cognitive sciences rather assume a pragmatic level of interaction that they only describe. They do not assume that every implicit utterance has a clearly distinguishable performative and that it can be related to a clear interest.
But Habermas’ approach is also problematic with regard to the fact that a theoretical discourse is a learned discourse. For example, at this particular moment, we might agree on a kind of epistemologically rigorous talk. We follow rules that, however, can vary at another moment. Habermas’ strategy of simply introducing a relation between a subject and an object is too vague to describe how we achieve truth in epistemic discourses.

It is also difficult to identify the different interests in a normal conversation. It seems that Habermas relies here on a distinction between ‘systeme’ and ‘parole’ from a pragmatic stance. Yet, it seems languages cannot be ordered in a closed system of different sub-systems. So, for example, how can Habermas claim that there are only three interests that guide our discourses? Particularly the multiplicity of linguistic explanations why we communicate is one reason why research into language universals has declined over the last decades. Habermas’ explanation with regard to the semiotic triangle is a linguistic model, but does not give an unshakable explanation of how we communicate. Instead, he has to acknowledge that his argument is part of a historical moment. He himself relies here on the historical constellation after the linguistic and pragmatic turn that I described above. He believes that we can work out the contextual conditions of our utterances. Later, I will describe how he abandons this belief in *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung* (1999).

With regard to the subject-subject-relation, we can discuss the “interpretive, or cultural-hermeneutic sciences” resting on the “practical interest” of how to live in communities (see Bohman, Rehg 2017). Due to the fact that these discourses organize human behavior, they also play a significant role for the relation of communities to the objects of reference (Bohman, Rehg 2017). Yet, there is not necessarily an ahistorical criterion for the right practice. Rather, the practice is based on a commonly shared understanding of correctness during a historical moment.
In addition to these two interests, Habermas therefore identifies the third interest of reflection, “precisely a methodological reflection that aims to free science from its positivist illusions” (Bohman, Rehg 2017). In terms of the Theory of Communicative Action, this third interest can be understood through the relationship of the symbolic mediations, which an inter-subject endorses, and the inter-subjective exploration of language. This third interest derives its normative power from an intrinsic self-differentiation that can annihilate the power relations that the former forms of discourse build (see Rockmore 1989, 41). The former development of philosophy can then be revealed by a critical reflection of its development of power. I described this above as making interests transparent. Habermas’ suggests here that language must intrinsically include conditions for emancipation. His formal pragmatic, however, should not transcendentally deduce conditions for all discourses, but reveal empirically how discourse achieves this kind of emancipation by virtue of the concrete, historical development of language. The question remains whether Habermas sees this as a formal capability. Then, language and its critical capacities would not be related to history. The approach would be non-substantial and ahistorical.

Altogether, Habermas wants “to unmask concrete cases of personal self-deception and social-political ideology” (Bohman, Rehg 2017). The problem is, however, that in Knowledge and Human Interest Habermas cannot yet deliver a convincing basis for this normative standard. In the Stanford article this problem is described as follows:

These and other deficits of his analysis posed a challenge for Habermas that would guide a decade-long search for the normative and empirical basis of critique. Whatever the best path to the epistemic and normative basis for critique might be, it would have to pass a democratic test: that ‘in Enlightenment there are only participants’ […] Habermas will not resolve this methodological issue until a series of transitional studies in the 1970s culminates in his mature systematic work, The Theory of Communicative Action (Bohman, Rehg 2017).
I disagree with the Stanford suggestion that Habermas solves this conflict by the formal model of the *Theory of Communicative Action*. The problem is not only that the quasi-transcendental conditions that he derives from the ideal speech situation are formal, but also that the conditions cannot give us guidance for substantial problems. This problem was revealed in the later Sloterdijk-Habermas-debate that dominated the German debate during fall 1999 and resulted in a change of Habermas non-substantialist approach. His argument from the essay *Zur Zukunft der Menschlichen Natur* (2001) culminates in a substantialist argument for discourse ethics with regard to preimplantation diagnostics (PID). Habermas argues that we can forbid PID on the basis of the premises of the constitutional state, which should secure the communicative conditions for our society. An allowance of PID would then undermine these conditions for all participants of our community. In other words, Habermas derives substantialist laws that are universally true from his formal pragmatics. The whole argument is problematic, since, according to his position presented above, Habermas strictly denies a transcendental argument and argues that positions in a society are based on an empirically observable progression to which we critically relate. In *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung* (1999), Habermas paraphrases this position by arguing that the human being cannot not learn, but he abstains from saying what we learn. If Habermas changes his position in *Zur Zukunft der Menschlichen Natur*, then his former formal solution must be incomplete. After this publication, it looks as if a pragmatic account of morality must finally take metaphysical ideas into consideration. This is a drastic change in Habermas’ position and relativizes the idea that our societies emancipate themselves by better discourse structures. Critique is then not separable from content, and our project of reason is rather historically reflective and informed by the content.
To summarize, Habermas’ formal pragmatic approach resulted finally in the irrelevance of philosophy. As a result he had to compensate this pragmatic approach by a transcendental argument in Zur Zukunft der Menschlichen Natur. Habermas’ proposed earlier anti-metaphysics was probably founded in a fear of objective idealism that he identified in the Marxist philosophy as the consciousness paradigm. For him, this lays out a predestined history of humanity that demands revolution. Habermas’ turn towards the philosophies of language means a stronger rejection of viable, metaphysical topics. Habermas’ purification of philosophy makes it impossible for the philosopher to defend substantialist positions. The fear of error turns philosophy into an empty enterprise, or an empirically bound discussion that thus can hardly defend moral judgments. In this sense, Habermas philosophy cannot do more than criticize failures in current discourse structures. Without a notion of history and a relation of reflection to content that Hegel develops, Habermas’ relativism cannot produce an objective justification of progress. The lack of such a criterion is demonstrated in the Menschenparkdebatte. Habermas’ idea that the theoretical knowledge of discourses leads to better practice, cannot be proven, but turns out to be a suggestion.

We can come to a preliminary conclusion: In Habermas, we find a variation of the Marxist position that social practice interferes with our epistemological access to objects. Either it distorts the relationships of subjects to objects completely or, at least, partially. The original epistemological problem of recognition deals with the split between subject and object. The problem with a solution for this split occurs after the Hegelian view of philosophy as a history of reason with a teleological goal for human development. Teleology poses, therefore, another epistemological problem in creating an identity between being and thought. Being with regard to history is not simply a status of facts that has to be represented, but an evolving set of historical
approaches. The epistemological problem of reflecting on a criterion is intensified if history is part of the problem. This means that it is not only about the identification of an external object, but also about the production of the object in history, in which the subject itself is embedded. The question of where to place an empirical philosophy remains. Habermas develops an idea of critique, in order to deal with this problem. His turn towards formal pragmatics, however, loses its original meaning of a critique of the experiential conditions of human beings. Habermas’ philosophy is ultimately ahistorical, a criticism that Habermas himself will apply to Hegel.

3.3 Habermas and the Pragmatic Turn

I cannot discuss Habermas’ *Theory of Communicative Action* in detail. I can only indicate that Habermas’ desubstantialist solution for the universal basis of discourses is too formal to address problems such as preimplantation diagnostics. Despite these difficulties, Habermas’ Discourse Theory can still be investigated in its relationship to the pragmatic turn, which links his approach to analytic philosophy and Brandom’s formalist account of human interaction. The main question of the pragmatic turn is: how can meaning be justified by use? In other words, how can we replace theories of actual truths by procedural truths. I called this ‘the pragmatic integration of a reference-semantics’. It resembles Habermas’ move toward sociology. This means that we are not interested in actual truth anymore, but in the way of how we justify truths. The problem of an empty coherentism, however, will also pose a problem for Habermas’ theory.

Despite this dependence of truth on discourse conditions and thus a relativization of the concept of a reality in-itself, Habermas’ approach is supposed to be ontologically relevant, since
it still uses the concept of a reality that is for us (see Pihlström 2015, 99). Reality for us is grasped through communitive structures of discourse that can be justified ideally. The closer we come to the ideal of a discourse community, the closer we get to reality. In Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung (1999), Habermas, however, changes his concept of truth as ideal justifiability in discourses. Habermas describes what has motivated this change. He argues that we are referring to a commonly shared reality through discourse, which is, however, distorted by language. Particularly in his criticism of Brandom, he will reveal that such a presupposition of reality is problematic. However, he also argues that without a shared idea of reality, we would expose ourselves to a contextual skepticism so that no justification would be possible at all (see Levine 2010, 680). I will reconstruct his argument in the following paragraphs.

Habermas states: “Die Wirklichkeit, mit der wir unsere Sätze konfrontieren, ist keine »nackte« Wirklichkeit, sondern selber schon sprachlich imprägniert“ (Habermas 1999, 48). This statement denies that we have access to a mind-independent reality. Reality, however, is indirectly grasped in our language. The truth of a statement seems to be mediated only with regard to other sentences. Here, Habermas identifies the main problem of contextualism:


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Habermas discusses the problem of a frictionless coherentism. According to such a coherentism, claims can only be justified by already accepted claims. The problem is that we might have coherent systems, but our system could still be false. Habermas further analyzes his earlier solution of an ideal discourse:

Als Ausweg aus diesem Dilemma bot sich der Versuch an, das sprachtranszendenten Verständnis von Referenz mit einem sprachimmanenten Verständnis von Wahrheit als idealer Behauptbarkeit zu kombinieren. Demnach ist eine Aussage genau dann wahr, wenn sie unter den anspruchsvollen, pragmatischen Voraussetzungen rationaler Diskurse allen Entkräftungsversuchen standhalten würde, d.h. in einer idealen epistemischen Situation gerechtfertigt werden könnte (Habermas 1999, 48).

Habermas here discusses his earlier idea of a critical community that achieves truth by processes of communication guided by an ideal. Accordingly, truth is justified by ideal assertibility. This means that a claim is true if it could be defended against all attempts to deny it under ideal circumstances. We accept something as pragmatically true, if we can defend it against all reasonable objections during an actual discourse. In this sense, Habermas’ concept of truth is procedural. In its practice truth depends on the inclusion of all concerned members of the communication-community who have equal rights of communication. Habermas specifies these rules:

Diese Praxis beruht auf den idealisierenden Voraussetzungen (a) der Öffentlichkeit und vollständigen Inklusion aller Betroffenen, (b) der Gleichverteilung der Kommunikationsrechte, (c) der Gewaltlosigkeit einer Situation, die nur den zwanglosen Zwang des besseren Arguments zum Zuge kommen läßt, und (d) der Aufrichtigkeit der Äußerungen aller Beteiligten (Habermas 1999, 49).

Again truth is achieved by securing the social conditions for truth to occur. Yet, the question is whether the securing of ideal speech circumstances will actually achieve truth, or whether it only constructs another context. The possibility of a confirmation bias that exists between the
discourse participants cannot be excluded. Even under ideal conditions of the discourse, we might agree on something that is simply false and we might have no means to correct our false beliefs by merely discursive standards.

In *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung*, Habermas attempts therefore to repair his concept of truth as justifiability. He writes: “Diese prozedurale Fassung von Wahrheit als diskursive Einlösung von Wahrheitsansprüchen ist insofern kontraintuitiv, als Wahrheit offensichtlich kein »Erfolgsbegriff« ist“ (Habermas 1999, 50). Due to the epistemologically impossible connection of truth and justification, Habermas acknowledges now that there is no conceptual relation between truth and rational justifiability (see Habermas 1999, 50). In other words, something can be justified very well, but this does not guarantee its truth. This means better discourses do not necessarily lead to better insights of how the world really is. On the contrary, it is also questionable whether something that is true can be justified at all. Habermas draws the following conclusion:

Diese Einwände haben mich zu einer Revision veranlaßt, die den *beibehaltenen* Diskursbegriff der rationalen Akzeptabilität auf einen pragmatistisch gefaßten, nicht-epistemischen Wahrheitsbegriff bezieht, ohne damit »Wahrheit« an »ideale Behauptbarkeit« zu assimilieren (Habermas 1999, 51).

As a consequence, Habermas replaces his concept of truth as justifiability by a pragmatic conception of truth. This means that an actual living being has no doubts about truth in actu. In a word, truth is practice. Epistemic truth, on the contrary, only appears in the context of an opponent challenging our everyday practices (see Habermas 1999, 52). Truth is thus a derivative discourse from our normal course of action.

Habermas remarks that despite the impossibility of achieving truth the phenomenon of cooperation remains. Consequently, Habermas asks how it is possible that discourse participants
agree in a discourse, if truth is only artificially introduced (see Habermas 1999, 53). Actors have a pressure to act. This pressure leads them to processes of learning. Only if an acquired belief can be justified by a process of acquisition, they can defend this as true knowledge for acting (see Habermas 1999, 55). Habermas writes: “Aktoren, die mit der Welt zurechtkommen, konsumieren ihre Handlungsgewißheiten, aber für Subjekte, die sich im Rahmen von Diskursen ihres Wissens reflexiv vergewissern, sind das Wahrsein und die Fallibilität einer Aussage zwei Seiten derselben Medaille“ (Habermas 1999, 55). In other words, actors presuppose a mind-independent world in order to communicate practical failure. Then, it is not about epistemic truth, but it is the pragmatist question of how truth functions in our discourses. Levine remarks that “objectivity is rendered in the first instance not by our linguistically representing the world but through our acting upon it and within it” (Levine 2011, 7). Confronted with failure, we correct our practice, since the world does not collaborate (see Levine 2011, 7-8). Only after a failure, we will represent the world as “a totality of objects” in order to discuss a shared world (see Levine 2011, 8). We do not discuss facts but objects. In other words, Habermas proposes here a model of experience, according to which practice is primary. Theories will be built on the basis of our experiences.

Altogether the question emerges: Does Habermas give up on his former concept of Discourse Theory and does he come closer to a Hegelian conception of truth? Though he comes closer to a relativist account of truth, especially in his criticism of Brandom, he denies a return to Hegel on the basis of a misconception of Hegel. Independent from his rather pragmatist

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conception of truth, the progress of analytic philosophy is for Habermas a linguistic movement to replace the paradigm of consciousness and to develop a non-metaphysical philosophy that resembles the supposedly non-metaphysical, empirical operations of science. In this sense, Habermas’ position derived from Marx prevents him to reconsider Hegel.

Habermas still holds on to his former rejection of consciousness philosophy:

The appropriation of hermeneutics and linguistic analysis convinced me then that critical social theory had to break free from the conceptual apparatus of the philosophy of consciousness flowing from Kant and Hegel (Habermas 2015, 7).

Habermas’ counter-approach is supposed to be sociology, a method that he believes does not rely on the internal representations of objects. Instead for Habermas, sociology only describes human interactions on the societal level. From his description of his theory, it becomes clear that Habermas follows the historical trend of the analytical movement to reject Hegel as metaphysical. In this sense, Habermas’ theory combines the continental rejection of Hegel, in the form of a quasi-Marxism, and the analytical reaction to Hegel on account of his attachment to formal anti-metaphysical pragmatics.

As a parallel to Habermas’ discourse theory, we can read Brandom’s *Making it Explicit* as a similar historical attempt. Brandom abandons the model of an experiencing subject, and explains semantics in terms of pragmatics, a seemingly sociological move. Unlike Habermas, however, semantics remains the foundation for Brandom. Though, according to Brandom, everything is pragmatic all the way down, his downtown of language is the proposition.

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From the perspective of the ‘pragmatic turn’, Brandom can then be interpreted as a contributor to Discourse Theory, whose main exponent, however, is Habermas. This is, of course, imprecise with regard to Brandom, since Brandom is a different realist than Habermas. He relies on semantics. This confusion describes, however, the historical constellation, so that Höffe, for example, writes:

One of the most advanced contemporary theories of truth, the discourse theory developed by Robert Brandom in the spirit of American pragmatism, sets aside the (allegedly) descriptive question about the nature of truth and simply addresses the performative question about how the members of a linguistic community come to treat something as true (Höffe 2010, 186).\textsuperscript{163}

Certainly, Höffe is a bit too excited about Brandom’s achievements, but my point is that there is a connection between the program of Brandom’s inferentialism and Discourse Theory that is rooted in Hegelian problems. The exchange between Brandom and Habermas demonstrates their conceptual closeness in terms of pragmatics. So, for example, Habermas calls Brandom’s *Making it Explicit* a milestone in 1999 (see Habermas 1999, 138). He also makes a note about the program which is a “geduldig-präzise Ausarbeitung einer innovativen Verschränkung von formaler Pragmatik und inferentieller Semantik“ (Habermas 1999, 138). I perceive this crossover of formal pragmatics and inferential semantics as the central point of the “pragmatic turn” (see also Habermas 1999, 170), and I take it to be the main reason why Habermas is so much in favor of Brandom.

However, the advancement of analytic philosophy toward holistic contextualism does not connect appropriately to Hegel’s central idea of systematicity and history. Holistic contextualism therefore remains inferior to the Hegelian approach. My reconstruction of the discourse between

Habermas and Brandom will therefore reveal an original conception of Hegel. It is the idea of science that follows historically achieved standards, and thus is fundamentally distinct from Brandom’s and Habermas’s ‘Discourse Theories’. Neither in Habermas nor in Brandom can we therefore find a bridge for the divide.

3.4 Habermas’ Critique of Brandom
Habermas’ criticism of Brandom is closely related to his revised concept of truth. According to his former model, truth is closely tied to justifiability. Now, truth is part of our practices that accompany discourses and that are distinct from justifiability (see Habermas 1999, 50). From a Hegelian perspective, this change makes sense, since the object of consciousness and the object of how it is supposedly independent of consciousness are distinguishable. For a Habermasian framework, it means to distinguish between two objects: the object of how it is discussed in a real discourse community, and the object of how it were discussed in an ideal discourse community. As Hegel, however, points out, the distinction of an in-itself object, and a for-itself object is part of consciousness. Thus, we would also have to follow this distinction for the Habermasian model: the ideal and the real discourse communities are themselves objects for the discourse community. It comes down to the question of whether Habermas can justify the distinction of the real and ideal communication community dialectically.

Habermas, however, wants to justify this distinction on the basis of a communicational model and rejects Hegel’s model of how we can find objectivity under subjective conditions of reflection. Since Habermas delivers an insufficient reconstruction of Hegel, he opts for the analytical model, which is non-reflective and ahistorical.
Habermas compares Brandom’s impact on philosophy with Rawls’ *Theory of Justice*. According to Habermas, Brandom investigates the communicative actions that occur during the game of argumentation (see Habermas 1999, 139). These actions are used to transport claims. A reason is, accordingly, something that depends on the specific practices of the speakers’ community (Habermas 1999, 140). The strong focus on practice avoids representationalism and pays attention to the self-binding rules that speakers oblige themselves to whenever they communicate with each other.\(^{164}\) Habermas quotes Brandom with regard to this rather relativist, cooperative perspective on language: “Being a reason is to be understood in the first instance in terms of what it is for a community to *treat* something in practice as such a reason […] as reasons for claims.” (Brandom 1998, 253, see also Habermas 1999, 140). Nevertheless, language is not only an instrument for communication. This would be an inadequate understanding of language. Language also serves in its discovery function to make explicit what is implicit in the specific lifeform of individuals. In this sense, propositional knowledge must be integrated into the activity of speakers. Habermas questions, on the one hand, the transcendental status of propositions that are actually only part of a life-form. On the other hand, Habermas questions what these propositions ultimately refer to, since any grasp of an external objectivity is problematic.

So, firstly, the grasp of external objects is problematic for Habermas. The traditional, Kantian dualism introduces a sphere of something given, which runs, however, into the problem

\(^{164}\) Before, I have presented Brandom’s account in a very critical light that was mainly directed against the remainders of a realism that was historically inspired by a false rejection of Hegel. Nevertheless, against the atomism of “the mainstream post-Cartesian epistemology”, Taylor emphasizes the importance of the pragmatic turn that also focuses on a so called multi-dimensional holism that he finds in Brandom (see Taylor 2010, 32). Language is for Taylor more complex than simply inventing words and labelling ready-made objects. It is not only an instrument, or a labelling-machine. Taylor dismisses also the idea that we take in “pieces of information” (see Taylor 2010, 32) and bulk them together in a bucket of experiences. He points out that Brandom makes important advances on these aspects.
of the myth of the given, or, at least, an undiscussed distinction between sensibility and understanding. How can the given come from an external source? How can we distinguish between us passive reception or active determination of the given?

Secondly, the procedural accounts of truth, in particular, to deduce the ultimate conditions for discourses in order to get closer to reality, have been unsuccessful. Apel, for example, attempted to point out the undeniable, preceding conditions for participating in any discourse. Such transcendental conditions, however, are only recognized for specific situations according to Habermas. Habermas ultimately rejects this view in *Erläuterungen zur Diskursethik.*

As pointed out previously, Brandom combines similarly problematic accounts that are the idea to approach an external reality and the idea to deduce the procedural conditions for any language game. In other words, he presupposes reality with determinate objects. Then, he attempts to define procedural conditions for our interaction, while only having a distorted perspective on reality. Habermas’ identifies here the main point of criticism, which Giovagnol calls the “ambiguity […] between pragmatics and semantics,” a contradiction “that social practices confer conceptual content to states and expressions and that material rules of inferences confer, at the same time, that content” (Giovagnol 2001, 54). Both social practices as well as material inferences are supposed to give us content. Habermas denies that we achieve truth by either of these methods. In each case, truth occurs only as an intra-linguistic object (see Giovagnol 2001, 54).

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165 For Apel, this means the dissolution of discourse ethic [“Auflösung der Diskursethik” (Apel 1988, 727)]. With regard to an ultimate foundation [Letztbegründung], Habermas comes to the conclusion that the ultimate foundation, in the form of a substantial derivation from paradigmatic norms of actions, is not only impossible, but also unnecessary (see Habermas 1991, 195, and Apel, Karl-Otto. *Diskurs und Verantwortung. Das Problem des Übergangs zur postkonventionellen Moral.* Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988.).
In *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung*, Habermas reconstructs Brandom’s work by emphasizing the role of a pragmatic turn in philosophy while taking semantics into account. We have discussed earlier the combination of formal pragmatism and inferential semantics that also Habermas acknowledges as problematic (see Habermas 1999, 138). His criticism will focus on the problems that a conceptual realism entails. That is, firstly, that the position of the speaker as a participant in a communication community is a theoretical hypostasis and, secondly, that Brandom treats communication from the perspective of the observer. These perspectives arise from the compromises that a conceptual realism has to make. I will discuss Habermas’ reconstruction and his criticism of Brandom in the following points.

### 3.4.1 Brandom’s Pragmatism and the Problem of Reality

Habermas’ reconstruction of Brandom focuses on different aspects that are important to Habermas’ theory. He deals particularly with the problem of realism within a constructivist paradigm. It is the question of how to justify knowledge without an immediate approach to a mind-independent reality. Habermas explains Brandom’s pragmatic motivation to reconstruct the structure of language with regard to a real speakers’ community (see Habermas 1999, 140). According to Habermas, Brandom’s approach is based on the Wittgensteinian model that there is a “practically pre-predicative knowledge” (Habermas 1999, 140). This pre-predicative knowledge precedes the propositional, logical and expressive vocabulary. The social practice resulting from this pre-predicative knowledge precedes the intentions of singular speakers. In this sense, language is a life-form that entirely determines our social interactions.

Although linguistic competence is unspoken and implicit, at the same time, we learn the to make our linguistic competence itself explicit. Explicit and implicit structures are both
necessary components of a language. In a word, linguistic practice and explicitness are related.

Therefore, Brandom’s complementary structure of a pragmatic semantics is justified as a project. Logical vocabulary is used in order to reveal our implicit practices and is thus called expressive vocabulary (see Habermas 1999, 140). It makes the implicit practices explicit. Without this competence there would be no rational practice. Hence, rational beings are logical, expressive beings for Brandom (see Habermas 1999, 140).

The linguistic turn has, furthermore, the consequence that the “epistemic authority” (Habermas 1999, 140) is transferred from the private subject to the public practice of the communication-community (see Habermas 1999, 140). This expresses also a rejection of representationalism and introduces a community-guided understanding, in which communicators find themselves always in a “net of interactive relations” (Habermas 1999, 141). This net has to be responsibly explained [verantwortet] with regard to the members of the community. For Brandom, this is the practice of giving and asking for reasons. According to Habermas, Brandom avoids a mentalism by asking what we do, when we treat something as true (see Habermas 1999, 142). This includes, however, that we are not merely listeners, but that we adopt the attitudes of the speaker, in order to understand a sentence (See Habermas 1999, 142). Since reasons cannot be understood without knowing their ‘weight’ (see Habermas 1999, 142), the listener has to actively judge the entitlement of the speaker. From here, we acknowledge the credibility of the speaker and keep score (see Habermas 1999, 144).

In response to this pragmatism, Brandom develops a complementary semantics, which Habermas signifies as his greatest achievement (see Habermas 199, 145). In order to understand a speaker we need to judge his entitlement. We do so by tracing the material consequences of

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166 By ‘mentalism’ Habermas means a theory of cognition that is based on subjective consciousness.
what the speaker says. Thus, we understand the conditions of an utterance pragmatically and the material consequences semantically. The semantic dimension is then investigated in terms of an inferentialism.

Brandom, however, is not a pure inferentialist, since he allows perception to influence our semantical framework. For this reason, Habermas sees Brandom not as an idealist (see Habermas 1999, 145), but identifies his realism here. In effect, Habermas discovers the same problem that I have presented in the chapters above: the combination of realism with a constructivist program. Habermas discusses the related problem of an empty coherentism that shall be compensated by an idea of reality:

Wenn die Praxis der gegenseitigen Zuschreibung und Beurteilung von Wahrheitsansprüchen nicht schon durch die semantischen Festlegungen material gültiger Schlüsse garantiert werden kann, von welcher Art sind die Beschränkungen dann? An irgend etwas muß sich die Korrektheit der Anwendung von Begriffen – »the assessment of truth« - bewähren. (Habermas 1999, 146)

I have expressed this aspect before: how does Brandom evade a mere coherentism. How do we form our first level concepts? Habermas concludes from this problem: Dieser »realistische« Einwand, den sich Brandom selbst zu machen scheint, verträgt sich schlecht mit einer »phänomenalistischen« Einstellung (Habermas 1999, 146). Realism and a constructivist "phenomenalism“ are probably incompatible and Habermas seems to suggest to follow a merely constructivist program himself. The question of how to achieve objectivity is Habermas’ further focus for the discussion.
3.4.2 Brandom’s Circle – From Norms to Norms

How do we achieve objectivity, if we have no concrete anchor in a mind-independent reality? Since Brandom assumes that we have to understand concepts within the boundaries of a normative pragmatics, the question of truth transforms into the question of norms. There is, nevertheless, no norm without members of a community who acknowledge them. In this sense, norms are not naturally part of all humans interacting with each other (see Habermas 1999, 147). Norms develop because a society that codifies behavior rewards and punishes this behavior in terms of attributing credibility. Yet, the instance of ‘the law-giver’ is not outside of the laws that regulate the behavior. It is not a game like chess, in which we agree on external rules in order to play this game. Rather, we follow a variety of rules that can change. The method that we apply in such situations is then altered with regard to the contingent contents of a historical communication-community. Our standards are therefore a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic justification. Sometimes we adopt current practices, sometimes we alter these practices.

In order to justify his formal rules, however, Brandom introduces the concept of Kantian autonomy (see Habermas 1999, 148). This is the idea that norms can be chosen merely on the basis of rationality. Habermas is critical here since the autonomous creation of laws cannot operate without being circular: “Eine »vernünftig« Normsetzung muß nach Vernunftmormen vorgenommen werden und kann deshalb nicht ihrerseits das Modell für eine Erklärung der Normativität von Vernunft selbst abgegeben“ (Habermas 1999, 148). Habermas argues that Brandom commits a circular reasoning fallacy. In a dialectical framework, however, we could justify such a circular strategy as a development with regard to the method itself. This means that we presuppose a norm and control it with regard to the concrete development until the outcomes make it possible to accept or to reevaluate the norm. Of course, such dialectics are not known to
be ever completed. We are rather accepting a status quo. This circular strategy is part of a
historicist philosophy. Habermas remarks, therefore, that the law-giver is already within a
society that gives orientation for such norm-institution. Brandom, however, does neither discuss
such circular strategies, nor does he discuss the law-giver as embedded in a historically
developed society. Instead, he installs a kind of transcendental language game grounded in
assertions (see Habermas 1999, 154). So, as already explicated, for Brandom, the assertion is the
foundation for any kind of rational activity and must be free from cultural norms or historical
incompleteness. Assertions are thus necessary in order to say something meaningful that is
objective and also independent from the cultural presuppositions. This propositional,
unhistorical, and uncontextual understanding is then the foundation for normativity. Habermas
writes with regard to this aspect of normativity: Brandom mißversteht sich gewissermaßen
selbst, weil er einen überinklusiven Begriff von Normativität verwendet und Rationalitätsnormen
im weitesten Sinne – logische, begriffliche, semantische, ebenso wie pragmatische Regeln - an
Handlungsnormen angleicht“ (Habermas 1999, 148). The acts that Brandom has in mind, are the
acts of language. Habermas criticizes this with an important note: Die Affektion durch Gründe
ist aber etwas anderes als eine Verpflichtung durch Normen. Während Handlungsnormen den
Willen von Aktoren binden, lenken Rationalitätsnormen den Geist“ (Habermas 1999, 149). This
means that norms are binding by virtue of societal standards, and can be enforced. The better
argument, however, depends on the acceptance of the other participant to follow through
arguments and can therefore not be enforced. Brandom applies his game of giving and asking for
reasons to a society that might operate on very different standards. Habermas explains the
problem that emerges from this: Dabei verbindet sich die epistemische Autorität der Mitglieder
mit der sozialen Autorität der Gemeinschaft“ (Habermas 1999, 150). In other words, Brandom
levels rational and social normativity (Habermas 1999, 150). But how then can rationality be beyond the social (See Habermas 1999, 151)?

It is a common consequence of linguistic philosophy to level language and reality after the pragmatic turn (see Habermas 1999, 152). Brandom presupposes, therefore, an identical world of linguistic facts and social norms, but does not explain the learning contact between language systems and social surroundings. Instead, he believes that his propositional language must somehow stand for the structure of reality. It is a world constituted by determinate objects that by virtue of the factual impact on our speech-acts make our discourses on norms objective. In this sense, Brandom escapes the problem of an empty coherentism. The question remains whether his conceptual realism can be justified.

3.4.3 Anaphora – An Anchor in Reality?

According to Habermas, Brandom follows a transcendental, linguistic deduction of the double-structure of utterances based on simple, predicative assertions (see Habermas 1999, 154). Now, the anaphoric treatment of singular terms is supposed to anchor our words in presupposed mind-independent objects. Despite this realist question, the central point is for Habermas that recognizing something once is impossible, because then we could not recognize the objects under different circumstances again. The capacity to build anaphorical chains allows for a recursive relation to former moments of reconstruction (see Habermas 1999, 155). This implies further that without anaphora, there is no deixis. Habermas writes: „Erst die innersprachliche Bezugsnahme auf vorangehende Satzteile ermöglicht eine Referenz auf Gegenstände, die über einzelne Zeigehandlungen hinaus als reidentifizierbare Gegenstände müssen festgehalten werden können“ (Habermas 1999, 156). This anaphoric relation is supposed to ground Brandom’s
former discussed objectivity-claims. Objectivity is for Brandom the difference between what people believe to know and what they really know (see Habermas 1999, 157). In particular, the interpreter ascribes a commitment of \( p \) to the speaker, but distinguishes the truth of \( p \) from the speech-act of claiming \( p \). In this ongoing ascription, participants create an interpersonal map of reality by finding warranting reasons that are supposed to make claims reasonable. The last warranting factor are supposed to be anaphora.

Though cognition is not limited to these operations, they are supposed to get the conceptual system off ground. Habermas, however, does not see in this a solution for the possibility that all communication-participants could be wrong. This is because there is no guarantee that our words are anchored in what really is. Brandom’s emphasis of empirical observational sentences fails according to Habermas (see Habermas 1999, 159). He writes critically: „Aber reicht diese Art der Verankerung schon hin, um der realistischen Intuition einer unabhängigen Welt, die selbst unsere beste Beschreibung dementieren kann, Genüge zu tun“ (Habermas 1999, 159)? Habermas particularly remarks that such empirical anchor and the navigation around points of reference cannot explain why there are new norms developing. So, for example, even if parents could teach their child to reliably respond to the experience of blue with the word ‘blue’, then it would still remain unclear how parents or their children could ever radically change their vocabulary about such perceptions (see Habermas 1999, 161). This indicates that it is not about an external world as the ultimate verifier, but that it is instead about how we experience and learn. Experience is more complex and involves a dialectic of thought and perception. Brandom’s model would presuppose a conceptual development of frameworks, with no paradigm shifts, or the abandonment of old theories, and therefore his framework is
entirely grounded in the premise of an external reality. Since Brandom is not able to provide an ‘absolute’ that is the foundation for our learned theories, we should remain skeptical.

Furthermore, Habermas also criticizes Brandom’s interpretation of the litmus paper test. Brandom presupposes that something tasting sour but not turning litmus blue must account for practical failure. He does not, however, consider a possible revision of either the whole semantic concept of litmus paper, or the revision of the semantic rules (Habermas 1999, 160). This exemplifies Brandom’s limited conception of how experience works.

For these reasons, Brandom’s approach to anchor our language in an external reality is incomplete. It is further a question of whether we can find a pathway from perceptions to concepts. Consequently, Habermas writes on Brandom’s denial of an anti-realist solution:

Brandom, der offensichtlich nicht bereit ist, antirealistische Konsequenzen in Kauf zu nehmen, kann einen sprachtranszendentalen Ansatz, ob er nun kultarlistisch (MacIntyre), seinsgeschichtlich (Derrida) oder pragmatistisch (Rorty) gewendet wird, nicht akzeptieren.“ (Habermas 1999, 160). Habermas will therefore criticize further that Brandom’s strategy does not provide a model of how experience actually works, or how we get from perceptions to concepts.

3.4.4 Critique of Brandom’s Conceptual Realism

For Habermas, Brandom’s proposed anaphoric solution is insufficient. With regard to his examples, it cannot exhaustively explain how perceptions lead to a revision of semantic concepts (see Habermas 1999, 162). In other words, how do we question our conceptual framework? Simply presupposing that our conceptual framework will be verified by nature is a strong
presupposition and seems to lean into the direction of naturalism. However, as already explained above, Brandom pursues a non-naturalist strategy (see Habermas 1999, 163). For Habermas, the problem of naturalism is its translation of everything into terms of causality and neurological states, which establishes an unbridgeable gap between the original phenomena and its more, and more detailed, but more and more unintelligible interpretation of the original phenomena (see Habermas 1999, 162). So, for example, a table would be analyzed as composed from almost atomic nothings, while its phenomenological relevance might not be grasped by these physical concepts. On the contrary, Habermas asks how the perceived events should be described by virtue of a nominalist language, a language that does not operate with references, but with sense-interdependences (see Habermas 1999, 163). For Habermas, it occurs that we have to go beyond the immanence of language in confrontation with the world (see Habermas 1999, 163). The relation to the world, however, is insufficiently discussed in Brandom. Habermas objects consequently with regard to the litmus paper test: “Die objektive Welt kann diesen »Widerspruch« nur performativ einlegen, indem sie den zielgerichteten Interventionen in eine Welt kausal interpretierter Ereignisfolgen ihr »Entgegenkommen« versagt. Auf diese Weise meldet sich nur im Funktionskreis instrumentellen Handelns zu Wort“ (Habermas 1999, 164)

This means that the concept of a world that is intervening upon actions is for Brandom considered only with respect to an instrumental language. This means that the concept of an independent world of objects is still a concept that is produced within language, and thus ‘world’ is not mind-independent. A practical failure is therefore a failure, only if it is part of a specific language. So, for example, we could imagine societies that would not acknowledge the litmus paper turning blue as an indication for our practical failure because they have simply no practices in which this test should be significant. Therefore, Habermas proceeds:
Erst wenn die Handelnden vom praktischen Zurechtkommen mit der Welt Abstand nehmen, in einen Diskurs eintreten und die »zuhandene« Situation vergegenständlichen, um sich miteinander über etwas in der Welt zu verstündigen, kann aus einer dementierenden Wahrnehmung, die Handlungsgewißheiten erschüttert, ein diskursiv mobilisierter »Grund« werden, der in den Begriffshaushalt und das semantische Folgerungspotential bestehender Auffasungen kritisch Eingang findet und gegebenfalls Revisionen in Gang setzt (Habermas 1999, 164).

This means that for Habermas an objectifying discourse turns such experiences into experiences of failure. Brandom, however, moves linearly from perception to action (see Habermas 1999, 165), as if there is a predetermined path, and fails therefore to develop a complete theory of learning that can also account for paradigm shifts (see Habermas 1999, 165). Habermas judges for that reason: “Er begreift die Welt, mit der wir konfrontiert sind, überhaupt nicht nominalistisch, sondern […] »realistisch« (Habermas 1999, 166). In other words, Habermas criticizes Brandom’s solution of conceptual realism. This is the idea that the concepts of our contingent language are developed only with regard to the mind-independent structure of the world that we perceive. The phenomenon of interpretation would then be something by which real, mind-external things are distorted. Habermas quotes Brandom with regard to his conceptual realism:

The conception of concepts as inferentially articulated permits a picture of thought and of the world that thought is about as equally, and in the favored cases identically, conceptually articulated (Brandom 1998, 622).

Brandom equates the world and thought and claims that they have an identical structure. In this sense, experiences of the world would only have a passive role in shaping our conceptual understanding of the world (see Habermas 1999, 166). The human mind would not answer
creatively to disappointing stimuli, but receives a passively, imprinted, and yet distorted picture of the world (see Habermas 1999, 166).

With the hermeneutical turn, Habermas discusses a contrary, Continental concept of language that deals with the disadvantages of a nominalism, namely that the world is only a practically presupposed concept. This hermeneutical understanding, however, does not lead us to a blatant realism. Hermeneutics, according to Habermas, integrates the world as an inner worldly challenge. Accordingly, humans interpret historical occurrences within their language (Habermas 1999, 167-168). In contrast, Brandom turns concepts into objective things that are related to the way things really are. The poetical functions of language that I have characterized as one of the necessary insights of the pragmatic turn remain for Brandom outside the core of language, and are thus unintelligible. The assertion expresses rationality, while other symbolic forms of arts must be entertainment, and occupation of an overly active mind. Habermas quotes Brandom with regard to this conceptual realism:

   Concepts conceived as inferential roles of expressions do not serve as epistemological intermediaries, standing between us and what is conceptualized by them. This is not because there is no causal order consisting of particulars, interaction with which supplies the material for thought. It is rather because all of these elements are themselves conceived as thoroughly conceptual, not as contrasting with the conceptual. (Brandom 1998, 622).

The world is, in this sense, still the completeness of facts (Habermas 1999, 169). According to Brandom, we only have to find the right way to mediate this world. The fundamental structure is our reliance on assertions.

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3.4.5 Second Person-Perspective and the Levelling of Facts and Norms

Habermas denies Brandom’s approach to an external reality, but he also criticizes his model of communication. In particular, Habermas denies that Brandom successfully achieves a second-person-perspective. This is Brandom’s goal that Habermas criticizes: “Brandom will symmetrischen »Ich-Du-Beziehungen« zwischen ersten und zweiten Personen Vorrang vor einer asymmetrischen »Ich-Wir-Beziehung« einräumen, in der der Einzelne vom Kollektiv sozusagen überwältigt wird“ (Habermas 1999, 173). Habermas argues that Brandom rather introduces a third-person, the perspective of a neutral observer that, however, disqualifies the moral feelings of the actor. By this, Brandom dismisses the importance of people achieving truths in a discourse by virtue of their moral feelings. Habermas concludes therefore that the main premise of conceptual realism unburdens the human society from its constructive tasks and levels facts and norms:


This implies that for Brandom the objective content of concepts has to be made explicit and that this has a normative force in-itself. The world in itself is supposed to be rational (conceptual) and thus limits our normative discourses. This is, of course, a controversial subject as discussed in the former point (3.4.4). Hegel who is held to uncritically assume that the world is rational [vernünftig], writes, in fact: “To him who looks upon the world rationally, the world in its turn,
presents a rational aspect” (Hegel 1861, 11).\textsuperscript{167} It must be further investigated in how far the world is rational because we take it to be rational. Thus, the question is more complex and bound to our subjective perspective. The main task is to demonstrate how something that is subjective can still yield objective cognition. Brandom, however, attempts to level an “unintelligible” gap between subjects who operate normatively and objects that relate causally to each other:

[F]act-stating talk is explained in normative terms, and normative facts emerge as one kind of fact among others. The common deontologic scorekeeping vocabulary in which both are specified and explained ensures that the distinction between normative and nonnormative facts neither evanesces nor threatens to assume the proportions of an ultimately unintelligible dualism (Brandom 1998, 625-626).

Brandom’s observed unintelligibility, however, might emerge because of his understanding of objects as mind-independent facts of reality. Yet, for Habermas, the “burden of the concept” that subjects carry cannot be simply replaced by the “self-movement of the concept” that develops according to facts. Language for Brandom is consequently just another fact among other facts. Since this would bereave humans of their moral autonomy, an autonomy that Brandom also claims to be central in his deontic conception of morality, this is a severe tension. We would sacrifice moral autonomy for conceptual holism. Habermas therefore emphasizes again:

\begin{quote}
An die Stelle der »Astrengung des Begriffs«, die sonst eine Sache des kooperativen Lernens einer konstruktive verfahrenden Kommunikationsgemeinschaft wäre, tritt die »Bewegung des Begriffs«, die sich durch erfahrungsgemäßvermittelte Diskurse hindurch, aber über die Köpfe der meisten Diskurseilnehmer hinweg vollzieht. Dieser Objektivismus entkleidet die Diskurgemeinschaft der epistemischen Autorität (wie auch der moralischen Autonomie), die sie, solange sie nicht die Möglichkeit eines direkten Zufriffs auf ein Universum von angetroffenen Ideen hat, sich selbst zutrauen müsste. Das erklärt, warum Brandom einen
\end{quote}

Central to this criticism is that Brandom transfers the moral evaluation to the perspective of the observer. Habermas uses Brandom’s example of a trial to discuss this in further detail. Accordingly, the judge and the jury are observing and evaluating the arguments of the prosecutor and the defender. For Brandom, it is of lesser interest how the participants judge their positions and how they respond (see Habermas 1999, 174, and Brandom 1998, 505). For Habermas, this is significant, since a statement that takes not the real answer of the participants into account underestimates the grammatical function of the second person. Brandom’s formal account investigates, according to Habermas, only the formal, doxastic commitments. Thus, Habermas states: “Eine Untersuchungsstrategie, die die erste mit der zweiten Kommunikationsebene verwechselt, ignoriert aber mit dieser wichtigen Unterscheidung die grammatische Rolle der zweiten Person“ (Habermas 1999, 175). Consequently, Habermas calls this dismissal of the alter-ego ‘Theoretizismus’. This means that communication is the result of an epistemic relation, an epistemic relation between the assertions of the speaker and the ascription of the interpreter about what has been said (see Habermas 1999, 174). According to my earlier analysis, this theoreticism, the formal speaker-interpreter-relation, occurs because Brandom does not consider the dialectic between observation (de dicto) and inferential entailments (de re). The mere model of transmitting information fails to grasp the major idea of communication, also according to Habermas. This major idea of communication is coordination, which has to be achieved by

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168 As already explained before, Brandom neglects the possibility of phenomena of the third kind. That means that there are phenomena that occur that humans achieve socially that are, however, not intended. In this sense, language is a phenomenon of the third kind that was not invented by a human, but that is also not a product of nature. It is rather a result of social interaction.

169 In the particular example, Brandom demonstrates the difference between de re and de dicto ascriptions. So it is less related to Habermas’ criticism.
hermeneutics, a model that does not omit the embeddedness of interpreters and speakers in a pre-interpreted world and a communication-community. Hermeneutics also respects that our method of communication is not a mere formalism. Consequently, method always depends on content and content is also achieved by the method.

In the following, Habermas emphasizes that the utterance of the speaker is, at the same time, an imperative to coordinate different opinions, different backgrounds, and different interpretations of what it means to be in a shared world. It is, moreover, not only a theoretical battle of systems. It is rather a necessity of coordination that brings us into the play of language games (see Habermas 199, 175). It is neither a self-sufficient [selbstgenügsames] play, nor a question of whose standpoint will prevail (see Habermas 1999, 175). Habermas sees the most important indication for this coordination in the fact that we expect answers, if we claim something (see Habermas 1999, 174-175). For this reason, Habermas transforms the idea of understanding into his understanding of speech acts directed towards coordination: Wir verstehen einen Sprechakt, wenn wir die Bedingungen und Folgen des rational motivierten Einverständnisses kennen, das ein Sprecher mit ihm erzielen könnte (Habermas 1999, 176).

Here, the cognition of somebody’s utterance is not only about understanding what follows from a concept, which expresses Brandom’s inferentialism. Instead, it brings each communication back to the question of social beings whose intention are to understand the other and to coordinate their views with a possible agreement of the other party. In the scorekeeping-model of Brandom it is only about strategical observation of the opponent, but not about coordination (Verständigung) between discourse participants. For Habermas, this therefore expresses a methodological individualism that fails to understand that participants work together, instead of working against each other (Habermas 1999, 177). Thus, Habermas further concludes that the
objectivism of Brandom takes away the major burden of achieving the truths in a community through discourse.

Brandom binds communication to the objective representation of facts in the world that only have to be traced by logically asserting, by making the real status of the world explicit. This asserting seems to settle things, makes communication seemingly easier, but it rests on the assumption that truths settle themselves (see Habermas 1999, 177). For the very same reason, Habermas rejects all forms of objective Idealism and states finally: „Ein stillschweigende Rückkehr zum objektiven Idealismus dürfte kaum noch möglich sein“ (Habermas 1999, 170). This will also be Habermas’ foundation for rejecting Hegelianism. However, we have to clarify later that Hegelianism is not a cognitive realism.

3.4.6 The Privilege of the Assertion and the Undermining of Will’s Autonomy
According to Habermas, the levelling of facts and norms leads to a moral realism that should not be easily defended (see Habermas 1999, 178). Grounded on logocentrism, modernity might overestimate the primacy of the assertion. Instead, Habermas points out that the social background allows for a manifoldness of speech acts that possibly cannot be subsumed under the idea of the assertion (see Habermas 1999, 178). Because of the question of objectivity, however, Brandom commits to a cognitive realism, the idea that conceptual structures of the world are coining our practices of discourse (See Habermas 1999, 178-177). Brandom writes: “Concepts are rules, and concepts express natural necessity as well as moral necessity” (Brandom 1998, 624). As demonstrated above, Habermas particularly criticizes such a presupposed self-movement of the concept that guides the development of societies, since it unburdens humans from their responsibility by levelling facts and norms. To say it again, Brandom sees a
conformity between the subjective and the objective sphere expressed in the normative structure of the concept that is a fact among other facts. The question is now: Is this levelling of facts and norms overstretching of what we really are? The Brandomian interpretation that everything is normative, and that the normative can only be justified by assertions intertwines the realm of freedom [“Reich der Freiheit”] with the causal necessities of the world (see Habermas 1999, 179). This, nonetheless, undermines the claims for autonomy that Brandom assumes for normative beings. According to Habermas, Brandom analyzes our conceptual relation to norms in three steps:

a) Die Rechtfertigungspflichten, die wir stillschweigend mit intentionalen Handlungen übernehmen, mit den Begründungspflichten, die an assertorische Sprechhandlungen hängen. Sodann (b) erläutert er, wie Handlungen in der Form praktischer Schlüsse gerechtfertigt werden können. Das soll (c) auf die Pointe hinauslaufen: daß sich trotz einiger Assymetrien alle Handlungen *wie* Tatsachenbehauptungen rechtfertigen lassen (Habermas 1999, 180).

Since the responsibility for actions is similar to the responsibility for judgments, both should be treated as commitments. But is an action exhausted by taking over responsibility? Brandom, according to Habermas, does not ask this question (see Habermas 1999, 181). His “conceptual monism”\(^{170}\) only discusses the theoretical responsibility but does not discuss the question of how we bind ourselves with regard to rules of assertion (Habermas 1999, 182). Habermas explains the

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\(^{170}\) As already pointed out, it is problematic to simply equate facts and norms. This is what happens with regard to Brandom’s semantic pragmatism. The fact, moreover, that dualism runs into certain barriers does not imply that a monistic conception must be correct; it might be a false alternative that Brandom presents here; and with regard to a Hegelian attitude the opposition of both terms should be investigated dialectically, while the normative goal is an epistemological monism. There is no ontological monism presupposed, but it seems that a criterion of knowledge demands for such monism. If the only explanation for levelling of norms and facts, however, is its practicality within discourses, then ontological monism is still as reasonable as ontological pluralism independent from its practicality. It seems, however, that pluralism would mean that we could never know the world exhaustively. For this reason Habermas’ pluralism, expressed in the claim that the Kantian distinction between autonomy and heteronomy must be considered, will be at least equally strong if not stronger.
problem in further detail: “Handlungsnormen können aus der Beobachterperspektive zwar als Tatsachen beschrieben werden; aber rechtfertigen lassen sie sich nur aus der Teilnehmerperspektive, wie schon aus der ichbezogenen Form praktischer Schlüsse ersichtlich ist“ (Habermas 1999, 182). We can conclude that the participant’s perspective of speech acts includes another dimension that possibly cannot be objectified. The self-reference of a speaker, the I, is an existential adoption of responsibility that can only be reflected upon after the fact. Cognition comes late in the succession of societies. The philosopher can therefore only reflect. At the beginning is the deed. This does not imply that action is in principle non-conceptual, but, at the same time, it is not guaranteed that it is conceptual. It seems, however, there could be a limit of cognition that we have not yet discovered, but that we can only reflect upon.

Beyond this primacy of the action, Habermas gives further reasons why it makes sense to distinguish a practical will from factual knowledge. According to Habermas, Brandom does not take into account the differentiation between the will’s heteronomy and the will’s autonomy. He writes: “Im Falle einer zweckrationalen Wahl von Mitteln stellt die Regel, die der Handelnde adoptiert, die Verbindung zwischen einem subjektiven Handlungsgrund und einem – technisch genutzten – Tatsachenwissen her“ (Habermas 1999, 185). So, in the example of opening an umbrella, prudence is the result of an empirical rule that is subjective with regard to the contextual conditions of the surrounding world of facts. Will, however, acts autonomously, if it is freed from subjectivity (Habermas 1999, 182). Habermas writes therefore further: “Während prudentielle und konventionelle Gründe die Willkür nur relative zu gegebenen Interessenlagen und bestehenden sozialen Wertorientierungen binden, beanspruchen moralische Gründe, den Willen ganz zu durchdringen, also absolut zu bestimmen“ (Habermas 1999, 184). For such moral actions we claim universal validity, a validity that goes beyond something that is related to the
world of facts, but that specifies how something should be. For example, we all could be murderers. Even if this were a fact, however, it is not sufficient to universalize the action of murdering. Even though facts and norms have similarities in their justification, Habermas denies therefore: “Allein diese Ähnlichkeit des *Geltungsbereichs* darf nicht den Kontrast der der *Geltungsgrundlagen* verdecken. Die Gründe, mit denen sich moralische Handlungen rechtfertigen lassen, haben eine andere epistemische Qualität als Tatsachenggründe“ (Habermas 1999, 184).

According to Habermas, and as we see in the example of a murdering society, facts cannot deliver a sufficient foundation for decisions (see Habermas 1999, 184). Brandom, on the contrary, clearly states: “In this way the normative is picked out as a subregion of the factual” (Brandom 1998, 625). Yet, rather it is about the question: How can the universal character of moral deeds be achieved? The Kantian solution seems to be unfeasible, since its mechanism of universalization has demonstrated complicated results. So, for example, the maxim of not lying, demonstrates itself as absurd, if formally applied to any situation. Habermas answer is therefore that universalization must be related to fair procedures that have to be socially secured with regard to all potentially concerned ones [Betroffene].

Finally, Habermas concludes with regard to Brandom:

Das deontologische Verständnis von Moral, das auch Brandom favorisiert, paßt nicht zu dem begriffsrealistischen Verständnis des moralischen Vokabulars, das Brandom vorschlägt, um den objektiven Gehalt unserer Begriffe […] in den begrifflichen Strukturen der Welt selbst zu verankern. Ein kantischer Begriff der Autonomie paßt […] nicht zu dem Bild, das die Diskontinuität zwischen Tatsachen und Normen einebnet. […] Rationale Wesen, die sich in einer intersubjektiv geteilten Lebenswelt vorfinden müssen gewiß ihr Tun und Lassen auch im Hinblick auf die Bewältigung eines kontingenten innerweltlichen Geschehens voneinander diskursive verantworten (Habermas 1999, 185).
Since the world of facts does not deliver a clear method for our universalization processes, we need to consider our autonomy and freedom, and include them in a dialectical investigation. Though Habermas praises Brandom, he ultimately rejects his account. The question remains: why does Habermas then does not accept a Hegelian account?  

3.5 Habermas’ Discussion of Hegel

Habermas’ criticism of Brandom’s conceptual realism leads him to a specific perspective on Hegel. Habermas believes that Hegel defends an absolute, ahistorical concept expressed in Absolute Knowing. While crediting Hegel with decentralizing the subject and crediting Hegel with introducing the means [Medien] of language, labor, and mutual recognition between members of a society as a ground for epistemology, Habermas still sees him as preserving an ahistorical mentalism (see Habermas 1999, 186). This ahistoric mentalism separates Hegel from the later traditions of pragmatism, historicism, linguistic philosophy, and contextualism (see Habermas 1999, 186-187). Habermas identifies the repressed [verdrängte] intersubjectivity as the main reason why Hegel cannot deliver a successful epistemology (see Habermas 1999, 187).

While ultimately rejecting a return to Hegel, Habermas acknowledges the achievements of Hegel: “Er glaubt nicht, daß zwischen dem Geistigen und dem Körperlichen, zwischen unserem Bewußtsein und dessen Gegenständen eine Kluft besteht, die überbrückt werden müsste” (Habermas 1999, 187). According to Habermas, Hegel does not believe that there is an

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171 I have already answered this question. It is because Habermas assumes that Hegel’s account is similar to cognitive realism.
172 By ‘mentalism’ I understand the paradigm of consciousness that Habermas rejects.
ontological gap between consciousness and the objects of consciousness. From this position arises the idea of objective spirit by which the problem of individual, particular and universal can be balanced with regard to a community. Habermas believes that Hegel denies the historical consequence of objective spirit by replacing it with a history of rationality (see Habermas 1999, 188) that ends in Absolute Spirit. With this Absolute Spirit, Hegel, according to Habermas, remains in the structure of self-consciousness, and thus proposes a non-temporal, ultimately mentalist framework.

In what follows, I investigate each of these arguments in more detail. Firstly, my main criticism of Habermas’ position is that philosophy cannot be entirely desubstantialized because it would reduce philosophy to an empirical science, and thus it could not be distinguished from other sciences. Secondly, I disagree that we need to detach our tradition entirely from the mental paradigm, since the project of consciousness reflecting on itself can provide grounds for a historicist epistemology. Subjects still belong to philosophy and it is necessary to integrate this thought in an epistemological project, which I claim is the task of Hegel’s discussion of objective spirit and Absolute Spirit. Thirdly, and most important, Habermas’ interpretation of Absolute Knowing derives from an incorrect interpretation of Hegel as a foundationalist who defends a system that is atemporal. This interpretation is based on a misunderstanding of what Absolute Knowing is.

173 I have already demonstrated this aspect with regard to my first criticism of Habermas above.
3.5.1 Hegel’s Denial of Mentalism

As already argued, Habermas acknowledges Hegel for undertaking steps to detach from the traditional framework of mentalism by his focus on the means [Medien] of language and labor. He criticizes him, however, for falling back into mentalism because of his introduction of Absolute Spirit. Before addressing Habermas’ criticism of Hegel’s Absolute Spirit, I will reconstruct the problem of mentalism.

The main problem for the tradition of Hegel’s time was the perceived difference between subjects and objects. This gap between subject and object was supposed to be bridged by different theories of self-consciousness (see Habermas 1999, 189). Posited beyond naturalist language and beyond presupposed principles of morality, the self-reflection of self-consciousness transformed the ancient and ethical imperative of “know thyself” into an epistemic task (see Habermas 1999, 190). As a consequence, the mental was, however, defined within the boundaries of this epistemic task. Habermas identifies three problems that had to be addressed with regard to this problematic tradition: firstly, the myth of the given, secondly, the foundation of knowledge through the generation of knowledge in a subject, and thirdly, the equation of truth with certainty (see Habermas 1999, 190). In relation to these three problems, we encounter three dualisms: the dualism between I and not-I (something that is given to the subject as external), the dualism of inner and outer self (the private subject and its public generation of knowledge through language), and the dualism between immediate givens (immediate certainty) and mediated givens (see Habermas 1999, 190). In order to address all of these three problems and their resulting dualisms, Hegel, according to Habermas, was challenged to detranscendentalize the subject. Though Kant already developed the roots of a theory of self-

174 This is Sellars’ view in “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” (1956) that is rather related to problems of analytic philosophy than to Hegel.
consciousness, his approach, based ultimately on the transcendental unity of apperception, could not grasp the essence of subjectivity. Instead, it only objectified the subject. Habermas identifies Kant’s major flaw: the subject is affected by the empirical world, while, at the same time, Kant assumes a mind-independent reality (see Habermas 1999, 191). This leads to a conflict between causal dependence and transcendental freedom (see Habermas 1999, 191). According to Habermas, it is the false mental paradigm that is the ground for Kant’s problematic, dualistic answers (see Habermas 1999, 193). Ultimately, Kant cannot close the gap between experience and mind-independent reality. Kant’s dualisms are, indeed, questionable parts of his system.\(^{175}\)

In the following, the thing-in-itself, and the distinction between subject and object will be the main points of Hegel’s attack (see Habermas 1999, 194). Kant’s project is in so far problematic as it cannot explain how we can postulate a mind-independent reality that affects us, but at the same time escapes our conceptual grasp. Habermas writes with regard to this gap: “Hegel bestreitet, dass das erkennende, sprechende und handelnde Subjekt vor der Aufgabe steht, eine Kluft zwischen sich und einem von ihm separierten Anderen zu überbrücken“ (Habermas 1999, 195). The solution is therefore not to postulate a difference between the subject and its other. The solution is to investigate the relation of subjects to otherness. Since subjects are already with others, they must be grasped as inter-subjects. This, according to Habermas, is the main reason why Hegel discusses the means [Medien] that make this sort of being-in-between possible (see Habermas 1999, 195). In the process of finding a solution, the terms of subject and object will therefore be replaced by the concept of objective spirit (see Habermas 1999, 196). Here, we will finally find why the concept of a shared world arises.

\(^{175}\) Kant’s view is that we are affected by an unknown and unknowable world that provides contents, or a sensory manifold, that we bring under the categories or rules of synthesis when constructing the contents of experience.
For Habermas this fundamental change is already related to the traditional development of the social sciences [Geisteswissenschaften] and their historicist tendencies. Accordingly, philosophers are not only challenged to explain an eternal subject with regard to finite, natural objects, but also with regard to their own historical formation (see Habermas 1999, 196) in a possibly alienating society. Hegel’s description of human’s cultural development is therefore shaped as a learning process, and not simply posited. In other words, all of our institutions are the historical results of social or natural problems. From here, particularly, labor [Arbeit] and language [Sprache] have determined the becoming of human society. Habermas writes with regard to these means [Medien]: “Sprache und Arbeit sind Medien, in denen die vom Mentalismus auseinandergerissenen Aspekte des Inneren und Äußeren verklammert sind“ (Habermas 1999, 198). This means that these forms of language and labor externalize the inner subjectivity of subjects and their spirits persist while the subjects who originally generated them can vanish in the course of an emerging history. Humans, different from animals, do not only represent their species as individuals (see Habermas 1999, 198); rather, humans build identities and gain their personality (see Habermas 1999, 199) within history.

The historical identities of individuals transcend the individual life-span of only one individual. This has two consequences: Firstly, we are not only observing humans as objects amongst other objects, but we need to acknowledge that each person has a history of growing into his personality (see Habermas 1999, 199). Secondly, this growth, however, supersedes the individual person. Humans are more than merely learning individuals of their species. They are now part of a universal spirit of a society. The question remains whether this universal spirit and the individual can be reconciled or whether both of them fall apart in a society.
Consequently, Habermas focuses on this historical development of the community and its historical spirit. As I noted above, for Hegel, the means [Medien] supposedly play a mediating role between the subjects and objects of a society. Hegel’s solution to the problem of how the individual relates to the universal structure of spirit is therefore realized in mediators [Medien]. One of these means [Medien] is the family. Language (the theoretical side of our activities), the discourse of one single consciousness with nature, and labor [Arbeit] come together in a single society, while society’s core is the family. As our life-background, these structures ultimately determine how we perceive our world (see Habermas 1999, 202). Through them, we no longer live as mere members of a species. Rather, we exist as members of a family in a single shared world. We have a particular relation to the world as members of this species. Habermas argues: “Weil mein Sprachwissen meine aktuellen Wahrnehmungen vorstrukturiert, kann ich nichts wahrnehmen, ohne es in ein konzeptuelles Netz einzuordnen“ (Habermas 1999, 202). This means that though ‘reality’ accompanies the practices of the participants, it is never experienced independently from the medium of communication. The concept ‘reality’ depends on practice, and more precisely on societal formations like families. As the last chapters of Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung express a shift in Habermas’ theory towards relativism, Habermas finds a criterion for objectivity in the way we share spirit: „Der in einer Gemeinschaft verkörperte Geist ist in dem Maße »objektiv«, wie er von Mitgliedern, die von denselben Traditionen zehren und an denselben Praktiken teilnehmen, »intersubjektiv« geteilt wird“ (Habermas 1999, 204). So it is not only a practical knowledge that produces institutions and tools. The standpoint of utility is superseded. In order to achieve objectivity, forms of mutual recognition like family structures have to come into play. Otherwise, the overall structure of human interaction could not lift itself to the next level of cooperation.
How is the family appropriately understood? For the most part, Hegel uses romantic love as the prototype of mutual recognition. In romantic love, it seems, the difference and unity of the subject and object can be achieved. Both lovers are different and one at the same time, leading to a relationship in which universality and individuality are reconciled in a unity. This union, however, lacks a stable particularity (see Habermas 1999, 205) and can only be stabilized in the form of a family. Family is then an objective form of spirit.

The question is then: how do people find unity in their different practices. The problem is that in love the loving partners are worldless (see Habermas 1999, 209). They find an ideality that can never be achieved. In the family, however, the subjects are confronted with the question of an objective world because the relation sustains even though partners will disagree. Their struggle for recognition is not completed by a single act of romantic affection.

In order to describe this sublated romantic relationship, Habermas refers to Hegel’s theory of recognition and quotes: “Das Selbstbewußtsein ist an und für sich, indem und dadurch, daß es für ein anderes an und für sich ist; d.h. es ist nur als ein Anerkanntes“ (Habermas 1999, 209). So the different spirits that we will encounter must be results of the struggles for recognition, according though which each side fights for objective recognition. With these struggles, we enter an epistemic quality of self-consciousnesses because it is relevant for self-consciousness to fight for a fundamental arrangement of how the world is. This will manifest itself in institutions like the family. For Habermas it is significant that the relationship of a family, for example, needs the presupposition [Unterstellung] of a shared, common world. He writes:

Als Angehörige einer intersubjektiv geteilten Lebenswelt müssen sie unterstellen […], daß es eine identische Welt von unabhängig existierenden Gegenständen gibt. […] Eine Meinung könnte nicht mit dem normativen
It is this coordination of different perspectives, which underlies a true self-consciousness (see Habermas 1999, 211). The objective standard is thus neither mine, nor yours (Habermas 1999, 212). Rather it is a procedurally derived view of how the world is. Here, Habermas moves away from his former conception of truth as justifiability and moves towards a conception of a world for consciousnesses that is also for Hegel an important epistemological criterion. The true world is a world that we produce.

As I will demonstrate, however, this Hegelian criterion is not transcendentally presupposed as a precondition for our communication. This would reduce real human beings to the subjects of communication. For Habermas the presupposition of an objective world would only be necessary in order to mediate claims of knowledge. For Hegel, however, the criterion does not come from nowhere. Self-consciousness establishes this criterion as a part of how they operate at all. It is not external; it is internal to self-consciousness. Habermas, who wants to reject the mentalist paradigm as a potentially substantial interpretation of philosophy, relies only on an empirical description of how the concept “world” entered the discourse. It thus excludes an ontological discussion of the concept of “world”, and would thus remain only a formal assumption. From here on Habermas’ problematic interpretation and rejection of Hegel’s concept of self-consciousness begins.

176 For Habermas, Pinkard captures this idea best: “The activities of making knowledge-claims is part of our overall practice of dealing with the world so as to satisfy the system of desires that make up our various projects; and we know things by integrating our conceptions of what counts as an authoritative reason for believing or acting into these overall projects and desires. Since two points of view can clash, there will be problems of conciliating one individual’s claims with the conflicting claims of others. But a genuine conciliation could come about only if the parties could assume an objective, impersonal point of view […] that is, only if they could judge their own claims not completely internally to their own point of view and experience but could judge them in terms of something that would transcend that subjective experience […] Since the objective, impersonal point of view cannot be discovered […] the agents themselves must construct a social point of view” (Pinkard 1994, 57).
3.5.2 Habermas’ Critique of Hegel’s Concept of Self-Consciousness

Though Habermas does not ontologically follow Hegel’s project of self-consciousness, he agrees with his epistemological project of investigating the means [Medien] of spirit. In order to further discuss his rejection of the supposedly realist conception of absolute spirit, Habermas will first summarize Hegel’s theory of the different stages of self-consciousness.

At the beginning, the unhappy consciousness was exposed to doubt (see Habermas 1999, 212). This doubt, however, was replaced by a general form of reason. Enlightenment was supposed to recognize the order of nature and the order of society. Habermas writes: “Die Mentalität der Aufklärung traut der angeborenen Vernunft ebenso eine objektivierende Wissenschaft der Natur wie die rationale Organisation der Gesellschaft zu“ (Habermas 1999, 213). Problematic was, however, that the historically generated human spirit could never fit into the picture of man that was designed during this project of enlightenment. Habermas remarks for that reason: “Das Wesen des historisch gebildeten menschlichen Geistes entzieht sich dem wissenschaftlichen Menschenbild […]“ (Habermas 1999, 213). Because of these complications involved in capturing the true essence of human beings, the question remained about how to justify, and explain structures of spirit.

According to Habermas, Hegel analyzed a culture that assumed the possibility of self-grounding (see Habermas 1999, 213). This self-grounding signifies ahistorical tendencies. In fact, there are three significant motifs in Hegel’s philosophy that also includes a rejection of historicism. Habermas writes on these three motifs: “Dieses Vorhaben, das Hegel in der

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177 As I will demonstrate later, Hegel does not ground culture in the sense of a Cartesian foundationalism. A universal justification is no more than a justification. It is not a foundation in a Cartesian sense or a Letztbegründung. Habermas conflates ‘Grund’ and ‘Letztbegründung’.
Habermas interprets Hegel as a defender of a foundationalist project who wants to find a universal justification of philosophy. Therefore, Habermas characterizes his philosophy as a forward moving process that always wants to resolve dissonances:

Es löst die auf jeder Stufe erneut aufbrechenden kognitiven Dissonanzen dadurch auf, daß es die zunächst nur implizit gewußten Voraussetzungen einer problematisch gewordenen Weltauffassung explizit macht und dadurch eine befreiende Bewußtseinsstellung einnimmt, die bestehende Konflikte und Widersprüche beseitigt (Habermas 1999, 216).

This process of dissolving cognitive dissonances is necessary in order to achieve a coherent interpretation. Now, the difficult point is to determine the correct role that absolute spirit has in
this process. Absolute Spirit, according to my historicist interpretation, is not the end of this process, but an end of epistemology. It is the entrance to categorial thinking that is timeless, yet historical. This timelessness does not mean it is ahistorical. It only means that the representational understanding of time is insufficient to grasp the moments of spirit. Indeed, the Logic will provide the oneness of the categories and also allow for a concept of externality.

Historically, however, it is only the greatest compression that we can achieve in our current time. It is a diamond, compressed by the pressures and demands of our historical moment, but not an eternal structure. Given the instruments of cognition available to humans, it is our logic. In this sense, the problems we imposed on ourselves are freely chosen by the means of what we are.

Knowing can be acknowledged as absolute if we clarify all the influences of this epistemological situation of the anthropologically constituted subject. In order to give this interpretation of a historical interpretation of Hegel’s Logic some plausibility, we only have to remind ourselves that Hegel claims in the preface of the Logic that he should have written the Logic 77 times, given that Plato revised The Republic seven times. The introductions to the Encyclopedia Logic’s reveal, moreover, that Hegel intended the Logic as a guide, yet not as a ready-made result.

Thinking trumps thought. With this in mind, it is true that we will be introduced to a sublation of time, but this does not mean that the following generated ideas are ahistorical. I will clarify this in greater detail in my concrete discussion of Hegel’s idea of Absolute Knowing.

Habermas, however, is suspicious of Hegel’s Absolute Spirit: “Wessen Geist ist es, dessen Entstehungsgeschichte die Leser nachvollziehen sollen“ (Habermas 1999,216)? According to this suspicion, it is not the individual, but an anonymous form that takes over and governs our society. For this reason, Habermas concludes: „Oder sollten wir jenem welthistorischen Bewußtseinswandel als Subjekt nicht eher einen transzendierenden Geist
unterlegen, der über die Schranken moderner Denk- und Lebensformen hinausgreift“ (Habermas 1999, 217)? This spirit would not be our spirit. Habermas, well aware of deflationist Hegel-interpretations such as Pinkard’s, remarks that there remains a difference between objective spirit and absolute spirit. Habermas criticizes “Was nach unserer Auffassung rational akzeptabel ist, deckt sich nicht notwendigerweise mit dem objektiv Wahren. Der endliche, seiner Gegenwart und Vergangenheit verhaftete Geist bleibt, auch wenn er sich nach der Idee des unbedingt Gültigen richtet, provinziell gegenüber künftigem, besseren Wissen“ (Habermas 1999, 219). This position already indicates that Habermas will abandon his Discourse Theory, since this is based on rational acceptability. As the final chapters of *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung* indicate Habermas leans more and more towards a realism. More problematic, however, is the fact that Habermas apparently still adheres here to the myth of progress. Without a clear conception of a mind-independent reality this progress can only be historically justified with regard to former positions that were, however, also bound by the historical moment. Moreover, Habermas denies a context of all contexts as exemplified in the following statement: “Sicher können wir die Grenzen unserer epistemischen Kontexte von innen immer weiter hinausschieben; aber es gibt keinen Kontext aller Kontexte, den wir überschauen können. Nichts berechtigt uns zu der Erwartung, das letzte Wort zu behalten“ (Habermas 1999, 219). So it is unclear whether Habermas’ theory of progress, the idea that we cannot not learn, can be simply justified. According to Habermas, Absolute Spirit is related to a standpoint of progress: “Sie selbst sollen zur Erkenntnis einer alles bloß Subjektive überwältigenden Macht des Geistes konvertieren, die schicksalhaft durch die Sphäre der Volksgeister, also durch die Geschichte der intersubjektiven Lebensformen hindurchgreift“ (Habermas 1999, 220). Obviously, Habermas takes Absolute Spirit as overcoming the differences between the objective and intersubjective realm so that
Absolute Spirit can eventually guide the individual in order to get closer to reality. With this interpretation in mind, Habermas quotes Hegel’s Encyclopedia: “Der Geist hat für uns die Natur zu seiner Voraussetzung, deren Wahrheit, und damit deren absolut Erstes er ist.“ (Habermas 1999, 220) Here, Habermas sees Hegel’s clear break with the turn towards the means [Medien] of language and labor towards an “obscure self-consciousness” (Habermas 1999, 221). It is also crucial that Habermas makes no references to the circularity of Hegel’s project or how this final structure rather expresses freedom than closure:


For Habermas, Hegel sees in the self-conceptualizing thought the Absolute Spirit that comes to itself as the substance of the subject. So Habermas claims that Hegel does this by virtue of subjectivity, and thus he falls back into mentalism which cannot be anything else than a substantialism (see Habermas 1999, 221). It is no longer the mediation of language, labor and interaction that guides subjects. Instead, the overall substance of everything that we do is the substance of this anonymous Absolute Spirit. So Habermas writes on Hegel’s presupposed, mental subject: “Dieses Subjekt wird als das Ein und Alles, als Totalität gedacht, die »nichts außer sich haben kann«“ (Habermas 1999, 222). This totalizing is a return to mentalism, which, for Habermas, constitutes the ultimately opaque precondition for Hegel’s epistemology.

Though Habermas is right to critically examine the question of subjectivity, the most problematic part of Habermas’ interpretation is that he misunderstands Hegel’s historicism. In the following, Habermas quotes a well-known, but often misinterpreted passage:
Hegel identifiziert dieses »Andere« mit dem Geschehen in der Zeit, worin sich die Bewegung des Begriffs vollzieht, während er das absolute Selbst als den Begriff begreift, der die Zeit in sich verschlingt und gewissermaßen verzehrt. Damit verliert die Historizität der Vernunft ihren herausfordernden Charakter. Sie wird jedenfalls entschärft, wenn die Logik über die Geschichte doch wieder auf die traditionelle Weise den Sieg davonträgt: „Die Zeit ist der Begriff, der da ist …; deswegen erscheint der Geist notwendig in der Zeit, (aber) er erscheint (nur) solange in der Zeit, als er nicht seinen reinen Begriff erfaßt, d. h. nicht die Zeit tilgt. (Habermas 1999, 222)

The problem here is that Hegel has an idea of absolute spirit that must be thought as beyond time, but this does not mean that it is outside of history. Hegel discusses here rather a problem of dialectic that I will discuss in much more detail later. It may be useful to anticipate my arguments, however: in the preface of the Phenomenology, Hegel discusses the truth of a plant. The single stages seemingly refute other stages of its development. The bud is refuted by the blossom, and the blossom is refuted by the fruit. Now, it occurs that the plant, the universal concept of all of these occurrences, is outside of time, outside of its single moments. The concept of the plant occurs as a formal idea of what the plant is. The plant, however, does not exist if it does not become, and thus the universal that serves as a teleological goal cannot be outside of time. It must be somehow the process itself. At this point, my concepts are not rich enough to discuss this relation in detail without contradiction, but it implies that it comes down to the question of deconstructing the category of time, eternity, temporality, and history in order to grasp the moments of the plants as necessary, and in order to free them from their contradictions (see Hegel PoS §2, 2). We thus need another conception of time that Habermas does not develop here.

Habermas’ problematic interpretation of Absolute Knowing, however, guides his further evaluation:

Because Hegel’s goal of a “Vereinigungsphilosophie” (a philosophy that unites), Hegel replaces, according to Habermas, objective spirit with a subjective idea of Absolute Spirit. Thus Hegel returns to the, for Habermas, forbidden mentalist paradigm that relies on atemporality.

I hold that such interpretations inhibit a return to Hegel and have served Habermas to reject such a return. Though Habermas successfully refutes Brandom’s model, and criticizes his realism, from his own Kantian perspective, he cannot successfully take up the threads of Hegel’s historicism that ground our situation. A return to dialectics is impossible on the developed grounds of pragmatic-semantic and communication theory. Instead, a reading of Hegel has to be established that grasps him as a historicist thinker. In order to show that this is possible, I must reconstruct Hegel’s epistemology as it is developed in the Phenomenology and interpret his passages on Absolute Knowing.

4. Hegel’s Historicism

In this chapter, I will argue that Hegel’s concept of Absolute Knowing implies that all cognitive claims are bound to the historical moment. Thus, Absolute Knowing as a cognitive claim about the identity of subjective knowing and objective truth must be reconstructed as historical itself. In order to do so, I will particularly focus on Hegel’s distinction of time and history that he
introduces in his last chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel’s historical dialectic that reaches its epistemological goal in the historicity of Absolute Knowing will finally reveal itself as incompatible with Brandom’s semantic realism. Thus, we cannot say that Brandom bridges the divide between analytic and Continental philosophy.

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178 This interpretation of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* will have consequences for the question of Hegel’s *Logic*. For some interpreters Hegel’s *Logic* is the presentation of a diamond net that excludes historicity and presents the foundation of the Hegelian system. Hegel’s epistemology of a developing self in the *Phenomenology* and its relation to anthropology will render these positions impossible. Hegel’s *Logic* only serves as a preliminary grounding, a kind of metaphysical net that we use for interpreting experiences. Each consciousness requires a metaphysics. This question of a ‘grounding’ metaphysics will be investigated in the *Logic*. I would like to make two remarks that relativize the status of Hegel’s *Logic* as foundational. Firstly, Being, that is without doubt the starting point of a pure science without presuppositions, reveals itself to be intertwined with its contrary, i.e., nothing. Hegel writes then on the becoming of both of these concepts: “Their truth is therefore this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one into the other: becoming, a movement in which the two are distinguished, but by a distinction which has just as immediately dissolved itself” (See Hegel, G.W.F. *Science of Logic*. Translated by George Di Giovanni, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 60). Due to Being’s and Nothing’s intertwining, Gadamer makes, for example, the controversial point that Hegel’s *Logic* does not start with Being (Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Hegel’s Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*. Translated by P. Christopher Smith, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976). Rather, it starts with becoming. In other words, the fluidity of thinking cannot be captured by the abstract immediacy that Being represents. Hegel remarks that we cannot start with nothing, since the becoming of nothing must be the becoming of something, while something cannot be nothing. In this sense, Hegel’s position is that Being becomes. The major point that Gadamer defends, however, is that *Logic* is dynamic. This interpretation stands in contradiction to the idea that the *Logic* provides a stable position at the end of its movement. We cannot remain in the abstract thought that the *Logic* is Being, which would be the lifeless, and dead universal result. Secondly, even the objective truth of being and its essence are demonstrated as conceptual and syllogistic. Thus, the truth of being depends on inference. In a word, the objective logic reveals itself to be the subjective logic. Hegel proclaimed this already in the *Phenomenology*: “I’ is the content of the connection and the connecting itself” (Hegel PoS §166, 104). We cannot find, however, an abstract form that describes this ego, except we attempt to think pure being. In this case, we have to understand the ego in terms of its formal judgments that are at the same time its content. In this sense, experience is known through, but is not limited to judgment. Logic is the grounding for thinking, yet it is only the preliminary grounding that we accept in order to enter thinking. This grounding remains embedded into what human beings are. It is the process that we have abstracted from the empiricist, rationalist, and critical arguments, thus the highest concept that we got to know in history so far. Nonetheless, it only serves as a guidance for developing concepts concretely and the logic is not the absolute result of history that cannot be superseded anymore.

As it occurs in the *Logic*, the ego might be identical with the concept by virtue of the form matching its content. Yet, we should not forget the specific character of the *Logic* as only demonstrating a particular conception of presuppositionlessness resulting from Absolute Knowing. In this sense, it is the pure epistemological ego that discovers itself as a grounding structure, when it thinks Being’s dynamic becoming. It would, however, be a mistake to conflate this conceptual structure with human beings. It would only lead us to the absurd conclusions that humans are concepts. Rather, the problem occurs at the end of the *Logic*, since this abstract ego must achieve a relation to nature. Otherwise, its final mediation would remain meaningless. It would remain an abstract entity that stays as a sleeping spirit in itself, comparable to a potential God before creation, an absurd concept. God, a concept that can only be thought as actuality, cannot be potential. Thus an ego that is self-identical must be thought as an absurdity, too. Hegel’s main focus is therefore not the *Logic*, which remains only a part of his systematic account. His main concern is the human being as he presents it later in the *Philosophy of Spirit*. 264
The previous discussion of Brandom’s semantic realism will structure my discussion of Hegel’s historicism. There are three concepts that make Brandom’s semantic realism incompatible with Hegel’s position:

1) Brandom’s metaphysical realism,
2) Brandom’s presupposed formal subjects who play the universal game of giving and asking for reasons, and
3) Brandom’s ahistorical semantics.

Firstly, I will demonstrate that Hegel does not believe that content can be independent from form. From this follows that the presupposition of a mind-independent reality cannot be achieved since the subjective form of cognition is involved in all cognitive acts. Thus, recognizing a mind-independent reality means to recognize a mind-dependent mind-independent reality, which is absurd. All epistemology is based on a subject, and thus we cannot have mere content.

Secondly, Hegel’s epistemology is based on a subject understood anthropologically, and thus we cannot achieve a merely formal understanding of how we act. Rather, our actions depend on the conditions of experiencing, social human beings in their historical context.

Thirdly, the reason why Brandom believes he can relate to Hegelianism is based on a common misconception that Hegel follows an ahistorical, social model of how we secure meaning by inferences. Habermas also follows and perpetuates this misguided interpretation of Hegel as a social thinker,\(^{179}\) while ultimately rejecting Hegel’s account as ahistoric. On the

\(^{179}\) Like any thinker, Hegel’s epistemological project can also be accessed in relation to its predecessors. I regard the most important task for Hegel to overcome the Fichtean opposition of content and form in consciousness and achieve an absolute mediation of the further occurring contradictions that such a project reveals (see Greene,
contrary, I will demonstrate that Hegel’s account is intrinsically historicist and that all our
cognitive claims are limited to the historical moment.

For proving these points, I will focus on Hegel’s “Introduction” and the last chapter
“Absolute Knowing” of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I will explain the structure in more
detail in the following.

The overall epistemological problem is central in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Thus,
Rockmore states: “we should comprehend his entire book as a single theory of knowledge
running through different phases from cognition (*Erkennen*) to absolute knowing” (1997, 2).
Hegel’s epistemological account will be the foundation for any further problem that we
approach. Rockmore summarizes this epistemological account as follows: “We can never
compare what is in our mind with anything outside it, but only with something else that it is
given to, hence within mind” (1997, 3). While the best epistemology in theory would explain the
universal structure of all phenomena and their relationship to a mind-independent reality, Hegel
holds the view that we can clarify truth only for us. Thus, his theory must be understood as the
second best, but currently only possible epistemology. Though such an epistemology might be
correctly considered as relativism, it is important to note that Hegel does not give up on the
possibility of cognition. Rockmore presents the central point of Hegel’s objective cognition: “we

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process will be man himself who is exposed to the command “know thyself” in an epistemological sense. This
means that Hegel does not believe in an isolated, pure ego like Fichte (see White, Alan. *Absolute Knowledge
: Hegel and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1983, 24). Thus, his beginning is the
incomplete, historical status of man who faces the problem of knowledge that is supposed to be universal. This
subjective condition, its historical starting point, must therefore be included in a successful project of thought (see
White 1983, 125), and its consequences for a historicism have to be indicated.

Hegel’s strategy in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is to start with the subjective experience of immediacy and to
demonstrate the resulting inadequacies. The experience of these inadequacies and the negation of former theories
will lead to the attempt of recognizing the subject itself, which will require the perspective of the other, since
otherwise the problem of an objectification the subject cannot be overcome. The substance of this historical
community that produces intuitive, insufficient forms of what we are will finally be grasped in absolute spirit.
reach knowledge when our view of the object and the object as it is given to us, or is within mind, coincide” (1997, 3). Hegel attempts to reach this identity of subject and object in Absolute Knowing. Absolute Knowing is a historical moment, in which the subject can grasp itself as its own object after a series of self-investigations.

In my first step, I will present Hegel’s phenomenology. Given that Hegel does not accept noumena, but focuses on phenomena, it is adequate to call Hegel’s epistemological account phenomenological. Phenomenology expresses for Hegel the idea that we deal with approachable contents of experience, and not with contents that are beyond our grasp as, for example, transcendentally deducted noumena, or real things as Brandom presupposes. Contents are thus within our experiences. This difference between Hegel and Brandom, who presupposes a mind-independent reality, cannot be bridged. Rorty’s claim that Brandom leads analytical philosophy into its Hegelian stage is therefore absurd.

Hegel’s phenomenological account further implies that all contents are structured conceptually. Knowledge is therefore not immediate, but mediated during the process of experience by virtue of our conceptual activity. In a second step, I will therefore explain how Hegel’s epistemology is related to subjects and their conceptual activity. Though we cannot access a mind-independent reality, Hegel is interested in the possible identity of all experienced objects, which is known through historical, socially mediated self-knowledge. Since for this reason every problem hinges on self-knowledge, the investigation of knowing the subject and its object becomes an investigation of consciousness as its own object. Rockmore evaluates this

181 Demonstrating this will support my general thesis that Discourse Theory and the linguistic turn can be understood as reactions or even as a partial continuation of the Hegelian insights. As I will show, however, language, in Hegelian terms is not the undeniable unhintergebare condition of cognition but remains open for historical change.
important transformation of philosophy towards self-consciousness: “This reflexive level, typical of Hegel’s theory, separates it from Kant’s. Kant never asks about the relation of the thinker to the theory … [F]rom his antipsychologistic perspective, an analysis of the conditions of knowledge must be independent of any and all anthropological considerations” (1997, 36). Thus, Hegel does not only drop any claim for knowing the noumenon, Hegel focuses also on experiencing subjects, which is entirely different from Brandom who relies on a communicational model in which he formalizes language users.

Before Hegel, with the possible exception of Fichte, the subject was only understood with regard to the requirements of knowledge, but never discussed as a full person (see Rockmore 1997, 4). Hegel, however, does not conflate rational cognizers who happen to be human, with humans who happen to know. Instead, Hegel intends to solve the epistemological problem of human subjects knowing themselves with regard to spirit. Rockmore writes on this central concept: “His concept of spirit is roughly a view of people in the sociohistorical context as the real subject of knowledge” (1997, 4). I will highlight of how spirit as a possible identity of subjects and their objects expresses the substance of human beings who become deeper and deeper involved in the problem of knowledge.  

I will start with an interpretation of Hegel’s introduction to the Phenomenology of Spirit in which he presents his grounding views of philosophy as a phenomenology. All of the following points serve also to apply his epistemological standpoint to his thoughts of the Logic and his idea of systematically approaching knowledge. Since the Logic is widely regarded as the highest point of Hegel’s philosophy, and mistakenly referred to as an adamantine, conceptual net, I need to provide an interpretation of the Logic that relativizes this status. I think that the Logic is the historical, preliminary, and provisional grounding of what truth is for us. After Hegel has shown in the Phenomenology that all our knowledge of objects involves knowledge of us in communities and our historical moment, after he has achieved the standpoint of science, the logic is concerned with the development of the ontological framework of what is for us. The role of the Logic is to demonstrate that the phenomena of externality, that, according to a Fichtean account, are encountered as an external Anstoß, can actually be explained and determined through the conceptual framework of logic itself. The absolute idea, the concept of the concept is then the guiding, regulative idea for a systematic analysis of concepts in the ‘Realphilosophien’. In Absolute Spirit, unlike Habermas’ interpretation, we gain the first standpoint of what reality is for us, and can apply it to natural phenomena afterwards. In other words, Hegel’s Logic gives us an idea of how we know phenomena of experience.
In a third step, I will discuss Hegel’s solution to the epistemological problem of the difference between subject and object. Though subject and object are ontologically distinct in consciousness, they can be brought to an identity through a cultural learning process [Bildung] of spirit. Absolute Spirit, the content of Absolute Knowing, occurs first in the intuitive practices of a community that will increasingly know itself until it can conceptualize its identity by rejecting all of its merely intuitive, hence external, assumptions about itself. Thus it can grasp itself as the self-produced object.

The historical progression of this self-knowledge is Hegel’s central idea that does not occur in Brandom’s semantic realism. Though Habermas propagates a model of learning in *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung*, he only offers a weak naturalism that explains the development of different discourse practices. Habermas’ explanation relies therefore on external assumptions. Hegel goes philosophically beyond Habermas and Brandom by focusing on our capacity of reflection. His intention is to explain our standpoint of knowing through reflection without any external means besides our historical experience, the starting point of natural consciousness.

In order to distinguish Hegel’s account of Absolute Knowing from Brandom’s ahistoric language game, but also in order to distinguish it from Habermas’ misinterpretation as ahistoric, I will carve out Hegel’s distinction between time and history. For Hegel, human subjects remain historical, even though their substance must be grasped as independent from time. ‘Absolute’ means then that, in respect to our historically limited experience, there will be no more

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without adding anything external to the process of experience. In this sense, the *Logic* carries further the task of the *Phenomenology* and its demonstration that the subject and the object can be reconstructed as identical, which is truth for us. The *Logic* demonstrates how the resulting movement of thought is rich enough to produce a concept of externality, in order to guide our processes of experience. In terms of the *Logic*, we investigate how consciousness that is in principle identical with its object actually achieves its own objectivity and thus grasps determinate objects at all. Hegel, unlike Brandom, dialectically develops a concept of reality that is a regulative term for understanding phenomena that we encounter, for example, in nature.
unexplained component in our epistemology. Though, for Hegel, this is an objective starting point for science, the achieved knowledge is still historically bound. Habermas’ criticism of Hegel as annulling time and committing to an ahistoric perspective is therefore false. Since time is an intuition, hence an external mean of reflection, it cannot be part of Absolute Knowing. Though the achieved knowing is absolute, it is only absolute in the sense that it does not require any other foundation than what is given to humans through historical experience. Hegel’s goal is to grasp this process of experience conceptually by means of reflection.

My main and conclusive point for the last chapter is henceforth: while time is an intuitive form that consciousness uses to order empirical phenomena perceived from a contingent stream of events, historicity is the process in which humans can grasp their own development and recognize their own historical substance. For this reason, Hegel does not claim to grasp history in its contingent totality, but he offers a concept that makes contingent events part of one historical understanding. This oneness of our understanding achieved through reflection is a regulative for us in order to grasp irrational, contingent events organically. Neither Brandom, nor Habermas can provide such a reflective criterion. Brandom, moreover, simply presupposes a mind-independent, ahistoric reality. Habermas criticizes Brandom, but fundamentally misunderstands Hegel. Instead of proceeding with their analytic discourse, we have to see how Hegel develops a historically derived criterion for the objectivity of knowledge and how he therefore delivers a viable historical philosophy.

4.1. The Inseparability of Content and Form in Hegel’s Phenomenology
The goal of the following part is to show that Hegel’s phenomenology can be understood as an argument for the identity of content and form, which rules out the possibility of Brandom’s
semantic realism, a reconstruction of the formal, propositional requirements of discourses with regard to a mind-independent reality. Phenomenology, moreover, will not be interpreted in a Husserlian sense. Rather, I will demonstrate that phenomenology could be understood with regard to Hegel’s concept of self-consciousness. I call this phenomenology because it focuses on phenomena and does not presuppose or deduce any noumena. More specifically, phenomenology means that natural consciousness is confronted with phenomena, while phenomenology is then the “education of consciousness itself to the standpoint of Science” (Hegel PoS §79, 50). By natural consciousness I have in mind the subconscious production of unreflected knowledge. Thus, phenomenology refers to the method that emerges while investigating the content of natural consciousness and the truth of its phenomenal knowledge that leads to reflection.\textsuperscript{183} The project is reflective, since this first natural consciousness as consciousness can investigate itself. I will show later that consciousness of something always involves self-consciousness. The content of phenomenology is thus the description of how this phenomenal knowledge is constituted through consciousness itself and will lead to the question of self-consciousness.

In order to clarify these points, I will firstly demonstrate the ordinary meaning of phenomenology as essentialist and foundationalist. After mentioning some Hegelian arguments against essentialism and foundationalism, I will discuss secondly the Kantian form of a foundationalist approach from which Hegel derives his position. I will show the beginning ideas of Hegel’s phenomenology, namely how he borrows from Kant the constructivist idea of the system and how he transforms it with regard to the question of history. In the end, I will provide

\textsuperscript{183} I call this phenomenal knowledge, because it is the knowledge that should be free of all presumptions about a metaphysical world, for example: that time is independent from content, hence, that time is absolute. Of course, natural consciousness includes contradictions, since its first insights will always reveal themselves as inadequate. The following series of contradictions informs our process of education and should be understood as emerging history.
an argument for why content and form of Hegel’s phenomenology are inseparable, and how phenomenology is a description of our conceptual, subjective activity of experiencing. Overall, Hegel’s approach stands thereby in contrast with Brandom’s formal communication model that refers to a mind-independent reality.

4.1.1 Ordinary Phenomenologies in Relation to Essentialism and Foundationalism

Probably common to all forms of phenomenology is the view that knowledge emerges in the sphere of the subject, albeit under this broad definition are also gathered a lot of philosophies that are not phenomenologies (see Rockmore 2000, 51). But also the established known phenomenologies are questionable in their approach, since most of these phenomenologies consider essentialism as necessary for claims to know. Since it is, however, impossible to claim to know something without relating it to the context which justifies the claim, Hegel rejects the idea of essentialism for an epistemology (Rockmore 2000, 55).

Hegel’s rejection, roughly speaking, stems from the fact that language uses general [allgemeine] terms. So we cannot simply reference to essences which are individual. Despite the rejection of essentialism, we can still apply general concepts of language meaningfully in contrast to a social, and historical background (Rockmore 2000, 55). Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that we are able to operate with general concepts in sciences without any kind of essentialism. This method is related to Hegel’s idea of historical contexts, according to which we can achieve objective claims.


185 Following the rough lines of the chapter on ‘sense-certainty’, immediate knowledge could not include the meaning of ‘this’. Hegel concludes therefore that all knowledge must be mediated (see Hegel PoS §90, 85).
Since Hegel defends the idea of historical contexts, he also revises a linear foundationalism that is often associated with essentialism. Foundationalisms usually propose a secured method for constituting a rigorous science, after setting out an Archimedean starting point of certain knowledge. This means nothing else than the paradoxical demand, to know what knowing is, before we start to know anything. Although many of these foundationalisms stand close to essentialism, some foundationalisms follow the idea to subtract the subjective perspective from current knowledge for uncovering the conditions of the possibility of knowledge. Representatives of this transcendental or quasi-transcendental method believe that they can uncover the transcendental framework of knowledge, or that they could deduce the cause, the real object, of the in cognition given appearance. They believe that we can derive such a framework through, for instance, an understanding of how the instrument of cognition works.

In each case foundationalism attempts to distinguish with certainty the subjective appearance of an object from a mere semblance (false appearance) through setting out the rules for the ‘real’ science. No matter with which kind of foundationalism the foundation of the scientific house should be built, all approaches of foundationalism want to justify apodictic knowledge of a real object and are therefore metaphysical realisms. They claim to know a mind-independent reality. After such a foundation, which would include a correct notion of how the instrument transforms the real object into an object of knowledge, or how an essence is given directly, all epistemological problems would be solved, and from this reached point the real science could start (Rockmore 2004,1).

Hegel, who considers these approaches, states right at the beginning of the introduction in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*: “It is a natural assumption that in philosophy, before we start to

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deal with its proper subject-matter, viz. the actual cognition of what truly is, one must first of all come to an understanding about cognition, which is regarded either as the instrument to get hold of the Absolute, or as the medium through which one discovers it” (Hegel PoS §73, 46). Since Hegel is deeply rooted in the tradition, he arrives at his own philosophy through critiques of preceding views (see Rockmore 1997, 23). In the quote above, Hegel distinguishes the understanding of cognition either as an instrument or as a medium. The following text can therefore be read as a response to the critical epistemology of Kant, even though he never mentions him by name (see Rockmore 1997, 23).

Hegel accepts Kant’s goal to achieve a theory of knowledge that can justify its own conditions (what can be roughly called “critical”), and thinks that the idea is rational to ask if knowledge can bridge the gap between appearance and reality through demonstrating how the real object is constituted. Yet, he does not share Kant’s opinion that the justification can be attained apart from the process of knowledge, which is the process of consciousness’ experiencing (see Rockmore 1997, 23). Instead, Hegel replaces the foundationalist idea of a system through an idea of a circular, open system, which derives the conditions of knowledge within the process of knowledge. This is closely related to the idea of Hegel’s phenomenology which can be roughly described as the demonstration of the experiences of consciousness through its development toward Absolute Knowledge.

In the following point, I would like to sketch how Hegel develops his concept of phenomenology from a critique of Kant’s transcendental philosophy. Hegel who finally denies
access to mind-independent objects breaks with the Kantian tradition of knowing a mind-independent reality.  

4.1.2 Kant's Foundationalism and the Hegelian Rejection

For demonstrating the differences between Hegel and Kant and the similarities regarding their phenomenological approaches, I will explain the route from Kant’s foundationalism to the roots of Hegel’s phenomenology. Firstly, I will sketch Kant’s position. This can only be a very brief summary of the generally acknowledged problems of his theory and will not include an in-depth analysis. Secondly, I will demonstrate how Hegel derives his own epistemology from his criticism of Kant. Thirdly, I will argue that Hegel’s anti-foundationalist phenomenology leads him to the consideration of a subject understood anthropologically. This subject will be the center of Hegel’s epistemology that is open for historical change. Hegel’s anthropological understanding of the subject distinguishes his theory from Kant’s foundationalism who focuses on an epistemological subject.

4.1.2.1 Kant's Foundationalism and the Idea of the System

Kant understands experience as based upon a synthetic unity of all appearances so that experiences are constructed through categories provided by the thinking subject. There can be no knowledge without this thinking subject to which objects appear (see Kant KdrV §16 B 141). Scientists, for example, have no direct access to mind-independent objects of nature. Yet, they

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187 For the same reason, Hegel must be opposed to Brandom’s semantic approach.
188 This will also turn out to be the reason for why Hegel is incompatible with Brandom’s approach, who has formalized, linguistic subjects as the foundation for an objective theory in mind.
order uninterpreted phenomena by virtue of an apriori conceptual framework that is provided by a thinking subject. In other words, they interpret phenomena through an a priori categorial understanding, and therefore they depend on this categorial understanding.

By drawing our attention to the subjective conditions of knowledge, Kant makes, indeed, an important contribution to epistemology. He turns the metaphysical, scientific paradigm into its opposite. Knowledge does not depend on objects anymore, but objects depend on knowledge (see Rockmore 2007,60). This known as Kant’s Copernican revolution can also be described in the words of constructivism: knowledge is based on how we construct (see also Kant, KdrV, Bxiii).

Despite this constructivism, which is anti-foundationalist, Kant claims that there is a thing-in-itself outside us. The question, however, arises: if we can only know what we have constructed, how shall it then be possible to know that there exists a so-called thing in-itself? At least, we cannot make a causal inference, since this would be a category mistake, namely to apply a category to itself in order to ground it. Since the thing-in-itself cannot be experienced, the idea of it has to be a part of the subject. However, if it is related to the thinking of the subject, then it cannot be an objective condition of a representationalist model, but must be part of a more complex theoretical model, a holism that includes the subject.

For Kant, the a priori principles cannot be not justified by experience, but are justified by the necessity of a whole that stands in relation to a thing-in-itself. A science of knowledge should not be a subjective conglomeration of merely related phenomena. Empirical knowledge (experience) is only possible, if there is a secured unified ground available that regulates the

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application of our concepts. His idea of the system under one unifying idea emerges. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* he writes: “In accordance with reason’s legislative prescriptions, our diverse modes of knowledge must not be permitted to be a mere rhapsody, but must form a system [...] I understand the unity of the manifold modes of knowledge under one idea” (Kant CpR B860, 653). In other words, Kant wants to unify all diverse modes of our knowledge under one idea. This idea is the rational concept as a whole, according to which all concepts are organized. But since this rational concept must be provided by the subject, the question of the unity of the subject becomes central for his investigation. Kant relies on the formal I-think, which must be able to accompany all representations and which is supposed to support the coherence of all representations with respect to a possible mind-independent reality.

In fact, however, Kant does not solve the question of whether objective claims with respect to a mind-independent reality can be made through finite, human beings. Instead, he presupposes a formal subject that projects a mind-independent object as the absolute condition for knowledge. The epistemological subject becomes central for his approach, while the experiencing subject can only know phenomena. Thus the experiencing subject receives a subordinated position in his investigation. Kant’s theory is a priori, hence ahistorical. Therefrom, Kant needs to prove the unity of the epistemological subject in order to justify his theory. He needs to secure the unity of the system, or the unity of reason, and guarantee the objectivity of the system. But this identity of the experiencing and the epistemological subject is questionable.

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191 Kant’s philosophy is supposed to be the first and the last philosophy. For instance, Kant states that any change in his philosophy “introduces contradictions not merely into the system, but into universal human reason” (Kant CpR, Bxxxviii).
Kant wants to leave the circle of the experiences of the subject, because experience is always subjective. But this implies a formalization of an epistemological subject that is different from experiencing human beings. Regarding the subject of cognition, he thus defends a dualism between the mechanisms of cognition. Sensibility just deals with phenomena, and understanding organizes these phenomena through a priori categories. This diversity of the subject, however, is the problem for the unity of reason. In order to overcome this dualism, Kant attempts to combine both approaches sensibility and understanding in one system. He concludes that sensibility and understanding must be part of a system of knowledge in order to make it coherent. This means, on the one hand, Kant regards the sensory manifold as the medium in which subjects receive information; on the other hand, he sees the understanding as the instrument through which the information are spontaneously categorized and through which an object of experience is brought up (see Rockmore 2005, 24). The general idea of this approach is to understand how cognition in identity works. In order to justify this system, Kant believes that he can subtract the subjective perspective from appearances in order to deduce the conditions of the possibility of knowledge, the a priori categorial framework. The categorial framework, which is necessary for experiences, is only possible if it produces the idea of a real thinkable object, the thing-in-itself. Kant follows therefore a foundationalist goal, namely to justify a representational system under one unifying, objective, and a priori idea. This goal, as explained above, presupposes a separation of content and form, while we focus on the formal aspects that are necessary to order content.

I have only sketched the Kantian system as relying on an epistemological subject. In the following points, I would like to show how Hegel evaluates and handles Kant’s dualism, which in my interpretation is the root of Hegel’s phenomenology. On the contrary, Hegel argues that
content and form are inseparable.\textsuperscript{192} Moreover, he abandons the idea of a formal I-think and a noumenon that would close a possible system. Nevertheless, Hegel borrows Kant’s constructivist idea, and the idea of a systematic structure of our knowledge. In this sense, Hegel is a post-Kantian thinker who proceeds with the anti-foundational project of Kant by reinterpreting the Copernican turn with regard to the question of history.

\textbf{4.1.2.2 Hegel's Interpretation and Rejection of Kantian Cognition}

Hegel comments on Kant’s idea of separating content and form:

For, if cognition is the instrument for getting hold of absolute being, it is obvious that the use of an instrument on a thing certainly does not let it be what it is for itself, but rather sets out to reshape and alter it. If, on the other hand, cognition is not an instrument of our activity but a more or less passive medium through which the light of truth reaches us, then again we do not receive the truth as it is in itself, but only as it exists through and in this medium (Hegel PoS §73, 46).

As Hegel states, it is obvious that an instrument alters the object, and also the medium shapes the way we perceive it. It seems, nevertheless, that we could deduce the real object through correct knowledge of the instrument and the medium. But Hegel discards this idea:

If we remove from a reshaped thing what the instrument has done to it, then the thing–here the Absolute–becomes for us exactly what it was before this [accordingly] superfluous effort (Hegel PoS §73, 47).

\textsuperscript{192} Hegel’s theory is therefore incompatible with Brandom’s account which develops a formalized language game that presupposes a mind-independent reality.
So if we subtract what the instrument has altered, then we just receive what we had before, an unknown object. Our effort was useless. Also, to presuppose that cognition as the instrument is bringing the absolute closer to us, presupposes that there is “a merely immediate and therefore effortless relationship” to the absolute (Hegel PoS §73, 47). The question is then: why did our cognition alter it in the first place?

The same is true for the approach to apply the law of refraction to the concept of cognition as a medium (see Rockmore 1997, 25). When we determine the deviation of this medium, and we subtract this deviation from the object which is in the medium, then of course we know something about the process of cognition, but not about the object in-itself (see Rockmore 1997, 25). Hegel writes: “For it is not the refraction of the ray, but the ray itself whereby truth reaches us, that is cognition; and if this were removed, all that would be indicated would be a pure direction or a blank space” (Hegel PoS §73, 47). Understanding the medium’s refraction would just produce a description of the way the object reaches us and bring us back to where we were before the object reached us. This would tell us nothing about the object as it is in itself (see Rockmore 1996, 25).

The arguments indicate that it is impossible to separate content and form, or, to put it in Kantian terms, to work out a categorical a priori framework that is derived before we experience contents. Obviously, our knowledge is part of experience. And so both Kantian approaches (cognition as an instrument, or cognition as a medium) fail, because they distinguish between the shape of thought and the content of thought. In fact, however, our cognition works and there should be no necessity to have doubts concerning the way consciousness experiences. Hegel trusts our ordinary way of how we are in the world, and we do not need a secured method beforehand for joining the road to science. Knowledge starts with experience. Yet, we can admit
that it is ultimately not limited to it. To work out an approach to draw the right conclusions from experience is therefore Hegel’s project.

The mistrust in the way cognition works that is the cause of Kant’s foundationalism is, in Hegelian terms, merely “the fear of falling into error” (Hegel PoS §74, 47). For Hegel, the result of the Kantian theory would be skepticism. Hegel specifies his rejection of Kant’s account: “To be specific, it takes for granted certain ideas about cognition as an instrument and as a medium, and assumes that there is a difference between ourselves and this cognition” (Hegel PoS §74, 47). Hegel rejects a dualism of cognition, because this approach divides the experiencing subject and cognition. It would lead us to a formalized transcendental subject as well as a transcendental object. Furthermore, Hegel writes about such an artificial separation: “Above all, it presupposes that the Absolute stands on one side and cognition on the other, independent and separated from it” (Hegel PoS §74, 47). Hence, Hegel rejects this transcendental and abstract method to separate the subject from the absolute.

Nevertheless, Hegel does not give up the Kantian ‘system’. He demands that we should “mistrust this very mistrust” in our experience (Hegel PoS §74, 47). Instead of defending the absolute as the transcendental condition that is separated from the subject, Hegel focuses therefore on the conditions of knowing that are within the experiences of finite, human beings. In fact, human beings already have an understanding of the world, even when they are not grasping a mind-independent reality. Rather than searching for the a priori conditions of science, it is therefore reasonable to accept that human beings were always capable of dealing with objects. Therefore, Hegel states:

One may set this aside on the grounds that there is a type of cognition which, though it does not cognize the Absolute as Science aims to, is still true, and that cognition in general,
though it be incapable of grasping the Absolute, is still capable of grasping other kinds of truth (Hegel PoS §75, 47).

In other words, Hegel looks closer at the absolute which is related to our being in the world. The Hegelian project has therefore to be described as a theory a posteriori. It observes human beings as within the absolute and not separated from it. Since we are already in the truth through our being in the world, our task is to make explicit the concepts of our natural consciousness that is in a certain way already related to the absolute.

The method for this task would be phenomenology, or to put it in the proper terms, to make explicit what is phenomenal knowledge of the experiences of consciousness (see Marx 1975, 7). This form of investigation, however, can only be understood as related to the content of the investigation, natural consciousness. So far, we have not yet discussed this content, namely natural consciousness.

**4.1.2.3 Phenomenal Knowledge of Natural Consciousness and the Concept [Begriff]**

I have sketched how Hegel rejects the Kantian foundationalist project which contains many disputable presumptions such as the thing-in-itself as the cause of appearances, dualistic views about cognition as an instrument or as a medium, or the ahistorical a priori categorial framework that is unified through the formal I-think. After the refutation of these assumptions, Hegel comes up with the idea that instead of investigating the conditions of a completed and ready-made science, we have to begin with natural consciousness (Rockmore 1997, 26). Here the concept of Hegel’s phenomenology becomes concrete: if we always possess a certain kind of

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truth in our natural consciousness, then the question arises, what we have to make explicit?

Hegel thinks that we have to make the Concept [der Begriff] explicit. He writes:

For to give the impression that their meaning is generally well known, or that their Notion is comprehended, looks more like an attempt to avoid the main problem, which is precisely to provide this Notion (Hegel PoS §76, 48).

As we can see, the basic epistemological task is to explicate the Concept [der Begriff]. Hegel replaces the unifying idea of the system and the I-think by the regulative idea of the Concept that has to be historically achieved. Hegel, as opposed to Kant and his idea of the unification of the given, sees in the unifying activity nothing but the natural consciousness which will be acknowledged, when we bring it to the concept which is the absolute (Marx 1975, xx). In a certain sense, natural consciousness is therefore the ground for the unity of the object for us. This ground is constituted through the way in which consciousness works, and therefore we are not talking about a linear foundationalism which tries to prove the existence of a real object and secures in this sense a science of reality; rather, we are talking about a circular system that has its balance point in the experiencing subject. We thus enter an anthropological investigation of what humans are and how they constitute knowledge for themselves.

Consciousness understood through the Concept [der Begriff], however, is not limited to a concrete, conceptual shape. It is a major and often-committed mistake to attribute the position to Hegel that humans are concepts. Rather, concepts are our conceptual tool that we have available for our project of knowledge. To understand subjects by virtue of their conceptualizing activity has some advantages. Concepts symbolize the reflective relationship that natural consciousness

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194 Hegel’s ‘der Begriff’ will be translated as the Concept in the following. The translation that I use says ‘Notion,’” which trivializes its meaning.
builds to contents. By assuming that concepts are necessary tools for grasping anything, for example, we already admit that there is not an immediate relationship to a mind-independent object. Concepts express the fact that we discuss a mediated relationship to content. Concepts, are therefore also not empty, mere universals. They always presuppose content. Understanding this relationship might clarify what can count as knowledge for us. Acknowledging this, however, we have to break with the idea of recognizing a mind-independent reality because finally each cognition that emerges in the subject is “permeated through the categories of the self” (Marx 1975, xxi). Due to this fact, Hegel will undertake “an exposition of how knowledge makes its appearance” (Hegel PoS §76, 49). In this process natural consciousness takes itself as real knowledge, but has to discover that on “the pathway of [...] despair” nothing is left but phenomenal knowledge (Hegel PoS §78,49). Thus, it reaches the insight that all reality is in “truth only the unrealized notion [Begriff]” (Hegel PoS §78, 50). For the epistemological project this means: there is nothing to find but language that has developed historically. Hegel proposes here a middle-solution. It is neither a brute realism that simply presupposes a mind-independent reality, but it also does not claim a universalism, a reality of forms. Instead, Hegel defends what I call a nominalism, but which I will later modify as a conceptualism. Basically, it means that we have to understand how we can use concepts for our project of knowledge.

Though this focus on concepts might occur as a relation to the linguistic turn, Hegel goes beyond the linguistic and pragmatic turn by including the concept of a historical spirit. He describes language as a particular human language, resulting from human interactions in a historical community. So Hegel does not deliver a formalized model of communication that Brandom and Habermas subscribe to, but he investigates the dependence of content and form in relation to what human beings are. This critical knowledge of our language can be reached only
through a series of stages which Hegel signifies as the “detailed history of education” (Hegel PoS §78, 50). It is the history of human kind reaching the stage of science (Rockmore 1997, 27).

In this history, rejections are just the consequence of the progression within the series of these stages. For instance, according to Hegel, every negation of a predecessor has to be understood as a result of the tradition, and he calls this concept “determinate nothingness” (Hegel PoS §79, 51).

Therefore, the progression, to put it simply, happens relative to history. The final stage of this investigation would be the concept of the absolute which is the Concept of the Concept [der Begriff]. Hegel’s phenomenology is then to show how consciousness works conceptually, how consciousness relates itself to phenomenal knowledge [erscheinendes Wissen] as real knowledge (how the thing is for itself) by virtue of the Concept, and how it, at the same time, distinguishes itself from this knowledge, because it has the insight of the phenomenal appearance of things. All of this will be demonstrated as a function of the Concept that can relate to itself.

Under these premises, reality becomes a concept that is vital to our processes of knowledge. Yet, it is not understood as a mind-independent reality, but as a reality that is produced within the movement of the Concept. Since this movement, however, is a movement of concepts, Hegel’s project can be called a linguistic project. This, however, does not mean that it is exhausted by the insights of the linguistic-pragmatic turn. It is not a linguistic analysis of contingent concepts, but it is about the historical appearance of linguistics as the current core of our research itself. Hegelian philosophy grasped as linguistic philosophy expresses its own historical emergence. It is about the Concept of the Concept within a particular, historical moment, and about how it emerges necessarily in a historical process.

This Concept of a Concept means it cannot be superseded by the means of our historical moment. In this sense, the linguistic turn is anticipated in a Hegelian philosophy, it includes,
however, the decisive difference that it is neither understood as a secured epistemology a priori, nor is our worldview limited to one universal form of this conceptual activity. Language and the Concept of the Concept are rather the highest mediations with regard to the historical epistemological problem and its consequences. This will then turn out to be the current standpoint of science. While we could say that current epistemology is brought to an end by it, in the sense that we cannot go further beyond, it delivers only the preliminary grounding for our current ontology. I will justify this thesis in my last part on Hegel (4.3).

To clarify, with this interpretation, I am not rejecting analytic philosophy. I perceive it as another historical achievement of philosophy that, however, misinterprets its own position within history. It is not the last epistemological foundation that it delivers, but it is only the historically achieved position of former theories. Analytic philosophy has therefore to take the problem of history seriously and apply it to itself, in order to understand itself.

4.2. Hegel’s Account of Self-Consciousness Leading to Absolute Knowing

In the part before I have highlighted Hegel’s relation to his predecessor Kant. I have argued that content is not independent of form. Hence, we cannot simply approach mind-independent objects. Instead, our epistemology is related to experiencing, human beings.

In the following part, I further discuss Hegel’s introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I will demonstrate how his epistemology is rooted in the investigation of consciousness. Before Hegel, the subject was only an epistemological necessity. After Hegel, the subject is detranscendentalized and investigated as an experiencing human being in history. It will

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195 In a sense, Brandom makes the epistemological discourse the foundation of his theory. He does not observe how humans communicate, but works out conditions for how humans are supposed to communicate.
therefore turn out that the unity of self-consciousness cannot be provided by the epistemological ego. Unity can only be achieved with regard to other subjects in a society dependent on their historical moment. This form of epistemology will finally bring us to the question of Absolute Knowing. The question of Absolute Knowing will be discussed in the subsequent part (4.3) of this chapter.

4.2.1 From Transcendental Subjects to Experiencing Subjects

Hegel, acknowledging Descartes for his transition into subject philosophy, criticizes him for only employing “canons of evidence that were uncritical and untested” (Greene 1972, 19). For Hegel, as demonstrated in part (4.1), the problem is that knowing is already altered by consciousness and thus certainty cannot be provided by the subject itself (see Greene 1972, 19). Instead, consciousness needs to be recognized in its acts, and not in its persistence through time. Kant, succeeding Descartes, already “enunciated the supremely important principle of the identity of ego and Notion: the pure forms of thought, i.e., the forms of the Notion” (Greene 1972, 21). For Kant, concepts are forms of the self-producing, unifying activity of the thinking consciousness (see Greene 1972, 21). Kant, having made this shift to the conceptual understanding of cognition, however, did not deliver “a genuine demonstration of his great principle” (Greene 1972, 21). The question remained whether we can move beyond an “abstract, empty idealism” and build a relationship between a formalized unity of logic, and its contingent, and empirical content, the ‘Realphilosophien’ (Greene 1972, 21). Historically, also Fichte’s abstract idealism

196 In this sense, Hegel’s logic represents a similar case: Though it is concrete as the exhaustive, inner exploration of Being, the determination of all determinations of thought, and thus metaphysics, it would remain subjective, if it were not explored in the objective realms and discussed as an objective entity, namely with regard to its reoccurrence in nature as emerging spirit. There is no last certainty, but a circle.
could not exhaustively explain the relationship between the ‘I’ and the contingent content. In Fichte’s theory, content remained as an external “Anstoß.”¹⁹⁷ Thus, we stayed within the boundaries of an unexplained dualism.

For Hegel, this contradiction of a rational self and an irrational outside is itself irrational (see Greene 1972, 21). Accordingly, Hegel does not start with a transcendental subject. He rejects the idea of a pure, self-evident ego that remains always the same and only confronts itself with irrational content (see White 1983, 24).

The question, however, remains: how can we overcome the problem of external, empirical reflection and achieve unity between the content (also called the truth, or the object), and our knowing (also called our activity, or the subject)? Hegel’s solution is that the unification is found in human beings and their ways of knowing themselves in a historically developed society. For this reason, Greene writes: “The Sache selbst for our particular study is man himself, who is commanded to know himself by the law of his own being as Spirit” (Greene 1972, 21). Hegel’s epistemology is therefore based on a subject understood anthropologically. I will explore this changed view of the subject and its epistemological role with regard to the introduction of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in the following point.

¹⁹⁷ Hegel’s pursuit of a unifying explanation of philosophy was focused on the mediation between the dualism between the thing-in-itself and being-for-itself [Für-sich-sein]. Hegel himself refers to this: “In diesen Systemen tritt das Ding-an-sich [Kant] oder der unendliche Anstoß [Fichte] zwar unmittelbar in das Ich und wird nur ein Für-dasselbe; aber er geht von einem freien Anderssein aus, das als negatives Ansichsein pereniert. Das Ich wird daher wohl als das Ideele, als für sich seyiend, als unendliche Beziehung-auf-sich bestimmt; aber das Für-Eines-Sein ist nicht vollendet zum Verschwinden jenes Jenseitigen oder der Richtung nach dem Jenseits” (Hegel WdL 181). In Kantian terms it is the question of the justifiability of the two stems of cognition.
4.2.2 From Individual to Universal Spirit

The main point of Hegel’s introduction to science is that science’s appearance is still incomplete. Its incomplete spirit, however, moves toward universal spirit. Thus, Hegel writes: “But Science, just because it comes on the scene, is itself appearance: in coming on the scene it is not yet Science in its developed and unfolded truth” (Hegel PoS §76, 48). Incomplete spirit and universal spirit stand in a relationship that governs the course of our investigation. Because of the incompleteness of the beginning science, Hegel believes that we have to start with natural consciousness, which is within the process of knowing, but that has not yet achieved its goal that is scientific knowledge (see Rockmore 1997, 26). This implies that Hegel also hesitates in acknowledging natural consciousness as delivering scientific knowledge. Yet, this denial will not end in skepticism as Hegel further points out (see Hegel PoS §79, 51). The denial of natural knowledge is always the denial of something, and thus, it yields a positive result. Hegel describes this “incompleteness” of natural knowledge as “determinate nothingness” (Hegel PoS §79, 51).198 This term expresses the ever evolving and self-perpetuating series of scientific research, according to which we have to deny former views of knowledge in a self-developing process leading finally to a conception of philosophy as the highest cognitive form within our known history. With this in mind, Hegel remarks that there is a goal of this movement:

But the goal is as necessarily fixed for knowledge as the serial progression; it is the point where knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself, where knowledge finds itself, where Notion corresponds to object and object to Notion (Hegel PoS §80, 51).

198 Brandom usually compares “indeterminate nothingness” to his idea of “material incompatibility” and believes that Hegel justifies here a semantic condition for how things must be really structured. In fact, however, indeterminate nothingness is not an ontological fact, but the result of the epistemological problem of incomplete knowledge and its resulting dialectical movement.
The goal of the process of knowledge is thus the fulfillment of an identity criterion that achieves completeness of the Concept. It is the identity of the concept and the object. How can this correspondence be justified and why is it the goal? Rockmore writes on this aspect:

Hegel’s approach rests on the subject’s ability to distinguish between its view of the object, roughly what the subject thinks the object is, or its ‘theory’ about it, and what is given in conscious experience. This conception presupposes a conception of self-consciousness (1997, 29).

So the “criterion” for the identity of the concept and its object is the object in-itself (PoS §81, 52). Though Hegel remarks that this criterion is not yet explicit with the emergence of the science itself, he claims that we will see how knowledge, the object for us, and truth, the object in-itself, occur in consciousness as necessary moments. We can compare both of these moments, since the ontological difference is bridged by consciousness itself. The object will be revealed as an externalization of consciousness so that consciousness grasps two objects, an object reconstructed by itself and an object idealized by itself. From this distinction of two objects, we will also be capable of determining the goal of a phenomenology, i.e., the identity of two objects of thought, the object that we thought it was, and the object that we think is. Hegel writes on this self-distinction within consciousness:

Consciousness simultaneously distinguishes itself from something, and at the same time relates itself to it, or, as it is said, this something exists for consciousness; and the determinate aspect of this relating, or of the being of something for a consciousness, is knowing. But we distinguish this being-for-another from being-in-itself; whatever is related to knowledge or knowing is also distinguished from it, and posited as existing outside of this relationship; this being-in-itself is called truth (Hegel PoS §82, 52-53).

So consciousness is always reaching beyond itself by recognizing its limitations. It is a process of self-negation, and thus, it does not retain what it has, but strives for the standard of an in-itself to extend its own limitation. It is consciousness that posits a distance to the object by self-
negation. Thereby, however, it projects objects in themselves, and thus relates to them by virtue of projection. Yet, the object in-itself is not the supposedly outside and real object of a Kantian theory, but the object that we can synthesize from the former process of our experience. The thought object is the object of the former experiences of consciousness and its projection of the object derived from experience. It is the relationship between a historically arriving consciousness and its historical, not immediate presence. Consciousness arrives from the past with its synthesized theories of objects, and compares them to the present moment. The epistemological criterion is therefore provided by consciousness that distinguishes itself. Our goal is, therefore, to bring the movement to a halt by grasping how consciousness produces its object, so that it cannot exceed further limitations anymore.

Hegel writes on this internally, emerging criterion of consciousness: “Consciousness provides its own criterion from within itself, so that the investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself; for the distinction made above falls within it” (Hegel PoS §84, 53). Besides the main project of unifying consciousness in its process of knowing, this is also an important change in the view of our criteria. The criteria for knowledge are provided by consciousness itself. Most importantly, there is no external criterion. Instead, it is the process of the experience of consciousness that conducts us towards a criterion.

This experiential process seems to require a phenomenological reduction so that the object can appear as it is. This phenomenological reduction, however, would presuppose a mind-independent object that is supposedly altered by our misguided attitudes, or distorted by existential categories. Against this phenomenological program, I have to say: things do not show themselves. Presupposing this would be an anthropomorphism that attributes human activities to
things themselves without considering our subjective activity as a part of the constitution of objects.

Hegel avoids this problem and focuses instead on the object that is already in consciousness and externalized by consciousness itself. For Hegel, the in-itself is a presupposed relation of consciousness to the essence of an object, while the concept of it is knowledge. Knowledge is true, if essence and concept are equivalent to each other. Since the truth, the mind-internal object, however, can change, the criterion for their correspondence can change as well. In this sense, knowledge becomes a procedural term and should also not be conflated with a progressivism towards truth or a preconceived, mystical event that ultimately reveals truth. By this fundamentally different phenomenology, we are not getting closer to the Truth, but we act coherently with regard to the criterion that our consciousness has achieved: a concept corresponding to the essence of a mind-internal object that ultimately is consciousness itself. Truth is then rather a question of coherently acting with regard to our experiences that are within consciousness. We could say that we get closer to truth for us. Absolute truth is not the point of Hegel’s discussion. Instead, Hegel’s point is an investigation of self-consciousness and its historical society.

Beyond Hegel revising the view on truth that clearly distinguishes him from Brandom, Hegel also reflects on the idea that objects depend on the theory about them. This means that if the object turns out to be different, it is not only our theory that changes. Hegel writes on this semblance: “If the comparison shows that these two moments do not correspond to one another, it would seem that consciousness must alter its knowledge to make it conform to the object”

199 Habermas’ discourse theory of truth presupposes that when we agree we agree about what really is, whereas it is obvious that we can agree but be wrong about what we agree about.
Instead of changing our theory, Hegel points out that objects depend on our theory, our knowledge or the developed concept. Thus, there can be no progressive movement towards an external reality. If the theory changes, then the related object changes. This implies that Hegel introduces a concept of what it means to do sciences with respect to human consciousness, the ground for having views on objects. This further implies that there is no ultimate, formal criterion, or ultimate object that is certain, since our theories that determine the object could change. Thus, Hegel proceeds:

In other words, the criterion for testing is altered when that for which it was to have been the criterion fails to pass the test; and the testing is not only a testing of what we know, but also a testing of the criterion of what knowing is. (Hegel PoS §86, 55)

Hegel expresses here that even criteria can be altered. This implies that there is not a single, methodological criterion, once and for all, but that criteria depend on contextual conditions. This has already strong implications for Hegel’s later historicism. Here, however, Hegel develops only the contextual conditions of knowledge that are based on experience. Hegel explains what experience is for him:

This is the moment of transition from the first object and the knowledge of it, to the other object, which experience is said to be about […] The new object shows itself to have come about through a reversal of consciousness itself (Hegel PoS §87, 56).

So experience is the process in which our views of the object change. It is unclear how this process of experience occurs in all its details (see Rockmore 1997, 33). I assume that since criteria for knowledge can be different, the process of experience might be different for particular objects. In essence, Hegel does not say that experience is about a mind-independent reality, but he talks about how objects can be constituted only with regard to our experience that is mind-dependent. Here, we encounter Hegel’s ‘empirical realism’. With regard to empirical
realism, Rockmore distinguishes three kinds: first, “direct knowledge of an independent object”, second, “indirect knowledge of an independent object through a dependent object”, and third, the denial of direct and indirect knowledge claims of a mind-independent world, but experience of mind-dependent objects (see Rockmore 1997, 197). Given the former arguments, Hegel commits strongly to this “tertiary empiricism” (see Rockmore 1997, 197). Experience is then the process of the emergence and production of new objects. From this follows that since consciousness is only consciousness of its objects, and since form does not exist independently from content, consciousness must be altered in the process of experience. Since, however, mind-internal objects do not exist independently from consciousness, a change in consciousness must also change the object. This implies that the dialectic of consciousness cannot be brought to a halt. It starts with experience, but it causes a cascade of infinite changes.

Regarding the ongoing dialectic of consciousness the following question emerges: how can consciousness that projects the object in-itself as a result of former experienced objects, and the experiencing, present, empirical consciousness be thought as one? In order to justify such an activity of projecting and experiencing an object, we need to develop a theory of self-consciousness. Before I discuss Hegel’s theory of self-consciousness, however, I have to discuss Hegel’s empirical realism and its relation to historical systematicity.

With regard to our construction of sciences, Hegel makes clear that we do not simply change our theory, if a new object arises. Instead, the new object as it will be reconstructed contains its predecessor in the negation. By virtue of this positive negation, Hegel grasps the “nothing of that from which it results” (PoS §87, 56). It is a result that “contains what was true in the preceding knowledge” (PoS §87, 56). This is incompatible an approach of falsification. According to the approach of falsification, we assume that a change in the perceived object
ultimately denies our theory so that we would simply replace the former theory. Yet, we do not simply replace the former theory. Instead, our theories are developing historically. They are an integral part of what makes the objects that we have at hand. Thus, we do not discuss what mind-independent reality is, but we discuss what human cognition is in its historical development. In this sense, we could say that the transcendental and empirical consciousness of Kant come together in one theory of an ever evolving consciousness with regard to its history of experiences. In conclusion, history does not only stand for the absolute relativity of our standpoints. Rather, the inclusion of the concept of history delivers a better understanding of how our cognition actually works. We will understand what qualifies as knowledge for us. Brandom’s theory, for example, does not include such a history of experiencing language users. Rather, Brandom reduces our knowledge to a formal game of giving and asking for reasons.

We can also already see how the concept of a historical systematicity is contained in the simplest acts of knowledge. This means that each cognition stems from a process of comparing the in-itself object with the for-itself-object, while each of these objects are the results of former comparisons. Change, moreover, perpetuates further changes. In other words, there is a constant series of comparisons between the object given in the present consciousness and the theories about the object. Theories change if they are shown to fail in order to give way to more adequate theories about the contents of experience. This is not a simple falsification, since the changing theories are related to dialectical considerations and not simply replaced.

Following the presentation of the historical process of experience, Hegel claims that there is necessity [Notwendigkeit] intrinsic to the overall process. It is difficult to understand, in which sense this necessity has to be understood. Hegel writes on this: “[I]t is just this necessity itself, or the origination of the new object, that presents itself to consciousness without its understanding
how this happens, which proceeds of us, as it were, behind the back of consciousness” (Hegel PoS §87, 56). I assume that the German term ‘notwendig’ expresses a change [wenden] of a need [Not]. Consciousness has to alter its theory and its object, since it can never be satisfied with its understanding and will eventually sublate the object at hand. Since for consciousness the understood object in-itself is insufficient, in order to reach truth because it only turns it into something that is known temporarily for-itself, it is necessary for consciousness to know how it knows.

Problematik is that consciousness will reduce itself to an object in the process of self-knowing. If we become, however, aware of these processes, then, Hegel assumes, are we capable of turning natural consciousness into scientific consciousness (see PoS §88, 56, see Rockmore 1997, 35). Necessity is thus understood as demonstrating that the different moments belong to the process of our experience. With regard to the German term ‘Notwendigkeit’, consciousness ‘turns’ [wenden], or perhaps better, it ‘satisfies a need’ [Not]. The final criterion must therefore be found in reflecting on an essential need, which, according to Hegel, is ultimately not found in the calm and stable unity of self-consciousness, but in the ever-changing society and its historical movement. The process of experience is, thus, the formation of self-consciousness in mutual, societal relations, such as, for example the sciences. Yet, the process is not limited to the sciences.

I have said before that the criterion for this endeavor cannot be formal. In his quest for authentic experiential science, however, Hegel defines an abstract criterion for our science: “[…] at a point where appearance becomes identical with essence, so that its exposition will coincide with the authentic Science of Spirit” (PoS §89, 57). Obviously, this is the criterion for reaching something that can be called science. We achieve science when consciousness knows how it
knows. Given what we have said before, however, this must indicate only potential knowing, and thus it only seems to be ahistorical. Instead, Hegel’s theory does not close with the idea of an eternal scientific self-consciousness that exists independently from further action. Rather, a theory of self-conscious subjects must be derived from subjects in their historical moment, whose life of the Absolute Spirit is their own doing. The historical conditions for knowing can thus still change according to their society. The resulting Absolute Knowing is for this reason probably the most controversial aspect of Hegel’s theory and has to be discussed in more detail, especially, since Habermas, as demonstrated above, identifies here an ultimately realist, ahistorical account. It is the problem of whether we achieve an ahistorical position or whether Absolute Knowing is historical. My interpretation is that Hegel’s seemingly introduced, a formal criterion. It is absolute, but only absolute in the sense that it cannot be superseded by current means of our time. Thus, it is a criterion that he proposes for our time. It is not formal, but open to further change depending on the historical experiences of human beings.

What is therefore this Absolute Knowing? Is it, for example, independent from the forms of objective spirit that self-consciousnesses constitute in their task to achieve themselves? The following discussion has to be dedicated to this topic. It will conclude the discussion between Habermas and Brandom by showing that Hegelianism is a viable solution to the epistemological problems that Habermas pointed out in his criticism of Brandom.

4.3 Absolute Knowing in Relation to History and Time
As discussed above, unlike Kant, Hegel does not introduce a transcendental subject, or a soul outside of the world that holds everything together for us. Rather, he refers to complete universal spirit and incomplete Spirit. The movement between them captures the essence of finite human
subjects who live out their lives in a given historical moment. Hegel determines the goal of this movement in the final sentence of the introduction to his *Phenomenology*: “finally, when consciousness itself grasps this, its own essence, it will signify the nature of absolute knowledge itself” (Hegel PoS §89, 57). In other words, Hegel promises transparent self-consciousness. This self-consciousness, however, has not always been there like the transcendental ego waiting in the shadow of an undiscovered land. Instead, it rather develops historically through various stages. Thus, self-consciousness is becoming in history (see Westphal 1979, 218).

It is important to distinguish here between time and history and to point out that the human subject remains historical, but not temporal since we conceptualize it independently from time. While time is an intuitive form that consciousness uses to order empirical phenomena perceived from a contingent stream of events, historicity is the process in which self-consciousness can grasp its own development with regard to its experience and recognize this as its own substance. Hegel does not claim to grasp history in its contingent totality, i.e. to order all historical events in contingent time. But, he offers a concept that makes events part of one ongoing history, so that we can understand otherwise unordered contingency organically with respect to the way of how we actually know.

Despite this goal of achieving a science that orders all contingent occurrences with regard to the necessity of knowing itself, Hegel is aware that there are already sciences existing. As Westphal remarks these sciences are “highly reflective forms of natural consciousness” (1979, 218). Yet, their natural goal of Absolute Knowing is not yet achieved (see Westphal 1979, 218).

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They are not yet on the level of science. The main question arises from here: How do we have to understand Absolute Knowing as the goal of these historical forms of natural consciousness?

There are two interpretations: either Absolute Knowing expresses a universal truth for all time, a truth independent of history, an ahistorical framework according to which everything develops, or Absolute knowing grasps what can be true for us under the conditions that must have guided our development. According to the latter interpretation, Absolute Knowing would be limited by ourselves, in so far as we are the subjects and objects of our self-produced history. Absolute Knowing would then describe only how humans came to know and produce themselves, but it would not deliver knowledge that is beyond their constitution in the current historical moment. Habermas, who is influenced by the analytic misconception of Hegel, believes that Hegel follows the former model. I will argue for the latter.

4.3.1 Hegel as a Thinker of History and Absolute Knowing

It is important to understand the distinction that Hegel draws between time and history in order to understand Hegel’s project as a rejection of metaphysical realisms of all kinds, and thus also as a rejection of Brandom’s semantic realism. The beginning of this distinction occurs in Hegel’s chapter “Absolute Knowing.” I will argue that time is part of the representational understanding [Vorstellung], also translated as ‘picture-thinking’) of spirit, while history is the conceptual unfolding of Absolute Spirit. Absolute Knowing rejects time because it is a representational intuition in seeking to grasp the historicity of Spirit. I discuss this point, since Habermas criticizes Hegel’s concept of Absolute Knowing as annulling time, and thus criticizes Hegel’s project as positing itself as eternally true. However, a correct reading of the passages will reveal that Hegel defends an eternity that is self-produced and assumed by subjects in a community for
themselves. This self-production is absolute only in the sense that it does not require any other foundation than what is given to humans through experience and understood in reflection.

Hence, Hegel does not return to a transcendental realism as Habermas assumes, but rather turns to a concept of reality that can be recognized as a subjective activity.

The discussion between Brandom and Habermas concludes in the question of the historicity of Absolute Knowing. Habermas’ reading of Absolute Knowing as ahistorical subjectivity is not unique, but is influenced by a common misinterpretation of Hegel. Hoffmeyer refers to this misconception in the following passage:

According to the Phenomenology of Spirit, Spirit becomes itself only in and through history. Yet the concluding section on ‘Absolute Knowing’ has left many interpreters wondering whether Spirit in Hegel’s eyes is only penultimately historical. Does Hegel ultimately relativize Spirit’s historicity within an ahistorical framework?” (Hoffmeyer 1992, 198)

Fulda summarizes the discussion about the final chapter of Hegel’s Phenomenology similarly:

Spätestens in ihm [the last chapter], so die Kritiker, ist Hegels ambitiöses Unternehmen einer wissenschaftlich-phänomenologischen Einleitung in Philosophie, die das Wirkliche von einer spekulativen Logik aus systematisch begreift, manifest gescheitert [He refers to Habermas here]. Auch unter den meisten Interpreten, die der Hegelischen »Phänomenologie« Wohlwollen entgegenbringen, wird fast nicht anders gedacht (Fulda 2007, 340).

Fulda takes up the debate that Habermas reinitiated in Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung. There, Habermas agreed with Hegel’s understanding of society, which was intersubjective, but criticized him for focusing on the eternal qualities of Absolute Knowing. Fulda, who criticizes

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this criticism of Hegel, attempts to reconstruct the last chapter of Absolute Knowing with regard to its openness towards experience and historical change.203

Before I discuss the idea of Absolute Knowing and its historicity, I have to develop a first, preliminary notion of Hegel’s concept of historicity. I assume that Hegel thinks historically, and will argue that the last form of Absolute Knowing is itself historical. The problem of interpreting Hegel, however, is that he is not entirely clear what historicism entails. Historicism is, according to Rockmore, central to Hegel’s claims of knowledge (see Rockmore 2004, 194), but it is not entirely developed by Hegel himself (see also Jaeschke’s evaluation in Perkins 1984, 101). Rockmore writes on Hegel’s historicism:

If Hegel is correct, the commitment to contextualism already entails a commitment to a historical conception of knowledge, hence to historicism, which is a view about the intrinsically historical character of all first-order cognitive claims (Rockmore 1994, 194).

Despite Hegel’s clear commitment to historicism, Rockmore points out that the meaning of this historicity of cognition is “mysterious.” Rockmore states, therefore, that it is the interpreter’s task to “construct and evaluate arguments that support Hegel’s view of the historicity of knowledge” (Rockmore 2004, 193). In the following paragraphs, I therefore attempt to provide an idea of Hegel’s historicism with regard to Absolute Knowing. I begin with Jaeschke’s discussion of Absolute Spirit occurring in world-history and an eternal history of

203 Furthermore, it is important that Fulda respects the currently emerging tendencies of analytic philosophers to interpret Hegel’s absolute Knowing as a “nicht-metaphysische, ‘kommunale Selbstreflexion’ hinsichtlich der theoretischen und praktischen Gründe und Normen” (Fulda 2007, 386). Fulda objects, however, that these interpretations of Hegel do not discuss Spirit with regard to experience. Rather, they are dependent on the rejection of metaphysical positions that evolved within analytical philosophy. Thus, they understand Hegel “in eine[r] polemische[n] Abhängigkeit vom Zurückgewiesenen. (Fulda 2007, 386). This rejected proposition is, for example, the myth of the given. Sellars, however, introduced the myth on the basis of the earlier, analytic misinterpretation of Hegel and analytic philosophy’s turn towards external realism. It comes down to reconstruct Hegel independently from the analytic tradition, in order to compare his model with the analytic tradition.
spirit. Then, I will demonstrate concretely how Absolute Knowing unfolds with regard to history. It is helpful to begin with Rockmore’s definition of historical relativism:

“[‘Historical relativism’] refers to our incapacity to escape from the limits of our own historical moment, can be taken as suggesting that claims to know are objective but also historically relative. A knowledge claim that was historically relative but not objective would be uninteresting; and a knowledge claim that was objective but transhistorical would not be historically relative” (Rockmore 2004, 195).

This means that, according to Rockmore’s definition, Hegel is only a historicist if all our claims are relative to the historical moment. If Absolute Knowing is independent from its historical moment, then Hegel’s theory would not qualify as historicist. Yet, this cannot exclude objectivity, since otherwise the theory would not produce any value. With regard to Absolute Knowing, it comes down to the question of how we can achieve communal, objective cognition in history, and how it is understood within the limits of our specific world history.

Jaeschke remarks that since Hegel did not work out this relation between world history and Absolute Spirit, this relation raises many further questions. For his analysis, Jaeschke observes, first of all, that: “[T]he space that world history fills in Hegel’s system looks comparatively small” (Jaeschke 1984, 102). It occurs to him that history is thus only “limited to a specific part of the system” (Jaeschke 1984, 102). Consequently, it would be an “overstatement” to see Hegel as a philosopher of history (see Jaeschke 1984, 102). Yet, Jaeschke makes the point that the overall “extreme position, namely that his system as a whole is a philosophy of history” can be reasonably defended, since everything is a form of spirit in time (see Jaeschke 1984, 103). Since “even logic is implicitly spirit, and nature is spirit that has externalized itself” (Jaeschke 1984, 103), Hegel’s whole account is grounded on history. In a further step, Jaeschke, however, argues against this position, since if everything were grounded
on one history, it would lead to a reduction of everything to forms of one occurring historical spirit. This position of a super-spirit that works through all instantiations of history as one guiding idea would be difficult to defend. There are, just to mention one example, complex appearances of different forms of literature, which cannot simply be demonstrated as occurrences of only one historical principle. Moreover, looking at Hegel’s historical attempts to order world history with regard to the progression of European history, and looking at his interpretation of America as the land of the future, it would turn him into nothing more than a euro-centrist historian. Under these premises, we could easily criticize Hegel’s idea of an all embracing world history, with respect to the complexity of occurring phenomena in history. Absolute Spirit would be overpowered. Jaeschke summarizes therefore the major problem: “[…] how it is even thinkable that one spirit could have diverse forms of history, and nevertheless still remain one” (Jaeschke 1984, 104). In my mind, this expresses the problem of assuming one ontological historical ground for all historical development. It might induce a confirmation bias so that we interpret history with regard to one principle. Though “history is essentially history of spirit” (Jaeschke 1984, 102), the status of Absolute Spirit itself is questionable. Some treat Absolute Spirit as a mole.204 This means that we cannot see Absolute Spirit working itself, but all events have to be attributed to this one hidden force (like a mole producing molehills).205 For Jaeschke, it is questionable if we have to read each single passage of Hegel’s philosophy with regard to its supposed end, a super-entity of Absolute Spirit. Yet, he also introduces the term of an “eternal history of spirit” (Jaeschke 1984, 106). Of course, Absolute

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205 I claim that this understanding of Absolute Spirit would remain on the level of understanding, it would understand all dialectical movements in history as the result of one force, and thus it would be a representation of Absolute Spirit, but not yet conceptually grasp its reality.
Knowing it is not an eternal substance, but it is only comprehensive as a subjectively self-produced substance. With his interpretation of an eternal history of spirit, Jaeschke attempts therefore to preserve the objectivity of the historical principle. Jaeschke writes:

> Since history is a property of the forms of spirit, it does not remain just a history of states or political history. It is likewise the history of absolute spirit, and that means the history of art, religion, and philosophy, in all of which absolute spirit unfolds itself (Jaeschke 1984, 104)

How then does Absolute Spirit stand in relation to world history, and its eternal unfolding in art, religion and philosophy? The problem arises that the eternal history of spirit has “without doubt […] not only conceptual but temporal priority to the forms of history […]” (Jaeschke 1984, 106). All historical events that are known to us would then be grounded in an original historicity, an “eternal history of spirit” (see Jaeschke 1984, 106). Absolute Spirit would be the underlying form of the “the process of alienation and return in itself [Spirit]” (Jaeschke 1984, 106). Though Jaeschke does not reject this position, he identifies the major problem in combining eternal spirit with the temporal and partial history of spirit: “[J]ust as previously the supposition of the eternal history was not entirely rejected, so also here the supposition of a temporal history of absolute spirit is not to be completely rejected” (Jaeschke 1984, 110). Despite his emphasis of the eternal history of Absolute Spirit, Jaeschke remarks that the absolute content of world history is inadequately understood, if world history is understood “by the superstructure of several histories of the absolute spirit, with one of these histories being more absolute than the other” (Jaeschke 1984, 115). Further, this would not only be false with regard to the text, but this would

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206 “Temporality is for Hegel excluded from the development of the various logical determinations. The concepts of the logic are not forms of spirit that fall into the framework of time. And so, for this reason, the process of logic is not history in the full sense of the word. Nevertheless Hegel holds fast in maintaining that the connection of logical determinations among themselves can be spoken of as a process, as the self-movement of the concept” (Jaeschke 1984, 108).
also create “superworlds” from which a “very weak glance […] falls back to this world and its history” (Jaeschke 1984, 115).

Instead, we have to see that Hegel attempts to mediate “metaphysics and history.” Jaeschke concludes, with regard to a possible middle solution:

Such a meditation would not be achieved if the absolute content were present only in the separate histories of absolute spirit, and the eternal were not embedded in actual history, too, and this actual history were not elevated to the absolute (Jaeschke 1984, 115).

In other words, Absolute Spirit must be bound to its occurrence in history and cannot be thought independently from its historical moment. The historical moment cannot be an expression of an eternal and hidden spirit. Instead, the historical moment delivers an intuitive idea of the eternal. Afterwards, we have to free it from all external elements in understanding and grasp it conceptually.

In order to find such a middle solution, we have to shift from the idea of an Absolute Spirit that works as a hidden force behind all events, to an epistemological principle that serves us in order to understand historical events, and that we produce in the course of these events. As Erp suggests, this principle must be similar to how spirit occurs in world-history. Erp writes: “[h]istory is the way of how people express the principle that guides their actions” (see Erp 1998, 5). So their Absolute Spirit is not a mole that is the one force for many histories to occur. Instead, there are principles of history included in these many principles of the people. The principles of the people can be different. As much as we can decide to be the desiring, the honorable, the witty, or the wise person, as much, such principles can be the guiding principles of specific societies. We shall be honorable, a union of soldiers, or a union for graciousness and so forth. The problem with regard to all of these principles is their problematic reversal related to the
limitations of their determination. Everything that is determined will enter a dialectical process according to Hegel’s overall theory. Applied to history, this means that principles lead to a historical dialectic. This means that it will always turn out that each principle cannot satisfy our goal because they are based on theoretical abstraction, and include external elements. Erp argues therefore that the “spirit of a particular people” will always be finite only (Erp 1998, 5). The idea is then that universal spirit frees the “development of the idea of the spirit as such” (Erp 1998, 6). For the *Phenomenology*, this means that the goal is to develop the universal principle that is science. The former principles occurring in world-history are spirit, however, spirit in a convoluted form and therefore part of an ongoing dialectic. The principles have an external motivation that will push them to their extremes.

Nevertheless, according to Hegel there is no spirit in independence from subjects. Hegel’s is concerned to show the relationship of universal and individual spirit in Absolute Knowing, more specifically, the interdependence of substance and subject in the dialectical movement towards science in a society. Since spirit is historical, and not a natural development of a mind-independent world, “spiritual history of the world must be ultimately comprehensible as a rational totality” (Erp 1998, 6). This rational totality is the freedom of the subjects of spirit to determine themselves as expressed in Absolute Knowing. Erp points out that if Absolute Spirit is freedom, then it is not the “conclusion of empirical knowledge and historical experience” (Erp 1998,6). World-history is the hidden force of reason as if it were a hidden power in the form of “a philosophical a priori” (Erp 1998, 6). In the religious representation, for example, it would be “a matter of divine providence” (Erp 1998, 6). Hegel, however, is neither a philosopher who defends a priori principles nor does he defend an instantiation of God in Absolute Knowing or
Absolute Spirit. Instead, we have to understand history “in its concrete development as a rational whole” (Erp 1998, 6) of subjects determining their own substance. Erp concludes:

A philosophical concept of world-history can only be developed from the moment that world-history itself has reached the spiritual result that can be conceived of as its rational end. Therefore, world-history is itself a special or concrete totality of time; it is time that has come to its end (Erp 1998, 6).

Hegel’s philosophy reaches the point, according to which all development can be explained without further presuppositions. Looking at world-history as a succession of stages, it seems that we have removed contingency in revealing necessity with regard to the former guiding principles that we grasp in clarity only at the end of a concrete historical process. The last principle must guide us on our historical path up to this historical moment, and that is free of external assumptions, assumptions that are independent from the historical process. This points to the need for a further distinction between history and time.

My point concerning Hegel’s distinction between time and history is the following: Absolute Knowing determines all former moments of historical becoming. Therefore, Absolute Knowing depends on the former moments. But since Absolute Knowing is also the result of this becoming, it is thus paradoxically within the framework of time. It is the condition, and simultaneously the result of all former moments of its becoming. For this reason, we cannot proceed in thinking Absolute Knowing within the framework of time. We therefore have to leave time as a succession of contingent events behind, and “free the notion of history from the notion of natural time” (Erp 1998, 7). Erp concludes with regard to “the absolute (‘untied’) spirit”, and with regard to the close relation of the forms of understanding to “their historical environment”, that “[p]hilosophy's task is to develop the conceptual understanding of this relation between the objective and the absolute spirit” (Erp 1998, 12). With
regard to world history, Erp explains that the final stage of Absolute Knowing closes “the history of the world, but without the necessity of being understood as its historical end, that is to say, as an end-point in time” (Erp 1998, 12). The end of world history is rather an achieved actuality of self-knowledge, namely the condition for its occurrences and further history. For Erp “it is the period in history in which the state, religion and philosophy recognise each other in a form of perfect harmony” (Erp 1998, 13). In other words, Absolute Knowing concludes a historical movement and prepares us for another form of historical movement.

Other philosophers such as Habermas believe that “the dialectical closure of philosophy excludes a real future development of spirit” (Erp 1998, 14). Yet, it is false to compare “Hegel's concept of spirit with some complex and abstract representation of a subsistent entity, separated from our conception of ourselves” (Erp 1998, 14). This representation of a historically independent substance is, according to Erp, caused by the right-wing-Hegelian movement. I have already noted that this false interpretation of Hegel’s Absolute Knowing is popular in Habermas and the analytic tradition. The right-wing Hegelians defend a view of religious substance that finally leads to Absolute Knowing as one ontological substance, a view that Russell opposed. In a sense, Habermas therefore criticizes right-wing-Hegelians, but not Hegel. Erp writes with regard to these problematic criticisms:

Hegel’s notorious statement about the identity of actuality and reason sounds unbelievable to most of our contemporaries and even as blasphemy for some. Fifty years after the Second World War, it has almost become a commonplace to confront the pretensions of the Hegelian philosophy of history with the ‘truth of Auschwitz’. Auschwitz would be the absolute refutation of Hegelian thinking of totality, with its identification of history, reason and providence (Erp 1998, 15).

It is true that Hegel’s identity of reason and actuality is implied in Absolute Knowing. The question, however, is what this identity implies. It does not imply a predestined development of
history. Instead, my thesis is that Hegel develops a principle of objectivity that does not exclude further historical development of reason. The argument for such a development could be quite simple, if we only consider the identity of the actual and reason: the actual is not stable but historically unfolding, and so is reason. Absolute Knowing remains historical. In other words, the idea of history grounds the identity of reason and the actual [das Wirkliche]. Hegel introduces the thought of the identity of the actual [das Wirkliche] and reason in the *Logic* and comes back to it later in the *History of Philosophy* and in the *Philosophy of Right*. In the *Logic* Hegel maintains that reality that must be rational, since otherwise it could not be known. Since, as already noted, he cannot mean reality as a mind-independent reality, he must mean a reality that is for us. Since our capacity of reflection is grasped as reason, this thought must then also be applied to the identity of reality, and reason that he discusses in the *Logic*. The identity of reason is found in the subject that produces a notion of reality. Since the subject is furthermore not stable, but moves in forms of spirit, what we take to be reality must be bound to the dialectical movement of the subject. The problem is therefore not the identity of reason and the actual [das Wirkliche], but rather whether there is a last and final stage of the development of subjects. We could also ask the question of whether Hegel has a closed, and final system. Yet, Hegel writes in a letter to Victor Cousin about his second edition of the Encyclopedia in 1827: “This book is only a collection of claims.”\textsuperscript{207} “A collection of claims” falls short for being interpreted as a completed system. And also Schalhorn\textsuperscript{208} emphasizes that Hegel understood his *Encyclopedia* merely as a guideline which does not give account to a complete system. Rather, this guideline has to be taught in lectures. According to Schalhorn, Hegel expressed this

\textsuperscript{207} “ce livre n’est qu’une suite de thèses“ *Hegel Philosophische Bibliothek*, Volume 237 Meiner 1954, 169 (translation by me).

restriction in all three editions of 1817, 1827 and 1830 (See Schalhorn, 14). So it seems that Hegel rather relates his systematic approach to the idea of teaching, guided by a desire for truth and the nature of human beings to learn.

Like Jaeschke and Erp, I therefore argue that Hegel’s historicism must be linked to Hegel’s idea of Absolute Knowing that occurs only in history and is thus limited to its historical emergence. Of course, I cannot clarify the problem of history in its entirety. My remarks will center therefore on Habermas’ misinterpretation concerning the supposed annulment of time:

In the Notion that knows itself as Notion, the moments thus appear earlier than the filled whole whose coming-to-be is the movement of those moments. In consciousness, on the other hand, the whole, though uncomprehended, is prior to the moments. Time is the Notion itself that is there and which presents itself to consciousness as empty intuition; for this reason, Spirit necessarily appears in Time, and it appears in Time just so long as it has not grasped its pure Notion, i.e. has not annulled Time (Hegel PoS §801, 487).

The interpretation of the task to ‘annul time’, hinges on the question of why we have to annul time. The moments necessary for achieving Absolute Knowing precede the result of Absolute Knowing in history. However, if these moments of Absolute Knowing move in time, then their movement must be caused by something that is external to them. The goal is insight into their conceptual constitution as Absolute Knowing. As their goal it precedes them as moments. As already presented in the preface of the Phenomenology, the fruit does not appear before the bud (see Hegel PoS §2, 3).209 The whole plant is a succession of stages. Yet, neither the parts of this whole, nor the whole of the plant, are the plant. According to Hegel, it is the challenge of philosophy to present the plant as the ultimate result of all of its moments, and the whole. In

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209 Hegel uses this example to explain the course of philosophy.
other words, the becoming and the result both belong to a single process. With regard to Absolute Knowing, it is similar. If we presented the result of Absolute Knowing as a dead, teleologically preconceived goal, then we would exceed our horizon of current history, and we would posit it as a lifeless result. We would posit this goal transcendentally. Consequently, it cannot be the universal result that is the core of Hegel’s analysis. Moreover, it is also not the individual moment of one historical instantiation. Instead, it is about freeing both the individual and the universal from their contradiction in time in demonstrating that both are necessary moments of one developing Absolute Knowing. We must grasp the process itself that produces the notion of the individual moment and the universal concept. Since this process can neither be after or before, nor simply now, time must be annulled. Absolute Knowing itself is not in time, but it must be grasped as the conceptual ground for the conception of time, its eternity, and its temporality. Absolute Knowing, however, is historically relative to the present moment.

Hegel’s discussion of Absolute Knowing is difficult to understand since it denies the individual, abstract notion of time. It denies temporality, that is time as vanishing in seconds, and it denies the universal notion of time, time as eternity that has no elements. It therefore only seems as if Absolute Knowing denied or rejected time, while we actually attempt to sublate it in the higher concept of history. Hegel writes on this relativizing of time therefore:

Time, therefore, appears as the destiny and necessity of Spirit that is not yet complete within itself, the necessity to enrich the share which self-consciousness has in consciousness, to set in motion the immediacy of the in-itself, which is the form in which substance is present in consciousness; or conversely, to realize and reveal what is at first only inward […] (PoS §801, 487).

Westphal remarks that “the temptation is all but irresistible”, that Hegel refers to a “transtemporal, super-human Absolute” as a “timeless knowing” (see Westphal 1979, 219). We
have to deal with the problem of subjective substance and a substantial subject. In other words, we must deal with the question of the identity of the actual [das Wirkliche] and our reason. As Westphal remarks correctly, for this task, Hegel is not concerned with time’s “duration or succession” (Westphal 1979, 220). He rejects the problematic externality of temporal relations. Only in the religious consciousness, that is still a consciousness of representation “the unity of human and divine is conceived of as a temporal event” (Westphal 1979, 220). Instead, Hegel suggests a non-representational solution that abandons the subjective form of thinking that is bound by categories or intuitions such as time. Instead, thinking really achieves its substance as the standpoint of the historical subject. This Absolute Knowing occurs when the knower knows its knowing as a particular result bound up in his or her particular, historical moment. From this further follows that Absolute Knowing is relative to its self-knowledge, in particular to its historical moment. This historical moment can only be with regard to its earlier historical becoming, the succession of stages that led to it.

All of this is only an indication of what Hegel might mean. I will discuss the distinction of time and history in the following parts. Before, I can come to a conclusion on these motifs, I need to reconstruct Hegel’s concept of the Absolute. After this, I will discuss the externalization of time, which is a part of Spirit’s nature, and history.

4.3.2 The Absolute

In the following, I briefly discuss Hegel’s concept of the absolute. ‘Absolute’ usually stands for a concept that is independent from anything else, is final, and can serve as a principle (see Rockmore 1997, 179). It presupposes a foundationalist tradition that is incompatible with Hegel’s historicist approach, according to which knowledge is dependent on the historical
context. After the Kantian turn in philosophy, the absolute was posited as a transcendental condition for knowledge, and therefore it was believed that we had only indirect access to the absolute. According to this view, the absolute has to be posited outside of ourselves as a noumenon in order to achieve an understanding of our otherwise incoherent concepts (see also Rockmore 1997, 179). Hegel’s position occurs at the end of a long debate, after which the noumenon will be rejected as a transcendental condition that was derived on the basis of false extrapolation.

Hegel introduces the concept ‘absolute’ in a different sense. According to the definition of truth that Hegel also uses, thought and its object have to coincide. The unresolvable problem of how to know an object outside of us is intertwined with the problem of an ontological difference between the subjective activity and the passive, determinate object external to the subject. The tradition that Hegel comes from seeks a mind-internal solution. In order to fulfill the condition of the subjective, conceptual activity and the determined object coinciding, we must find only one object that can be thought. The sought object, according to Hegel’s position, is spirit, since spirit can be subjective, conceptual activity, and, at the same time, produces itself as

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the object of this activity. The activity and the produced object could then be the same and thus fulfill the basic condition of truth.

This insight into the necessity of identity is simple. The sought unity of spirit, however, cannot be an empty and abstract formula like ‘I’=‘I’, an idea that Fichte committed to. Instead, the sought unity must also be recognized in its process. In other words, the standpoint of Absolute Knowing has to be achieved as a unity of being and becoming. Hegel commits to this view of an identity already in his *Differenzschrift* and also defines the form of the investigation that is related to his solution:

But if the Absolute, like Reason which is its appearance, is eternally one and the same – as indeed it is – then every Reason that is directed toward itself and comes to recognize itself, produces a true philosophy and solves for itself the problem which, like its solution, is at all times the same. In philosophy, Reason comes to know itself and deals only with itself so that its whole work and activity are grounded in itself, and with respect to the inner essence of philosophy there are neither predecessors nor successor (Hegel 1977, 87).  

Hegel demonstrates here that the acceptable philosophical form of investigation is reflection, since it relates to an activity that can be unified and remains itself with regard to itself. Reflection does not refer to a truth that is external to the subject. At the same time, it remains like the Absolute as one with its content. Thus, it can serve as a ground for knowledge claims that are relative to a stable, internal unity. Philosophy’s goal is, consequently, to achieve the Absolute as an identity of itself with itself, i. e., a unity of subject and object, knower and known, through reflection (see also Rockmore 1997, 182). Reflection must stem from its substance, and substance must be demonstrated as a content of reflection.

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If this is, however, the task of philosophy, then this expresses rather a requirement, not a result. This implies further that if the task is to unify, then there must be a difference to be overcome, since philosophy begins in difference. Reflection about the Absolute reveals the task of overcoming all of the upcoming contradictory differences in order to grasp them in an open concept of oneness that must be the ground for knowledge. Rockmore writes:

The idea is, then, twofold since it expresses the identity of the concept and objectivity and further expresses the relation of the subjective and objective poles, or the concept and objectivity as immediately given. This definition is now said to be absolute and, as such to supersede all previous definitions of the absolute (Rockmore 1997, 184).

In his epistemological reading of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, Rockmore discusses this kind of Absolute and its relation to Hegel’s form of investigation that is based on the experiences of a subject. It is the task of providing unity between an experiencing subject and the object of its experiences. For Rockmore, Hegel holds on to the Absolute “as an ultimate principle, which is independent of all further principles” while this constitutes “monism” (Rockmore 1997, 184).

I would like to specify this approach in order to separate it from Russelian monism and Brandom’s semantic account. Hegel’s monism is an epistemological necessity for achieving knowledge, but does not include claims about monist ontology. Instead, the main task is to understand objectivity without presupposing external reality. This does not exclude oneness. It is, however, an epistemological endeavor. At our historical moment, the only object that can provide oneness, and thus resembles the sought Absolute, is reflective reason in the objective form of spirit. By involving spirit, Hegel moves finally away from asking for the abstract conditions of knowledge (see Rockmore 1997, 184). Alternatively, he looks at how knowledge

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<sup>212</sup> An approach that is entirely different from Brandom’s who claims that external determinate objects make our views true.
arises as a phenomenon through which a subject relates to itself through an other that historically occurs in communities. The Absolute, however, remains an ideal that provides an epistemological regulative of oneness that is, at the same time, the reason why these reflecting communities exist. In this sense, the absolute as the sought object of communities and the subjective activity of building communities must be understood as the same spirit.

I will discuss Hegel’s solution of Absolute Knowing in the following points. As already said, Habermas criticizes Hegel’s return to an eternal Absolute, and thus rejects a possible Hegelian return as dogmatic metaphysics. Hegel’s final paragraphs on history and the sublation of time in Absolute Knowing reveal, however, that historicism is already considered in Hegel’s account. Historicism means that all our cognitive claims intrinsically depend on the historical moment. Habermas’ simplistic reading and rejection of these passages fails to grasp Hegel’s view of history.

4.3.3 The Achievement of Absolute Knowing

I begin with an outline of Hegel’s chapter about Absolute Knowing. In §788 and §789, Hegel briefly expounds the problem of spiritual identity in religion. Religious consciousness intuits the unity of self-consciousness, but cannot grasp the outcome of this identity conceptually. In §790 to §795, Hegel summarizes the previous development of spirit in religion. He explains that the movement of consciousness leads consciousness beyond itself and that a series of forms of self-consciousness appears; all worldly forms of knowledge are finally unified in religious knowledge. Religious knowledge, however, occurs first as a contradiction between the beautiful soul, the good, and its realization, the evil. The reconciliation will provide an implicit concept that is accessible to all reasonable subjects in a community. This concept can be experienced by
human beings in their culture and forms of communication. The main problem, however, remains: substance is not yet subjective, and the subject has not yet become substance. Even in their highest form, religious communities can only deliver formal, intuited solutions, but cannot yet solve the problem of unity (§796). According to Hegel, philosophy is superior by grasping spirit through the concept (§797). In §798, Hegel explains this last and final shape, which is ‘the concept’. The unity of this concept, however, is still only formal. §799 is therefore dedicated to the action of individuals who experience Absolute Knowing as their own act. Yet, humans run through the different stages of spirit and experience its development only intuitively. Hegel demonstrates in §800, that the task of science is to work through these various stages of subjective knowing in order to arrive at Absolute Knowing. Nevertheless, the problem persists in that the substance occurs before it is grasped subjectively. This means it is still external to thought. In §801, Hegel points to the incomplete appearance of spirit that still includes contingency. He comes to the conclusion that time is the source for this contingency. Time is a last remainder of intuition and, thus, it has to be annulled. We should keep in mind that this annulment of time will lead Habermas to the false view that Hegel denies historicity. In §802, Hegel analyzes how to transform “Substance into Subject” (Hegel PoS §802, 487). This transformation shows the concrete relation of cognition to experience. Experience is the starting point that involves subjects, but it also grounds an intuitive relation to substance. In §803, we encounter the conceptual argument about Absolute Spirit as intuited substance in history. In particular, Absolute Knowing results from the labor of spirit to grasp itself in various historical forms. In a historical analysis, Spirit emerges as a result of human action through historical forms in history. Spirit is developed through different philosophical stages, and only finally arrives at identity. This identity, however, is only intuited. Hegel summarizes his historical
moment, according to which the philosophical positions up to this moment still assume an Absolute outside of thinking. Hegel solves this problem on the basis of spirit’s capacity for reflection that enables self-differentiation (§804). He develops a final version of Absolute Knowing relying on the concept of negation and reconciliation. This concept does not operate in time, but is in its negativity the unity of all historical processes. In §805, Hegel describes this solution as the existence of the Concept, in which the Concept no longer falls apart in truth and knowing. Hegel exhibits here a unity independent of time in foreshadowing his idea of the Logic. The science of Logic, however, does not come to a halt. It is unrelated to the stable and ahistorical resting point that Habermas falsely assumes. In §806, Hegel introduces us therefore to the thought that if we know the limit of an object, then we are already beyond this limit. In the case of spirit, this knowing means that spirit has to “sacrifice” itself. Absolute Knowing in its highest form freely externalizes itself. Firstly, it externalizes itself in Nature as its own immediacy. Secondly, it externalizes itself through Spirit as History. Hegel introduces here the idea that each moment of the movement of Absolute Knowing can be expressed in a science of its own (§806). In §807 Hegel, explores nature as an externalization in time, which is contingent. In §808, Hegel develops the concept of history that ultimately removes this last contingency of time. Science and history, however, build two sides that have to be understood together in our historical moment as culture [Bildung]. Humans actually know culture, but since knowing means to go beyond, it will always produce a new beginning within their culture [Bildung].

It is remarkable that Hegel’s theory counts as a historical philosophy, while only the last four paragraphs of the Phenomenology consider the term ‘history’ itself. The last two paragraphs demonstrate that history does not come to an end in the idea of Absolute Knowing. Rather, they

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213 I mean by this Schelling’s unthinkable [das unvordenkliche Daß].
show that history as an externalization of spirit is related to itself through culture [Bildung]. Absolute Knowing means to know one’s cultural process, which changes the cultural process itself. Absolute Knowing is thus rather a persistent goal in history, and must be achieved again with each new beginning in a culture.

In the following paragraphs, I explain these steps in more detail and relate them to the problem of history that Hegel discusses in the last four paragraphs of his chapter on Absolute Knowing.

4.3.3.1 The Exposition of the Problem of Spirit

Following Kant’s thesis that reason can only know what it has produced by itself (see Rockmore 1997, 181), Hegel turns to reason’s capacity for reflection in which consciousness recognizes itself as a producing externality (see PoS §788, 479). The guiding idea is that, since consciousness already includes self-consciousness, there might be a possibility that consciousness can recognize its own activity in its own process of externalizing itself. The argument is the following: if knowing knows itself, then the identity of subject and object might be achieved. Objective knowledge might be possible.

This capacity of consciousness to acquire knowledge of itself is self-consciousness. This process of self-knowing, as promising as it sounds, is not yet a simple unity. As it is true for all knowing, consciousness cannot immediately bridge the gulf between truth and knowing, and so consciousness also does not know itself immediately. Instead, consciousness knows by virtue of mediation. Thus, consciousness has to enter a process of such a self-mediation through the concept in a historical, human community. Hegel replaces, therefore, self-consciousness by the
concept of spirit. The challenge is, then, to show that consciousness knows all the stages of its spiritual self-mediation. For this, it has to identify any and all external influences that hinder a clear self-knowing. It has to know itself only with regard to what has made itself, a social world of subjects that constructed reason (see Harris 1997, 709). If we can achieve this, then our community could be legitimately called ‘rational’ (see Harris 1997, 709).

Hegel describes the difficulties of grasping this community as the problem of representation, which seemingly brings him closer to Brandom’s critical understanding of representationalism. Yet, Hegel does not defend any kind of Brandomian inferentialism. Since Brandom’s belief in mind-independent things is the foundation for our communication, Brandom’s standpoint would be a return to something external and unexplained. Brandom’s inferentialism remains in a position of consciousness that cannot know its substance subjectively. Hence, it is irrational. This is because his position relies on a connection to the object that is not yet presented as a subjective production. In Hegelian language, substance does not become subject, which means that something unexplained lies outside our theory.

Hegel emphasizes, therefore, that it is not simply a return into consciousness but that knowing “is the externalization of self-consciousness that posits the thinghood” (PoS §788, 479). Unlike Brandom, we therefore have to understand how we come to the idea of how things really are. Historically, this presupposing of things is not an eternal fact, but rather a subjective production of consciousness (see Harris 1997, 713). Furthermore, this externalization also does not mean that the world becomes meaningless through the activity of self-consciousness. In relation to the activity of consciousness, the value of objects might be reduced to nothing. Hegel remarks, however, that we have to grasp it as a positive result. Though “self-consciousness knows the nothingness of the object […] because it externalizes its own self”, it gains itself as
the positive result of this negating process (PoS §788, 479). It can know how the subject becomes the object through externalization. This is by “virtue of the indivisible unity of being-for-self, whereas self-consciousness is also, at the same time, in-itself” (PoS §788, 479).

Consciousness, however, cannot simply access the process of its production in simple, unified form. It is not just there as a unity before us. Knowledge of consciousness itself has to be produced and it has to be recognized in the way it is produced.

Consciousness must recognize itself in this alienating objectification and return to itself as this externalization. For this return to itself, consciousness has to recognize its intersubjectivity. In other words, consciousness can only achieve “communion with itself in its otherness as such” (PoS §788, 479). Hegel calls the movements of the return to consciousness “the totality of moments” (PoS §788, 479). Totality, however, is not yet a whole. In order to achieve a whole that is the sought communion, we need to grasp the aforementioned idea of spirit. Hegel writes: “This totality of its determinations establishes the object as an implicitly spiritual being, and it does truly become a spiritual being for consciousness when each of its individual determinations is grasped as a determination of the Self, or through the spiritual relationship to them that was just mentioned” (PoS §788-479-480). So, we know what spirit is implicitly. In the course of the Phenomenology it comes to the fore as the revealed religion, a historical moment of the appearing substance. But Spirit must be grasped as the whole of an otherwise only composed totality.

Hegel’s idea is that we will know ourselves through our self-externalization in society that reaches its historical peak in revealed religion. This implies that the overall dialectical investigation focuses on consciousness that produces its object by externalizing itself in a spiritual society. While doing so, consciousness attempts to grasp itself as an in-itself, and

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acknowledges that self-consciousness, a for-itself, is involved in this process. Self-consciousness, however, can only be adequately understood with regard to an intersubjectivity that is not only formal. We must really understand how we come to self-consciousness through the concrete historical process.

Hegel remarks that we have, so far, only “affirmed” consciousness’ “spiritual essentiality” (PoS §789, 480). Consciousness occurs therefore only as the “shape of consciousness”, a for-itself, and as “a number of such shapes which we bring together” (Hegel PoS §789, 480). In a sense, ‘God’ “is the absolute concept” (Harris 1997, 708) that guides humans in their ultimate search for self-understanding (see Harris 1997, 708). In their religious communities, the substance of their understanding has preceded them. The problem, however, is not to understand substance from this standpoint external to thought. Rather, the question is: how to grasp the unity of the process of self-differentiation with regard to humans in their history? This question will lead us to Absolute Knowing.

After this brief exposition of the problem, Hegel draws attention to natural consciousness again. The cognitive object is not a fantasy, not simply imaginary. It must bear objectivity. At the same time, there cannot be anything presupposed outside us. For example, it would be problematic to presuppose a metaphysical reality, as Brandom does. There cannot be anything that is only affecting us through, for example, an empirical side to sensibility, a transformation of something real by virtue of imagination, or an ideal of reason that gives us logical forms.

Hegel proceeds, therefore, with repeating the results of his former investigation of consciousness and applies them to spirit. He distinguishes the moments of knowing, or the object that has to be captured in more detail: “[…] the object is in part immediate being or, in general, a Thing-corresponding to immediate consciousness; in part, an othering of itself, its relationship or
being for-an-other, and being for-itself, i.e. determinateness-corresponding to perception; and in part essence, or in the form of a universal-corresponding to the Understanding” (PoS §789, 480). This means, first, in the case of sense-certainty, that the object is grasped as outside of consciousness. It is a thing and it bears its seemingly immediate and complete truth.

Consciousness, however, cannot remain in this immediacy, since we cannot disclose any meaning with regard to the many ‘this’s and many ‘now’s that one universal ‘this’ or ‘now’ refers to. We realize that there is a dialectical movement between the thing and the way it is perceived. Perception alters the immediate. Thus, and this is the second point, consciousness reveals the thing to be a “determinateness corresponding to perception” PoS §789, 480). In altering the difference between oneness and many, the thing is brought to absurdity. It follows that—and this is the third point—that the dialectic of the object between the one and the many must be governed by an “essence” that can be grasped “in the form of a universal corresponding to the Understanding” (PoS §789, 480). Consciousness is the totality of these moments. None of these moments can be outside of consciousness so that consciousness reveals in a first act of self-consciousness that the object is what self-consciousness is itself.\footnote{Hegel makes reference to self-consciousness’ conceptual activity: “It is, as a totality, a syllogism or the movement of the universal through determination to individuality, as also the reverse movement from individuality through superseded individuality, or through determination, to the universal” (PoS 789, 480). The problem of self-knowledge is phrased in terms of the relationship between the universal and the individual that already alludes to Hegel’s Logic.\footnote{Logic can be regarded as}}

\footnote{Harris reconstructs these passages strictly with regard to the appearances of God. Technically this is accurate with regard to the text (see Harris 1997, 714-715). I hold, however, the position that Hegel wants to present is his epistemological position. For this reason, I attempt to avoid too many references to God and its appearance in religion.\footnote{Again, Harris reconstructs this as God’s incarnation, death, and reincarnation (see Harris 1997, 715).}
the attempt to mediate between individual and universal by virtue of syllogisms. I have already
suggested that ‘universal’ and ‘individual’ are universal terms; hence, they are abstractions. I
hold the position that neither universals nor individuals can be ‘true’ concepts, since in both
cases the terms do not fully coincide with their essence. Nevertheless, knowing the process that
connects and produces these crucial terms might give us a ground to understand them
objectively. In other words, Hegel’s project is the question of how to mediate the terms
‘universal’ and ‘individual’ in relation to a concept derived in a phenomenological process. In
the specific context of the Phenomenology, he must show that we can achieve a concept that is
not dependent in any way on an external term or terms. The elimination of externality in our
thought points us toward grasping the influences of our cultural becoming in history. Only then
we can deliver objective knowledge relative to history.

On the basis of this process of elimination, we can ultimately know ourselves in the
historical moment. This self-knowledge is not mediated through a timeless product of thought
unrelated to culture or history, but this self-knowledge is the product of a phenomenological
investigation of culture and history. The process itself will then be formally presented as a
movement from the universal to the individual and vice versa. Hence, the process is understood
through conceptual activity. Nevertheless, it is the conceptual activity in a concrete historical
moment that we have to understand first.

Before, we can investigate this logical movement of the conceptual activity, we need to
approach the concept itself phenomenologically. This means that we have to show how
consciousness can know itself through its appearance in history. Hegel remarks therefore that
“this Knowing is to be indicated only in its process of coming to-be, or in the moments of that
aspect of it which belongs to consciousness as such, the moments of the Notion proper or of pure
knowing in the form of shapes of consciousness” (PoS §789, 480). In other words, our goal is to entirely explain the process relative to our experiences occurring in our history. Only in this sense we are approaching an absolute.\textsuperscript{216} The conceptual shape of the notion will be the result of rejecting any external, presupposed element, yet it will not be independent from its culture and history. A potential logic that we could derive is therefore the result from culture and history.\textsuperscript{217}

\textit{4.3.3.2 Spirit in Religion – The Unification of Consciousness with Self-Consciousness}

In order to grasp self-consciousness’ activity concretely, Hegel refers to each shape of self-consciousness as it occurs. When consciousness, in an attempt to grasp the object, discovers itself, it becomes self-conscious. It, however, only becomes self-conscious as an othering of itself. Thus, it does not simply achieve unity. In what follows I explain this problem with regard to Hegel’s exploration of the religious stages of spirit.

There are three historical shapes in which consciousness attempts to recognize itself: as immediate, as perceived, and as corresponding to understanding. Each of these three forms is unsuccessful, but each builds toward Absolute Knowing.

Through the first stage of recognizing consciousness in its immediacy, we come to a judgement with respect to ourselves that the ‘I’ is a thing. Here, we consider self-consciousness

\textsuperscript{216}One last remark is necessary to grasp the significance of Hegel’s endeavor that Habermas, for example, neglects. I interpreted Absolute Knowing as a process that frees itself from external conditions and during this process grounds itself in the sense of justifying itself with regard to historical conditions. ‘To Free’ does not mean to be free-from, but to understand its former conditions and to understand its conditions of its becoming. It is insight into necessity. A consciousness that can grasp its history acknowledges its freedom. Hegel’s overall goal is therefore not an eternal substance that is ahistorical, as Habermas assumes. Rather, it is the determination of the current standpoint of man in so far s/he can know itself.

\textsuperscript{217}It becomes clear that Brandom’s account cannot be called Hegelian, since Brandom explicitly relies on the presupposition of how things really are and attempts to propose an ahistorical form of communication that is independent from our culture and history.
only with regard to its objective pole. This means that the ‘I’ is seen as a thing. This expresses itself in phrenology, or the idea that the ‘I’ can be understood by the structure of the skull. This immediate presence of consciousness in the world, its in-itself, is an extreme.

In the second stage of perception, we come to the second extreme insight that “the thing is I” (PoS §790, 481). Here, we consider self-consciousness only with regard to its subjective pole. This means that the immediate thing stands in relation to consciousness. Thus, it is ever-changing according to the utility of the observer. All objects are mediated with regard to consciousness and therefore they are understood only with respect to the reason that is established in communities of consciousness. Self-consciousness occurs here as reflected and for-itself.

The recognition of consciousness’ essence oscillates between the immediacy of its outer appearances of the ‘I’, a lifeless object, and the perceived utility of these appearances for a community of ‘I’s without stability. With this oscillation, through a third stage of understanding, we come to morality. In morality, we attempt to mediate the relationship between an object that can be a subject and the subject that can see itself as an object. In moral understanding, consciousness is neither simply object, nor the mediating subject. Rather, consciousness knows that “the objective element into which it puts itself forth, when it acts, is nothing other than the self’s pure knowledge of itself” (PoS §792, 481, 482). Hegel alludes here to the view that moral action produces an object in which communities come to know themselves. Through this awareness of their acts, the subjective and objective poles begin to build spiritual unities.

Since these paragraphs represent a summary of the complex movement of “Reason” and “Spirit”, and since that Hegel wrote these paragraphs under enormous time pressure, it is probably not possible to produce a fully coherent account of this portion of the text. Obviously,
Hegel himself can only mention fragments of the overall movement that ultimately lead up to the historical moment that will be captured as Absolute Knowing. We have reached the standpoint of morality, in which not only the abstract rules of a society matter, but also subjective intentions. The duties of morality imply the necessity of action, but action includes “errors of ignorance” (Harris 1997, 720) on the side of the subject. A dialectical movement of responsibility and conscience in society begins. The problem is that the societal acts that led to these spiritual unities were, on the one hand, necessary for the development of spirit, but on the other hand, they also include inevitable “errors of ignorance” (Harris 1997, 720). In order for self-consciousness to come into existence it has to act. Action, however, cannot be foreseen. For this reason, the ideal, morally hardened consciousness must be given up. In order to achieve an accurate understanding of human beings, we have to forgive and allow them to act (see Harris 1997, 720). Consciousness has to recognize actions as part of a practical community that cannot be grasped before it appears through action. While moral consciousness says ‘no,’ the forgiving community recognizes the practical circumstances of action and says ‘yes’ (see Harris 1997, 720), and thus, affirms its existence. Only through this unification of forgiveness the former moments of spirit arrive at the abstract formula of ‘I’=‘I.’ This formula represents the formal reconciliation between what we are as knowing consciousness and willing consciousness (see Hegel PoS §793, 482) that acts. In other words, the knowing, subjective ‘I’ and the true, objective ‘I’ come together in the forgiving action of a society. This unity, however, is not yet understood. It is only grasped in the formal expression, but it does not grasp how individuals were able to form societies on the basis of forgiveness. The spiritual stability of societies is, therefore, the fragile result of acknowledging individuals who form their communion with
respect to belief. Thus, their community does not know itself. Without knowing the inherited force of forgiveness, they cannot truly build a community of freely self-determined ‘I’

Since the self-conscious unity of ‘I’=‘I’ is void of its true spiritual content, it cannot relate to its reality as an externalized, acting consciousness in society. It only forgives by virtue of an established practice. It lets communities be, but does not understand how they are by virtue of this forgiving. For Hegel, there are therefore two sides: the universal, knowing side of self-consciousness that is for-itself, and the relation of consciousness to the individual content of its actions that is in-itself. Though, we have achieved a stage of forgiveness, it is only on the basis of a formal identity of an ‘I’. In this sense the forgiving ‘I’ is still opposed to a community of acting ‘I’s. Hegel writes with respect to these two sides:

[B]y themselves [consciousness and self-consciousness] they are single and separate, and it is solely their spiritual unity that constitutes the power of this reconciliation. The last of these moments is, however, necessarily this unity itself and, as is evident, it binds them all into itself. The Spirit that, in its, [sic] existence, is certain of itself, has for the element of existence nothing else but this knowledge of itself” (PoS 793, 482).

Hegel explicates here the conditions of the last unity that we have to achieve. Spirit’s existence must be self-consciousness as the knowledge of all of its unified moments. Without these moments of consciousness, there would be no necessity for a unifying spirit. Spirit would be empty. The formal unity is therefore incomplete. Spirit does not endlessly relate to itself in a formal unity of an ‘I’=‘I.’ In other words, an idea of something is not enough. Spirit has to be recognized in its realization.218

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218 Rockmore writes on this: “It is obviously not sufficient to have an idea. The idea must also be realized” (Rockmore 1997, 174).
Since spirit can therefore be only the existence of self-consciousness, not only the idea of it, spirit must first understand how it came to comprehending itself in a fundamental opposition. This opposition consists of, on one side, the moments of consciousness, the acting part, the historical moments, the in-itself, and on the other side, self-consciousness, the inner dimension of a beautiful soul that is only for-itself, self-consciousness. Hegel writes on the unity of these two contradictory sides: “This reconciliation of consciousness with self-consciousness thus shows itself as brought about from two sides; on one side, in the religious Spirit, and on the other side, in consciousness itself as such” (PoS §794, 482). Both sides, that is, consciousness as religious spirit and as formal self-consciousness, stand in extreme tension and therefore require a reconciliation that works for both sides. Consciousness as religious spirit precedes the formal awareness of self-consciousness in time. Yet, with spirit’s only intuited unity of spirit, it is impossible to achieve a final reconciliation through religious spirit.

Nevertheless, we have to take this historical becoming of spirit through religion seriously. Harris remarks here: “The lesson that philosophy is not to be understood apart from its history is widely understood; what Hegel’s science of experience teaches us is the much more demanding imperative that philosophy and religion must be comprehended together in the context of the actual history of the human community” (1997, 721). Harris highlights that the merely formal unity cannot be understood apart from its historical becoming in religion. In other words, the formal unity is not the ahistorical end of Hegel’s endeavor. The whole project of Absolute Knowing is rooted in its historical becoming.

A look into the chapters on religion helps to understand why consciousness that finds itself intuitively as an in-itself in a religious community cannot completely grasp itself. We can only come to a formal unity, or the ‘I’=’I’. Even though Absolute Spirit is the content of the
religious community, spirit cannot achieve reconciliation through the community, but must also find its substance as intrinsically related to subjectivity (see PoS §766, 466). Religion is limited in grasping this unity. For this reason, Rockmore writes: “For although religion can represent its [consciousness] key events, it cannot comprehend them” (1997, 178). For religion, Absolute Spirit occurs almost as a transcendent entity, an outside savior who unifies the particular, human community in one universal practice. Nevertheless, these religious communities are not fully aware of the incarnated substance and its relation to their subjectivity. Hegel holds that the savior by virtue of his death represents the idea of how the universal becomes accessible as a concept of oneness (see PoS §785, 476). The practice even persists after the savior’s death.

Hegel’s criticism of religion is that substance is only represented as a common practice, but that religion does not provide an explicit concept of what religion does. The knowing of the involved self-consciousnesses remains therefore external to the actions of self-consciousnesses, and thus there remains alienation.219

According to Hegel, the two extremes are not yet reconciled and build the following extremes:

a) Self-consciousness which “flees from contact with the actual world” (PoS §658, 400).

Hegel describes this as a “self-willed impotence to renounce its self” (PoS §65, 400). So this self-consciousness stands in “absolute difference” to the experiencing, acting self (PoS §658, 400). “[D]evoid of substance […]” this consciousness finds itself as an

219 Rockmore writes on the further goal therefore: This reconciliation is not realized in religion that “gave its object the shape of actual self-consciousness” (§794,482-483). After religion has done its work, we still lack full self-consciousness of human being “as it is in itself and for itself” (§794, 483*). The entire series reaches closure in the unity of consciousness and self-consciousness. For when this reconciliation has been accomplished, the real cognitive subject has been comprehended, since we have finally understood ourselves. (Rockmore 1997, 187)
unhappy, lost, yet “beautiful soul” (§658, 400, see also PoS §795, 483). We can also call this ‘empty self-consciousness’ or ‘spirit for-itself’.

b) The opposite of the beautiful soul is “its realization”, the religious act, so that the beautiful soul disappears in “thin air” (PoS §795,483). It is the religious community that obtains spirit as it is in-itself.

Hegel writes about the unification of this divide in “Absolute Knowing”:

The unification of the two sides has not yet been exhibited; it is this that closes the series of the shapes of Spirit, for in it Spirit attains to a knowledge of itself not only as it is in itself or as possessing an absolute content, nor only as it is for itself as a form devoid of content, or as the aspect of self-consciousness, but as it is both in essence and in actuality, or in and for itself (PoS §794, 483).

The solution for Hegel is the following: from the side of reflection, self-consciousness must grasp its realization in religious consciousness without external means. Through historical information, self-consciousness must become a self-knowing absolute unity, according to which all former appearances of spirit can be objectively explained, so that self-consciousness knows its own reality in spirit and can make further objective assumptions about spirit on the basis of spirit’s historical becoming. Hegel’s solution is to grasp it as the Concept.

The Concept fulfills the fundamental rule of unifying both extremes of consciousness and self-consciousness:

“[…] it is the Notion in its truth, viz. in unity with its externalization; it is the knowing of pure knowledge, not as an abstract essence such as duty is, but of knowledge as an essential being which is this knowledge, this pure self-consciousness which is, therefore,
at the same time a genuine object, for the Notion is the Self that is for itself’ (PoS §795, 485).

Hegel introduces us here to the criterion for Absolute Knowing, namely the comprehension of all of spirit’s moments through a single concept. The Concept produces and is produced simultaneously. It is immediate, externalizes and reconciles. With regard to religious spirit it sacrifices its immediacy, becomes for-itself, returns to itself, forgives, and thus becomes in- and for-itself. If the Concept is, indeed, the way of how human societies have formed themselves in history, then it is the objective criterion, according to which human beings can grasp themselves without any external means. If this Concept is, moreover, rich enough, then it will reveal how it has implicitly guided the process of human beings who produced themselves through human knowledge.

The goal is therefore to make this substantial, historical process of the implicit Concept, its substance, subjective. This means to transform substance into knowledge. Overall, the exposition of the problem as it reaches the stage of religion ends here. After this, we have to develop the idea of the simple Concept.

4.3.3.3 The Unification of Consciousness with Self-Consciousness through the Concept

From the exposition of the problem, we know that the unification of the extremes of consciousness has to be grasped as the unity of the “simple Notion” (PoS §796, 484). According to Hegel, this is the “simple Notion which has surrendered its eternal essence” (PoS §796, 484). In a word, it has to act. To relate it to the question of historicity, this means that we have
developed an idea of an eternal substance that, however, is falsely understood if we do not comprehend it in its externalizing activity.

Though the simple Concept is not the inwardness of the beautiful soul, it is also not the externalization of its act. It is the sublation of both. The simple Concept must be powerful enough to incorporate all of the experienced contradictions. Looking at the chapter “Absolute Knowing,” however, the discussion with regard to the simple Concept is limited. Instead of formally discussing the simple Concept as a solution, Hegel follows his phenomenological approach. His goal is to observe how humans act in society in order to grasp their spiritual becoming representationally, and then to eliminate the representational moment within our understanding of it. As a result, we will arrive at the Concept that is derived from a historical perspective. Ultimately, we do not show that humans are concepts, but that in their historical moment, they can be objectively understood through their conceptual activity.

After having discussed the problem of revealed religion, and after having introduced the formal solution of the simple Concept, Hegel observes the simple Concept in human communities.\(^\text{220}\) This means that humans recognize each other through their actions, which we, however, must reconstruct with respect to the Concept.

Again, the overall shift to a spiritual Concept, a concept that is really at work in societies, is supposed to solve the problem of the ontological difference between recognizing subjects and the recognized objects that are the subjects within the community. If we can know the forgiving

\(^{\text{220}}\) For De Nys the practical solution for the last difference lies therefore in the community: “[T]he intelligibility known in and through this reconciliation is an intelligibility that is determined, one might say produced, by the action of each self. Each is integrated into a community with the other, each presents itself in a determinate way to the other, and each stands in a condition of immediate separation from the other, on account of what it does. And what it does, most fundamentally, is to know the other and itself in a specific way. In this way, that which the self knows is now ‘the Self’s own act,’ and is understood to be precisely that” (De Nys, 566).
unity as a result of our conceptual activity, then we will know what objective knowledge of our community is for us. Rockmore summarizes the importance of the subject’s conceptual activity:

For philosophy, the importance of consciously acting is that the subject ‘carries out the life of the absolute spirit’ (§776, 484*). As concerns the concept, the final step is that ‘what happens in principle is at the same time explicitly for consciousness’ (§796, 484) or actually carried out. Through human action, the contradiction between what is the case in principle and actuality is overcome. (1997, 187-188).

The main idea is that the simple Concept is the “self’s own act” (PoS §797, 485), which occurs through the interactions of humans who create a common conceptual sphere. The subjects carry out “the life of the absolute spirit” (PoS §796, 484) in this conceptual activity. Absolute Spirit occurs therefore in the historical stages of this community and comes through this community to its self-knowing.

In more detail, the life of the community is grounded on the self-consciousness’ self-renouncing act. This renouncing act is repeated by each individual consciousness in the community through action. Action, however, is guided through concepts. Without having a concept guiding my actions, it is unreasonable to say that I act at all.

We get a first glimpse of the conceptual impregnation of society by looking at the division between good and evil. According to the former analysis, good and evil are dialectically related to each other as not acting and acting. The “self-sundering, or the negativity which the Notion is” (PoS §797, 485) is evil. The Concept releases itself and thus damages its ideal unity through separation. Consciousness as this conceptual activity becomes its “own act of renunciation, just as the Notion which it renounces is its own Notion” (PoS §796, 484). The Concept turns out as appropriate, in order to describe the “determinateness of both” (§796, 484).
It is an ideal unity that mediates itself through action, that grounds the moral evaluation of this action, and that forgives through the renouncing of its own renouncing.

Hegel sees in the Concept a possible unification of the individual and the universal. The Concept as the act of renunciation produces evil. This evil is the unique, individually realized Concept. By virtue of this, the Concept renounces the good as its dead universal concept. In a word, the good is a lifeless, moral ideal. Acting, however, will always deviate from the ideal good, and thus turn out to be evil. A society can only exist if it forgives this course of action, since otherwise communities would fall apart. Societies are built on forgiving, which is represented by religious spirit. With regard to this process, Hegel identifies the “Notion’s being within itself in its individuality, and universality” (PoS §796, 484). In other words, Hegel describes the ground for every action in the community by virtue of conceptual activity.221

It is tempting to call Hegel’s philosophy a nominalism that is neither a realism of universal forms, nor a realism of individuals. The terms ‘individual’ and ‘universal’ are abstract terms that cannot be entirely grasped. Habermas, when discussing Brandom, refers to this problem as a nominalism that cannot achieve a concept of reality (i.e., neither a reality of individuals, nor a reality of universal forms). Hegelian nominalism, however, turns out to be a conceptualism, since the universal non-acting soul and the individual act of evil are both the dialectical result of the Concept’s negating activity. In his view of the Concept, Hegel, unlike Habermas, proposes a solution to the problem of knowledge. Since the concept is the conceptual connection between the subject’s conceptual activity and the recognized conceptual object, it

221 Hegel describes this foundation of each community dramatically as a struggle to death: “The former dies to its being-for self, disowns itself, makes confession; the latter renounces the obstinacy of its abstract universality, and in so doing dies to its lifeless Self and to its unmoved universality; the former has thus completed itself through the moment of universality which is essence, and the latter through the universality which is Self” (PoS §796, 484).
might bridge the ontological difference and successfully deliver an identity. Identity, as presented above, is the ground for truth.

Hegel further explains how conceptual action lifts us to the level of thought: “It is only through action that Spirit is in such a way that it is really there, that is, when it raises its existence into Thought and thereby into an absolute antithesis, and returns out of this antithesis, in and through the antithesis itself” (PoS §796, 484). Our task is to shift from the representational paradigm of religious spirit to the conceptualizing activity of philosophy. Hegel emphasizes that action as a result of a negative conceptual activity builds a fundamental link to human actions, and relates actions to concepts. Self-consciousness grasps the action of the Concept in society. It arrives at the “unity of knowing” by understanding society neither intuitively nor representationally, but rather conceptually (PoS §796, 484). Self-consciousness is the capacity to step back from our immediate experiences and to look at the process of experiences and conceptualize them. Self-consciousness is thus the conceptual activity itself. However, it is also only in and through the society. We, thus, shift from the representational paradigm of religious spirit to the conceptualizing activity of philosophy that comes to the fore in self-consciousness. Our task is to grasp self-consciousness and its historical becoming in a community, in one unity, that is the Concept.

Yet, up to this point, we only have a formal idea of this identity of consciousness and self-consciousness. We need to show that we can understand the ontological difference between the conceptual activity of self-consciousness and its historical society through the Concept. This link to the real, historical community through the activity of the Concept has therefore to be the center of the following investigation.
4.3.3.4 The Concept and Human History

Before we are going to discuss the dialectic of this last, conceptual shape and its involvement in history, we can summarize the discussion as follows. First, knowing occurs abstractly in consciousness. This means that consciousness knows something that is distinguished from itself (see Fulda 2007, 350). The movement of consciousness, however, led consciousness beyond itself (see Fulda 2007, 350). In this way a series of forms of self-consciousness appeared. In the end, the worldly knowledge of these forms became unified through religious spirit. Hegel describes this as the idea of the beautiful soul. Reflecting on this result, we realize that this soul has to act. The action stands in an extreme tension to the inner of Spirit, the beautiful soul (see Fulda 2007, 350). Though communities externally reconcile this tension through religion, the true reconciliation must achieve a concept that is accessible to all reasonable subjects based on their negative activity. The main idea is that the concept is experienced and used by human beings to build their community in their historical moment. The Concept provides the implicit structure for differentiation and reconciliation, and thus explains societies.

Fulda makes here the important point that the substance of this community has to become subjective. This means that the substance has to be known by virtue of the Concept. Fulda writes that this is the:

Exemplifikation sich begrifflich bestimmender Einheit von beidem jeweils in einem einzelnen, sich selbst gleichen Ich, das mit anderen seinesgleichen zur substantiellen Vernunftidentität gekommen und als solches ein Wissen ist 'von diesem Subjekte als der Substanz‘ und von der Substanz als diesem Wissen seines Tuns” (Fulda 2007, 350-351).
This identity of the community of ‘I’s is the last shape of religious spirit. But, it will only be as stable as the identity of substance and subject in the Concept. We have, therefore, come to the “last shape of Spirit” that “gives its complete and true content the form of the Self” (PoS §798, 485). In other words, its former substance becomes subjective by virtue of its own activity. This activity can know itself since both, society and knowledge, have the same grounding structure. This knowing, which is the community, is conceptual.

Hegel alludes to this self-knowing as an identity of truth and certainty: “Truth is not only in itself completely identical with certainty, but it also has the shape of self-certainty or it is in its existence in the form of self-knowledge” (PoS §798, 485). The shape of self-certainty means to obtain the form of the ‘I’s that operate on the basis of concepts in a human environment that is by virtue of this conceptual operation itself.

Truth understood as the identity of concept and object is problematic in so far as the object is distinct from the concept. Hegel’s solution lies in the view that the object as well as the subject are conceptually unified in the historical society. Thus, he pursues the identity of the conceptual activity of a society with the conceptual object that is the society. The idea is that the conceptual activity establishes the society. Yet, at the same time, the conceptual activity is produced by the society. The idea is that we can eliminate the externality in the religious object. We achieve this elimination by demonstrating that the truth of the religious object in society is the subjective and conceptual activity (see Fulda 2007, 354).

This further implies that Hegel introduces a relativism that reaches objectivity for our subjective knowing since both truth and certainty, or object and the knowing activity of the subject, can be explained in one concept. This achievement concludes the task of the *Phenomenology*. Fulda explains why we can could call this relative knowledge absolute: “Dies
Wissen ist absolut […] zu nennen, weil der sich darin realisierende Begriff mit seiner gesamten Realisierung in sich selbst bleibt wie die 'absolute Substanz' mit allen Modis und Attributen, in denen sie ihre Realität hat“ (Fulda 2007, 351). In other words, the achieved knowledge is knowledge of consciousness for-itself (see Fulda 2007, 351). It knows how it knows by virtue of the Concept, which formally grasps its process of determination, negation and reconciliation. Hegel describes the last shape of spirit by providing a further criterion: “The nature, moments and movement of this knowing have, then, shown themselves to be such that this knowing is a pure being-for-self of self-consciousness” (PoS §799, 486). Self-consciousness is purely for-itself. This means that the substance is already subjective. The formal requirement has been achieved.

We have so far only discussed the formal idea of conceptual congruence. However, is this self-knowledge really achieved in societies? We still have to show that our conceptual activity of self-consciousness is what the historical form of society is in-itself. In other words, Hegel must still give us an idea of how the conceptual activity is embedded in historical societies.

Hegel thinks that the formal idea of a conceptual adequation of truth and certainty is expressed in the content of the ‘I’ and its relation to a community. He writes “it is ‘I’, that is this and no other ‘I’, and which is no less immediately a mediated or superseded universal ‘I’” (PoS §799, 486). Hegel explores here the aforementioned problematic relationship between the universal and the individual with respect to the ‘I’. The advantage of this focus on the ‘I’ is that the ‘I’, though it is individual, is not merely individual. It is also an other without being an other. Hegel writes on this ‘I’:

“It has a content which it differentiates from itself; for it is pure negativity or the dividing of itself, it is consciousness. This content is, in its difference, itself the ‘I’, for it is the movement of superseding itself, or
the same pure negativity that the ‘I’ is. In it, as differentiated, the ‘I’ is reflected into itself; it is only when
the ‘I’ communes with itself in its otherness that the content is comprehended” (Hegel, PoS §799, 486).
I will explain this view of a communing ‘I’ with regard to the relationship between an ‘I’ and a
‘you.’ If I address somebody as a ‘you’, I do not address him as an individual, but as a ‘you’ that
is ‘I’. If I refer to myself as an ‘I’, I do not refer to myself as an individual, but as an individual
who is, at the same time, for somebody else a ‘You’. Yet, this universal ‘I’ that is a ‘You’ for
another is not the dead universal, meaning that it is separated from its individual ‘I’. As naïve as
it sounds, for this self-reference to take place, there must be universal individuals. This means
that they have to be individual ‘I’s in order to be universal ‘I’s. The ‘I’ in its social occurrence
has, therefore, the potential to be the spiritual unity of a society that Hegel is seeking.

Yet, the problematic relationship is not solved by an abstract formula like ‘I’=’I’, or in
this case, an ‘I’=’You’. Hegel thinks that we cannot solve the problem of the ‘I’ merely
subjectively. In fact, the complicated relationship between ‘I’, ‘you’ and ‘we’ has to be
understood with regard to its actual community, in which everyone operates as an individual ‘I’,
and everyone treats each other as an ‘I’. In other words, it is the question of how objects are
subjects, and how subjects are objects with regard to their actual social contexts. This, as
discussed above, is Hegel’s transition to spirit, and thus Hegel develops it further:

“Stated more specifically, this content is nothing else than the very movement just spoken of; for the
contends Spirit that traverses its own self and does so for itself as Spirit by the fact that it has the ‘shape’ of
the Notion in its objectivity (PoS §799, 486).

Spirit, not the ‘I’=’I’, expresses the real solution for the problem of the ontological difference.
Rockmore remarks that humans achieve here the standpoint of science if they capture what they
actually do (see Rockmore 1997, 189). This is a moment of self-certainty, in which the problem of knowledge comes to an end for Hegel (see Rockmore 1997, 188), since we overcome the ontological difference between subject and external object. We will overcome this difference, however, only in a reflection of the spiritual shapes of a historical society in relation to the Concept. Hegel writes on this goal: “Spirit, manifesting or appearing in consciousness in this element, or what is the same thing, produced in it by consciousness, is Science” (Hegel PoS §798, 486). At this moment, we, therefore, need to reconstruct a relation to the appearance of spirit within a historical moment that is related to historical subjects in their societies who act by virtue of the Concept.

The appearance of Absolute Knowing is, as also Fulda remarks, the end of a process (see Fulda 2007, 357) that only happens in history. That spirit remains historical is the important point. The appearance of spirit in history, however, is confused and conflated with forms of knowing that are actually not grasping the essence of its process (see Fulda 2007, 357) that is its Concept. Our goal must be to transform the external representation of spirit into Hegel’s solution, the Concept, which finally grasps spirit in what it really is. This is Absolute Knowing.

By analyzing the problem so far, we have gained only a standard of knowledge. Now, we know, however, that the Concept has to be understood dialectically with regard to the history of human beings and their spirit. Since we became what we are in history by virtue of spirit, and since spirit is a form of knowledge, we can successfully reflect on ourselves through the criteria of spirit that have brought us to this historical moment. So, we are not at the end of science, but only at its beginning. In short, by getting to know the identity of the ontological difference

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between subject and object through the history of spirit by transforming itself into the ‘I’ expressed as the Concept we do not reach the end but rather only the starting point of the process. In this sense, we are not overstepping our historical limits, but arrive at an idea of how to identify our current historical state with regard to an objective criterion that we possess by virtue of our own conceptual activity.

All of this means that we pursue Absolute Knowing as an existing Concept, not only as a formal, external criterion for knowledge. Regarding “the existence of this Notion”, it does, however, not come on the scene before “Spirit […] knows what it is” (PoS §800, 486). Knowledge of ourselves is rather a goal at this moment, and not yet achieved as Hegel writes: “Spirit that is in and for itself and differentiated into its moments is a knowing that is for itself, a comprehension in general that, as such, substance has not yet reached, i.e. substance is not in its own self an absolute knowing” (PoS §800, 486). Hegel attempts to complete the project by discussing the temporal relationship between religious spirit and the self-knowledge of spirit. The problem is that our knowing of “substance […] exists earlier than […] its Notion-determined ‘shape’” (PoS §801, 486). This is because “substance […] as yet undeveloped in-itself or the Ground and Notion in its still unmoved simplicity […] the inwardness or the Self of the Spirit” (PoS §801, 486) has not yet developed. It is only represented. In other words, substance has not yet a self. For this reason, we have only encountered substance as the abstract moment (see PoS §801,486) in the historical moment of religion.

At this point of our attempt to recognize spirit, we encounter the problematic concept of time that has confused many interpreters, including Habermas:
“In the Notion that knows itself as Notion, the moments thus appear earlier than the filled [or fulfilled] whole whose coming-to-be is the movement of those moments. In consciousness, on the other hand, the whole, though incomprehended, is prior to the moments.” (QUELLE)

Does Hegel argue that Absolute Knowing as the knowledge of consciousness’ own activity is outside of time and history? Since Absolute Knowing precedes its moments as substance, but since it is also a result of these moments, the representational concept of time alone is insufficient to grasp Absolute Knowing. The consequential rejection of the insufficient concept ‘time’, however, does not exclude that Absolute Knowing is historical. According to the criterion of our knowledge that nothing should be external to our recognition of the process of knowledge, we only have to annul the contingent aspect of Absolute Knowing occurring within history. This contingent aspect is not history; it is time. History will turn out as an intrinsic part that, with regard to Absolute Knowing, is not contingent but a necessary part of what it is.

Absolute Knowing occurs as the result of a concrete, ultimately historical experience. Unlike Brandom’s account, Absolute Knowing as a form of mediation is not a pure inference, not a meditation of possible, conceptual connections in a semantic net. Rather, it is a confrontation with the real content of experience that is substance. It belongs to an effort to understand our experiences by virtue of the Concept.223

Absolute Knowing is thus a historical result of the forms of spirit. According to Absolute Knowing, we understand, how spirit can have guided all historical stages, since it exhibits the

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223 Fulda summarizes this as the criterion according to which the „Selbstprüfung seines Bewusstseins stattfindet” (see Fulda 2007, 364). He writes further: Doch es muß dem Bewußtsein dafür nicht zugeschrieben werden, daß ihm das Ziel bewußt sei, das wir schon kennen: sein Bewußtsein der Substanz mit seinem begreifenden Selbstbewußtsein auszugleichen. Wenn feststeht, nach welchem Vorstadium die Geschichte des erscheinenden absoluten Wissens beginnt und in Bezug auf welches Ganze von Erscheinungen die Selbstprüfung seines Bewußtseins stattfindet, haben wir an jenen Ausdrücken, welche je spezifische Erfahrung bezeichnen, das Wichtigste für die dialektische Bewußtseinsbewegung und können diese mit Sinn aufnehmen (Fulda 2007, 364).
Concept which was also the structure of history itself. Its current historical stage, however, is not an empty concept. It is the moment of reconciliation. This is the final shape of current self-consciousness, an ‘I’ that knows what it can know through itself, the Concept of its historical moment that is also the ground for our society.

Habermas’ interpretation of this moment of Absolute Knowing as an ahistorical, pure innerness is false, since the existing Concept\textsuperscript{224} is what societies are at this moment in history.

4.3.3.5 The Contradiction of Time and a Science of Experience

We have now encountered the final contradiction for achieving Absolute Knowing. On the one hand, with regard to the self-knowing Concept, the moments of its self-knowing occur earlier than the whole (see PoS §801, 487). On the other hand, the non-conceptualized [das unbegriffene] whole occurs earlier than the moments in the intuition (see PoS §801, 487). This whole is then conceptualized in time that is infinitely moving forward. Hegel writes about this infinity that is still related to time: “Time is the Notion itself that is there and which presents itself to consciousness as empty intuition” (PoS §801, 487). In other words, time fulfills the role of grasping substance. While this grasp is not yet entirely subjective, it only presents history as an irrational series of contingent events.

Grasped by virtue of the concept of time, substance is not yet limited by the subject, but grasped intuitively as an infinite movement. Subjects, however, are limited and only seek a relation to the universal through their finiteness. Hegel implies here that time grasped as the eternal must be set aside, since otherwise humans cannot grasp spirit as the Concept entirely. He

\textsuperscript{224} I say ‘existing Concept’ [Begriff] since it refers to the Concept that is realized in our society.
writes: “It is the outer, intuited pure Self which is not grasped by the Self, the merely intuited Notion; when this latter grasps itself it sets aside its Time-form, comprehends this intuting, and is a comprehended and comprehending intuing” (PoS §801, 487). If Hegel grasps time as an inaccurate representation of eternal substance, then Hegel also denies its eternity.

This denial of eternity contradicts Habermas’ thesis, that is, that the annulment of time leads to a concept that is ahistorical. Instead, Hegel wants to eradicate the notion of an unhistorical eternity that comes with the intuition of time. In other words, Hegel wants to achieve the Concept that can provide a clear grasp of history from the standpoint of historical, finite human communities.

Time as an intuition has, for Hegel, different functions. It can appear as the destiny of spirit, as the immediacy of the in-itself in motion, and “reveals what is only inward” (PoS §801, 487). Hegel summarizes the appearance of time with regard to all of these functions:

Time, therefore, appears as the destiny and necessity of Spirit that is not yet complete within itself, the necessity to enrich the share which self-consciousness has in consciousness, to set in motion the immediacy of the in-itself, which is the form in which substance is present in consciousness; or conversely, to realize and reveal what is at first only inward (the in-itself being taken as what is inward), i.e. to vindicate it for Spirit’s certainty of itself (PoS §801, 487).

It would be superficial to state that the connection between individual and universal spirit occurs in time. Rather, we grasp the movement conceptually. Absolute Knowing is timeless because it is not related to the external intuition of time. Rather, it is a concept. Time itself is an appearance, while Absolute Knowing is timeless and not appearance. Yet, its timelessness does not mean that it is not historical. An indication that Absolute Knowing depends on the historical
moment, though it exceeds the intuitive representation of time, is given by Hegel’s discussion of experience [Erfahrung]. Absolute Spirit, as Hegel explains, brings us to a science of experience:

For this reason it must be said that nothing is known that is not in experience, or, as it is also expressed, that is not felt to be true, not given as an inwardly revealed eternal verity, as something sacred that is believed, or whatever other expressions have been used. For experience is just this, that the content – which is Spirit – is in-itself substance, and therefore an object of consciousness (PoS §802, 487).

Hegel argues that, the content of experience is substance. Since the intuited whole of substance occurs before its subjective conceptualization, it must be obtained through experience in the form of represented objects. These objects are only partially grasped through experience. Though substance is experienced as part of consciousness, it is not yet fully subjective. Spirit, in this sense, is incomplete. Hence, according to the criterion of Absolute Knowing, we have to eradicate the intuition of time in order to make it subjective. We must reach the identity of knowing with its experiences. The resulting science is therefore not greater than its experiences, and if we are successful in grasping the essence of our experiences, then the resulting science is also not smaller than our experiences. I call this identity the ideal of an organic unity so that, according to our original epistemological criterion, subject and object really coincide.

Since Spirit must remain identical in its moments, it will reveal itself as striving toward an organic unity of both in-itself and for-itself. This organic unity is not built on a formal presupposition of an outside, transcendental thing, but only concludes what it does when it experiences. Hegel defines his project therefore as a circular epistemology: “The movement is the circle that returns into itself, the circle that presupposes its beginning and reaches it only at the end” (PoS §802, 488). There never was a substance outside us. We produce this substance
subjectively, and now only reflect on its becoming. Thus, we have reached the moment, in which we can understand how societies are possible.

Fulda qualifies Hegel’s concept of the Absolute with regard to experience. Substance is the object of consciousness (see Fulda 2007, 375). Since this reflection about substance cannot begin with something outside, nor with something external, it must begin with both substance and subject. This unity is given in the circle of experience and is not given as a mind-independent reality (see Fulda 2007, 375). After characterizing the historical genesis of philosophy in §803, Hegel will propose this solution of a beginning in substance and subject in §804. Fulda remarks that this is still a historical moment, though a historical moment in which we have no further reason to go beyond, as long as there is no new experience:


Hegel therefore has no last or final philosophy. Fulda emphasizes the openness that comes in with regard to the concept of experiences. Hegel’s philosophy begins with experience, understands how it experiences, and remains open for further experience.

We have reached here the most extreme point of the incompatibility between Brandom’s and Hegel’s views. Hegel has a science of experience that relies on the historical emergence of humans who reflect on their historical experience. Brandom defends a semantic realism, according to which rational subjects play language games. They play these language games
according to the idea of an ahistorical mind-independent reality. Brandom, as shown above, also
does not deliver a developed concept of experience.

We turn now to Habermas misinterpretation of Hegel’s historicism. Here it will suffice to
point out the difference between time and history in noting that Hegel’s final chapter provides a
first conception of history.

4.3.4 Externalizations of Spirit – Time and History

We have already clarified the basic shape of Absolute Knowing, as well as its relation to time
and experience. It remains to investigate the relation between time and history.

Time, to be more precise, is the abstract understanding of the externalization of Spirit in
nature (see Hoffmeyer 1992, 198). History, however, is the externalization of nature through
spirit (see Hoffmeyer 192, 198). In simple language, time is a phenomenon that belongs to the
concept of nature, while history is a social phenomenon that belongs to the concept of spirit. We
can reconstruct these ideas and their relation to each other in the following subpoints.

4.3.4.1 Definition of Time

In the Philosophy of Nature, Hegel demonstrates the relation between time and space as
time deduced from space. Space is the result of the logical idea, spirit in-itself, freely releasing
and externalizing itself as nature. The first externalization of nature, therefore, space in its three
dimensions. The second externalization of this externalization is time. Since this concept of time,
however, is only abstract, Hegel further derives movement and motion in pushing the concept of
nature further and further beyond itself. In a word, nature is neither simply space, nor time. In
this sense, time is only the concept of our naturalist attitude when we look at an externalized
world and conceptualize it in a merely, intuitive way. It can deliver a preliminary foundation for understanding further concepts of nature. Nature itself, however, has to be grasped in a higher concept since it is neither space nor time.

As concerns time, Hoffmeyer writes correctly: “Hegel goes on to say that when the concept grasps itself as itself, it ‘sublates its time-form’” (1992, 200). Time is only an abstraction of spirit’s movement that in its contradiction pushes toward its overcoming. Spirit can relate to itself in the intuition of time. So, for example, we see different historical principles contingently following each other in world history. Through time, we intuit such historical movements and express them in principles. Movements can, therefore, occur in the abstract notion of nature, or in the more complex notion of world spirit. In any case, time is related to intuition, and as Hegel argues, at the beginning of his section on “Absolute Knowing,” for achieving an actual understanding of ourselves, intuition has to be grasped conceptually.

Hoffmeyer states: “[The movement of Spirit] leaves behind time as it is understood in abstraction from the movement of Spirit” (Hoffmeyer 1992, 200). We could look at history in terms of time, but this view would constitute only a contingent becoming of spirit as Hegel writes “in the form of free contingent happening” (PoS §807, 492). It would constitute world history without, however, understanding how it takes place. We would recognize historical events as a ceaseless succession of events on a timeline, yet not understand why they occur. So, in a sense, the time of spirit can be intuited, but our goal is to conceptually grasp spirit’s movement. As an ultimate principle of unity, Absolute Knowing can order all occurrences of our experience coherently, not only with regard to time, which would be an external, intuitive solution, but with regard to their necessity. In other words, Absolute Knowing serves as a principle for understanding world spirit organically.
In *Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, Hegel distinguishes ‘original history’ that captures the first occurrence of spirit in time, ‘reflected history’ that already grasps different forms of world history, and a ‘philosophical world history’ (see PdW, 3) that orders all world historical occurrences with regard to one principle. ‘Philosophical world history’, however, is not based on an arbitrary universal [Allgemeines], but rather on a concrete universal [konkretes Allgemeines]. It is the spiritual principle of the people and the leading soul as Hegel explains (see PdW, 14). It has to be captured as its own activity. It is the historical production of its own occurrence. For Hegel, it therefore achieves a form of identity: “Denn der Geist ist ewig bei sich selbst“ (Hegel PdW, 15).

It is, of course, questionable whether Hegel can really deliver such a unifying principle in an explicit shape. It is, however, clear that an explanation with regard to history as a progression in time is insufficient as an explanation. Without appropriate, conceptual understanding spirit would be “[p]ure restlessness, total absence of stability […] neither motion nor time” (Hoffmeyer 1992, 200). So there must be a substantial principle of order that we attempt to grasp. This substance cannot be simply a movement in time, a ceaseless becoming. We attempt to point out the principle as a conceptual resting point, in which spirit can realize how it became. If this is true, then everything that is must be grasped as intrinsically related to the historical moment of self-knowledge.

Whether such a form of objective relativism is possible is a difficult question. Habermas critique of Hegel’s ahistoricity, however, is false. The principle of Absolute Knowing is timeless, yet, explicitly historical. Nevertheless, can we really eliminate all external elements in reflection and only relate to our own historical becoming? Given the complexity of history, it seems that
this remains a challenge. We should, however, look at Hegel’s proposed solution and discuss his concept of history.

### 4.3.4.2 Definition of Nature and History

Hoffmeyer writes: “Nature is Spirit’s immediate process of coming to be itself. History is the self-mediating process of Spirit coming to be itself” (Hoffmeyer 1992, 198). Nature, which is the externalization of the logical Idea, expresses the immediate becoming of spirit. In its immediacy, however, it remains abstract. History, on the contrary, is the self-relation of spirit. We could say it is the project of coming to know what it really is. Hegel distinguishes nature and history as two forms of how spirit becomes. He writes on nature as resulting from Spirit in the *Phenomenology*:

> Dieses sein letzteres Werden, die Natur, ist sein lebendiges unmittelbares Werden; sie, der entäußerte Geist, ist in ihrem Dasein nichts als diese ewige Entäußerung ihres Bestehens und die Bewegung, die das Subjekt herstellt. (Hegel PdG 589)

We can look at nature as the in-itself that occurs to us only in its mode of externality. I understand this in the way that I look at a phenomenon during my normal course of life, and just take it to be there, a self-subsistent, apparently immediate entity outside of myself. It is represented, and thus, I use the intuitions of time and space to locate it. I neither investigate this entity dialectically, nor do I question the intuitions of time and space. Yet, any serious investigation of the object would reveal that this entity is not only contained in an immediate, eternal externality, but that my subjective activity is involved in constructing it.
In the *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel will therefore show that nature has to be sublated as Spirit by revealing its internal contradictions. This means that knowledge of space and time gives us only an abstract representation of objects. For these reasons, Hegel demonstrates the other side of spirit that is history:

Die andere Seite aber seines Werdens, die *Geschichte*, ist das *wissende*, sich *vermittelnde* Werden – der an die Zeit entäußerte Geist; aber diese Entäußerung ist ebenso die Entäußerung ihrer selbst; das Negative ist das Negative seiner selbst. Dies Werden stellt eine träge Bewegung und Aufeinanderfolge von Geistern dar, eine Galerie von Bildern, deren jedes, mit dem vollständigen Reichtume des Geistes ausgestattet, eben darum sich so träge bewegt, weil das Selbst diesen ganzen Reichtum seiner Substanz zu durchdringen und zu verdauen hat. (Hegel PdG 589)

So history is not the immediate appearance of spirit, but its mediated knowledge. Hegel remarks that history that is not merely a succession, is a negative movement that negates itself, and thus creates a succession of spirits. With regard to the definition of spirit’s historical side, we can then summarize the main differences between time and history: Since Time that is immediate cannot represent a movement. History, on the contrary, is a movement of spirit. This is because history is related to knowing that it is an activity of consciousness, and thus a mediated becoming.

The various forms of spirit are subjectively mediated by self-conscious individuals. Self-conscious individuals, however, are impossible without consciousness of something. For Hegel, the immediate knowledge of oneself is impossible. Consciousness involves therefore a concrete process of mediation. Individual subjects that are not abstract, immediate entities only occur with regard to their particular mediation processes in an actual society of a historical moment. Thus, history is not a movement of substance, but a movement of a subjective substance. Hegel calls
history’s progression of achieving higher and higher forms of self-consciousness ‘Bildung’. It is the idea of how the particular consciousnesses are formed and come more and more to an insight of themselves. In the cited passage above, Hegel claims that this movement of a gradual progression towards self-knowledge is slow. This is because the process of ‘Bildung’ is mediated by stages. We can understand these stages of self-reflection as a gallery of spirits that follow each other in time. Since Absolute Knowledge is knowledge of the relationship between consciousness within a historical moment and self-consciousness as a self-relation within this historical moment, knowledge depends on the historical content. Yet, it is not explicable by the intuition of time, a mere succession of stages. As concerns time, spirits would only be a succession of events as if they were entities causing each other. Spirits are bound by the actions of the individuals guided by their socially mediated principles and their intuitive grasp of them. It is not possible to isolate a historical event as the cause for another historical event. This view of causality would be sociologically naïve. Absolute Knowing, in reflecting on its preceding spirits, achieves independence from time. Absolute Spirit, the goal of these movements, connects these stages with regard to one idea. By investigating different, historical principles that guide societies at different times, spirit can discover itself as within the historical process.

If we followed, on the contrary, Habermas’ false idea that Absolute Knowing is unrelated to the historical moment itself, then it would be the case that we created a substance, a view from nowhere, a God’s eye view.

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225 According to the Science of Logic, the idea is the concept that can justify a concept of objectivity (see Hegel, G.W.F. Wissenschaft der Logik II. Suhrkamp, 1969, 402).
4.3.4.3 Hegel’s Solution of Absolute Knowing

For Habermas, it seems that Hegel does not only annul the concept of time as a contingent form of intuition, but that he also annuls historicity, and thus defends an ahistorical approach. Given Hegel’s distinction between time as an intuition and history as a problem of the movement of spirit, this is false. Absolute Knowing is bound to its historical moment. It results from the concrete historical movement of ideas. The last chapter will test Hegel’s view of Absolute Knowing understood as the idea that knowledge claims are limited to the historical moment. Within our historical moment, we know our history in and through our objective claims.

In order to make the idea of historicity plausible, let us assume that the understanding is situated outside the historicity of consciousness. Under this premise, it would be problematic to understand anything that could count as knowledge for us, since all our knowledge would be immediate. Our knowledge would be limited to the partial comprehension of the object before us. Without historical movement, the knowledge we gained could not go beyond the immediacy of sensations.

Instead of rejecting historicity, a systematic approach to experience is the ground for natural consciousness that turns these immediate sensations into knowledge. This mechanism consists in a series of changing objects in mind composed with regard to changing sensations. In order to grasp this process, we have to become aware of the relationship between consciousness and the sensed object. We could apply the term ‘history’ to this process of knowing, and call it a history of how consciousness finds its objects. However, it could still be argued that this is rather an ahistorical process than the pursuit of knowledge limited to the historical moment. Nevertheless, in order to know, consciousness must grasp itself. For self-consciousness, its own
history becomes crucial, since the process of its becoming is relevant for knowing. Our becoming occurs in society. Our society distributes different roles to the individuals that alter their self-consciousness with regard to societal demands. There are different views about political institutions, their structural components, artefacts, products of skill and inspiration, and so on. And we have different developing views on the religious aspects that unify our society. Finally, we have different viewpoints about science. These views unify or diversify our interactions. These views are grounded in active communities with different histories. Our individual actions are only immediate occurrences that they result from a series of mediations that integrate experiences into a communal body of knowledge. This communal body of knowledge forms a culture limited to the historical moment. Ultimately, these bodies of knowledge form the spirits of a world history that we study and that is the basis for studying ourselves.

In Absolute Knowing, Hegel studies these first appearing contingent histories, the series of events necessary for forming societies as the recognized history of our historical moment. Absolute Knowing can be grasped as a criterion for as single history, our history. Absolute Knowing explains this history without any non-conceptualized arguments. We are not looking for external explanations of our arrival at our historical moment. But we have to examine our place within this history. Since history determines what we are, there might be a possibility to grasp ourselves as an object in our subjective activity through understanding our history. Hegel does not go beyond this internal standpoint.

Hegel’s solution to the problem of knowing and truth is that the spirit in all of these historical actions can neither be the unorganized substance that contingently occurs in world history, nor can it be a subject that imposes unreflected means, in order to understand the objects
of history. It has to be the subjective substance that emerges from its own historical process and clarifies itself. Hegel writes therefore “Spirit, however, has shown itself to us to be neither merely the withdrawal of self-consciousness into its pure inwardness, nor the mere submergence of self-consciousness into substance” (PoS §804, 490). Hegel wants to present subjective and substantial spirit as one movement. Thus, he proceeds:

this movement of the Self which empties itself of itself and sinks itself into its substance, and also, as Subject, has gone out of that substance into itself, making the substance into an object and a content at the same time as it cancels this difference between objectivity and content. (PoS §804, 490).

Hegel identifies this movement of the self between subject and substance as “reflection out of immediacy”, which is the subject’s capability to step back and look at itself. Hegel calls this “the Notion’s separation of itself from itself” (PoS §804, 490). This “pure act of ‘I’ = ‘I’” is, however, “the Notion posited indeterminateness and is thus also its immanent movement” (PoS §804, 490). By no means have we achieved a harmony of object and subject in this only abstract understanding of ourselves. The Concept is only indicated as a solution.

However, our historical moment moves toward the conceptualization of what we are, since action and forgiving, the basis for a society, require conceptual awareness in order to be stable. Hegel attempts to capture this movement towards the conceptualization of its own principle through the Concept. He disqualifies a possible resting position of this Concept in abstraction “as if it were afraid of the externalization of itself” (PoS §804, 490). Instead, spirit as the social unity of the ‘I’ in world history has to demonstrate its identity “in its externalization” (PoS §804, 490).

226 By ‘forgiving’ I refer to the German ‘vergeben’. By ‘reconciliation’ I refer to the German ‘Versöhnung’. Forgiving is a simple act of forgiving somebody an morally questionable deed. Reconciliation, however, only occurs if two parties can get beyond their differences and find unity.
Hegel points out on various occasions that the self-awareness has to be thought as a procedural unity of negation. This implies that spirit is a constant becoming by virtue of negation. For this identification, as argued, we cannot simply look at ourselves, since we would look at ourselves as an object. For Hegel, this capacity to look at ourselves resembles what history is for us. It is based on self-reflection, which requires externalization and the negation of this externalization. The Concept is therefore not an abstract becoming of, for example, a substance that is located in abstract time and space. The Concept achieves itself in a concrete history of negating former forms of knowledge. As we observe these negations, we come to the conclusion that no moment rests immediately in-itself. We see that every moment contradicts itself. Overall, we learn through various historical examples that this movement constitutes a circle of contradictions and reconciliations. This circle is therefore not an abstract idea of Absolute Knowing. Instead, Absolute Knowing is our history. Our self-differentiation of our history is the self-differentiation of ourselves. In this sense, Hegel’s philosophy remains empirical, since we derive Absolute Knowing as a part of our world history and of our historical understanding. To be more specific, Absolute Knowing is the end of a world-historical period at the end of which spirit captures its own self.

Hegel explains that the Concept is “the movement of carrying forward the form of its self-knowledge […] the labor which it accomplishes as actual History” (PoS §803, 488). Still, we have to understand the Concept through an appropriate understanding of history. In §803, Hegel proposes therefore a very brief history of philosophy that moves from the first insights of religion to philosophy. First, we discover the identity of Thought and being. Second, the identity becomes substance. Third, we express this as the identity of being and externality. Fourth, this leads to the insight ‘I’=‘I’. Since, fifth, this substance is in movement, we have to understand it
as an identity of thought and time. Yet, there is still an external element left, as Hegel writes:

“But the difference left to itself, unresting and unhalting Time, collapses rather within itself; it is the objective repose of extension” (PoS §803, 489). Hegel comes to the conclusion that the identity of Being and extension, and the identity of Being and time are not yet reconciled. Substance is not yet subject. Hegel completes this very brief historical summary of philosophy’s development in §804. There, he offers his solution of a subjective substance and a substantial subject. In §805, Hegel elaborates the only meaningful solution to the historically remaining problem of the ontological difference. Spirit has “shaped itself … burdened with the difference of consciousness” (PoS §805, 490). It has clarified itself by means of negations that led to reflections of what it is for itself. Finally, Hegel notes that in this historical process we have “won the pure element of its existence, the Notion” (PoS §805, 490). The Concept is the final result and is demonstrated as the core of what we are. Hegel finishes his argument here.

The Concept is the central concept as demonstrated through the history of philosophy. The content of the concept is difference in-itself. In this difference, it knows how it alienates itself (see PoS §805, 490-491). Alienation introduces the need for the content (see PoS §805, 490-491), while it is a “restless process of superseding itself, or negativity” (PoS §805, 491). Content never remains in-itself, but reveals itself as identical with its becoming, since the “content is the Notion” (PoS §805, 491). Spirit thus inhabits both “its existence and movement” by virtue of the fact that this “is Science” (PoS §805, 491). All differences of consciousness are therefore unified in the “Notions […] as their organic self-grounded movement” (PoS §805, 491).

Science is the one Concept that explains, according to one category, namely the Concept, how it contains difference, how it cancels, and reconciles it. Hegel’s criterion of truth is met
here, since the object as Truth and the subject as knowing come together in a single “immediate unity” that is the Concept (PoS §805, 491). There is no “passing back and forth”, since the Concept can be seen as the working force behind all of its occurrences (PoS §805, 491). As the concept has been the content of Absolute Spirit all the way through history, and as it grasps its form, we can call this Absolute Knowing. Hegel summarizes the last step of his project:

To know the pure Notions of Science in this form of shapes of consciousness constitutes the side of their reality, in accordance with which their essence, the Notion, which is posited in them in its simple mediation as thinking, breaks asunder the moments of this mediation and exhibits itself in accordance with the inner antithesis” (PoS §805, 491).

The result is the Concept that knows itself and even includes its own antithesis. However, with this last move, the Concept as the substance of former history is not yet completed with respect to further movements. Almost paradoxically, the limit of the concept is its beyond. I conclude from this that history has not come to an end, but that it moves on. Now, however, we can know and approach our further becoming scientifically.

Obviously, the Concept is only a working definition that occurs as the best epistemological strategy in order to explain our processes of knowledge. The Concept can now be applied to everything that exists. In this sense, it has to prove itself during its application [Bewährung]. It is, thus, not true that by virtue of the Concept we predict the entire shape of a system. Rather, we have an idea of what it means to do science and how to work systematically.

In a final argument, Hegel clarifies why the Concept is not only emerging within history, but is further limited to history. For this clarification, Hegel will also explain that we understand nature and history through the Concept. Hegel’s explanation proceeds from the inner antithesis that is part of the Concept to the constitution of an external nature. Though we cannot supersede
the achieved standpoint of science by means of reflection, and though we have come to an end of the current epistemological investigation, we can still explore the power of the Concept by observing its “necessity of externalizing the form of the Notion” (§806). Now knowing the Concept’s limit means to go beyond. Hegel explains:

[...] Self-knowing Spirit knows not only itself but also the negative of itself, or its limit: to know one’s limit is to know how to sacrifice oneself. This sacrifice is the externalization in which Spirit displays the process of its becoming Spirit in the form of free contingent happening, intuiting its pure Self as Time outside of it, and equally its Being as Space (PoS §807, 492).

Here Hegel provides explanation of the logical constitution of the concept as it is for-itself. It knows itself as a limit. Since the limit is always inside and outside of a determined object, it is thus also always beyond. It can thus grasp itself as nature. Beyond the exploration of its inner necessity that is externalized nature, Hegel will then explain how we return from the Concept of nature back into consciousness through spirit (see §806). All together this constitutes a circle: self-knowing spirit as the Concept understands itself in an externalized form and can thus capture itself as nature. Spirit becomes nature, a substance in-itself, “its living immediate Becoming,” which will, however, go beyond its existence. After a series of sublations, it will “reinstate[.] the Subject,” since otherwise the nature, shattered in differences, could never be grasped (PoS §807, 492).

Hegel’s last step is to connect nature through the Concept of spirit to history. History is self-externalization (see Hoffmeyer 1992, 205) of spirit. Furthermore, as also Hoffmeyer points out, nature is only possible within history. This means that the concept of nature can only be

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227 The thought itself foreshadows the Logic. In the Science of Logic, Hegel will demonstrate how the inner concept actually can provide a concept of something that is external. This stands in connection to the idea of how infinity and finiteness are related to each other.
understood through its dependence on what it is in relation to historical subjects. Hoffmeyer argues, therefore, that nature is a concept that cannot remain as an immediacy in-itself. It must also be sublated. Consequently, nature must become subject. As Hegel presents later in *The Philosophy of Spirit*, we need to follow the anthropological constitution of humans who occur to themselves in history.

World-spirits govern our self-conceptions. With regard to the earlier difference between time as a succession of spirits and the conceptual organization of these world-spirits, Hegel distinguishes two sides of how the “goal, Absolute Knowing, or Spirit that knows itself as Spirit” on this “path of recollection of Spirits as they are in themselves” occurs (PoS §808, 492). First, from “the side of their free existence,” the spirits appear as “contingency” (PoS §808, 492). This occurrence of spirit on a timeline is what Hegel defines as ‘history’ or perhaps better ‘world-history’. This means that different periods of time emerge on a timeline. History is a succession of events that also follows the development of concepts. Therefore, history emerges, secondly, “from the side of their [world-spirit’s] comprehended organization” (PoS §808, 492). This is “the Science of Knowing in the sphere of appearance” (PoS §808, 492), also called ‘phenomenology’.

History and science taken together deliver “the actuality, truth, and certainty of his [Absolute Spirit’s] throne” (PoS §808, 492). First, spirit became actual, since the Absolute Knowing of Spirit is the culmination of its development toward self-knowledge. Second, spirit is true, since Absolute Knowing offers a starting point, according to which subject and object are identical. Third, spirit is certain, since Absolute Knowing’s identity is based on the principle that guided the development of spirit. Hegel concludes: “[o]nly from the chalice of this realm of spirits foams forth for Him his own infinitude” (PoS §808, 492). This means that Absolute Knowing is grounded in finite spirits identifying themselves through the process that determines
them. It is the historical development of world spirits reflecting on themselves. Hegel claims that we find infinity on the basis of this knowledge. Infinity has to be explained in order to distinguish it from the idea of ahistoricity.

We conclude that spirit is the form of movement that at its end knows itself as its limit concept. By knowing its limit, it has to sacrifice itself. This sacrifice, as the Concept externalizing itself, is rooted in spirit’s conceptual circularity and leads to nature. The negation of its negation leads back to itself. It is the negating activity of the concept that brings it back to itself. During this process of negation, it comes to know itself, while the return to itself is a return that is higher than the starting point of the circle. The circle does not finish the movement. This openness of the circular movement towards history is one way of how to understand ‘infinity’.

The new circle must begin from a higher standpoint. Spirit, in this sense, is history itself that does not stop. At the end of each world-historical period, spirit can capture itself, while the resulting knowledge implies that it has to overcome itself. Conceptual thinking does not simply stop because it has reached a convincing thought. If we grasp our culture in history, we will see its flaws, its mistakes, its injustices. Reflecting on our culture and grasping it means that we cannot remain, at any single point, but that on the basis of reflection our culture has to change.

The resulting infinity of its movement is, therefore, limited to further experiences in time, which display themselves through consciousness. Since consciousness is part of this experiential circle, Absolute Knowing remains, therefore, in history. It knows only how it constitutes an end of each single circle of world history. Hence, Absolute Knowing marks each new beginning; a moment in which we grasp our current world-spirit, present to us in its organization according to its own principle. In this moment we grasp at the same time its opening toward a new history. In
its openness, it occurs as an infinitude. Absolute Knowing remains, therefore, as a goal. Yet, Absolute Knowing is also the end of the former world history and the beginning of a new world history. In other words, grasping itself in its historical moment by means of reflection will remain the infinite task of reflecting subjects.

As we now know, there is no end to this reflection. Hence, instead of coming to a definite end of history, Hegel closes with Schiller’s poetic lines: “from the chalice of this realm of spirits / foams forth for Him his own infinitude” (PoS §808, 493). With this metaphor, Hegel does not reduce science to a semantic explanation by virtue of the Concept. As explained further above, analytic philosophy attempts to demonstrate a semantic closure. We cannot, however, close the circle of experiences; we cannot close the project of knowledge with a last solution. Historically, we can, however, know, if not who we will be, at least who we were and who we are. History is, thus, evolving with regard to the capacity of reflection and experience. These two ingredients—reflection and experience—build therefore the substance of subjective knowledge. Altogether, we can say that science has found its objective starting point, but science, that is still at its beginning, has not yet achieved its final form.

5. Conclusion

My main goal was a discussion of the divide between the analytic and Continental philosophy. The recent claims of a unification are a misrepresentation of its current status. Contrary to Rorty’s claim, for example, Brandom does not transition analytic philosophy into its Hegelian stage. Instead, he still attempts to address problems that resulted from the early analytic rejection of a false construction of Hegel. This false rejections results in an external realism. Brandom
does not realize how his solution to the resulting controversies around external realism is based on a rejection of a false Hegelian model. As a consequence, he offers an alternative solution to a problem that has not much in common with problems Hegel that Hegel attempts to solve, i.e., how to develop a theory of knowledge without a noumenon. Yet, Brandom’s alternative solution to the problems of analytic philosophy is based on another false Hegelian model. The difficult task in understanding the divide is therefore to understand in how many different ways Hegel was misunderstood.

At first, Russell rejects Hegel’s supposed anti-realism. Later, in order to solve the problems that resulted from the discussion around an external realism, Brandom introduces Hegel as a cognitive realist. Thus, we deal with two false models of Hegel combined in one approach of analytic philosophy. The problem is that Hegel is neither an anti-realist, nor is he a cognitive realist.

The solution for the conflict must be to reconstruct Hegel as a relativist, empirical realist, which I claim is a more accurate account of Hegel. This means that Hegel denies our cognitive access to a mind-independent reality. He still, however, offers a conception of truth that relies on experience and historical reflection. In comparison, Hegel is the prototype philosopher of history, while Brandom is a thinker of a formalized linguistic discourse model that presupposes progress towards a mind-independent reality. Both approaches are therefore incompatible. As a consequence, borrowing from Hegelian relativism under the analytic premise of approaching a mind-independent reality will always compromise the Hegelian philosophy. For this reason, the divide cannot be bridged by a mere implementation of Hegelian ideas into the analytic approach. Instead, we need to establish an understanding of Hegel that is not based on the premises of neo-
pragmatic, social contextualism and its metaphysical realism. This includes that analytic philosophy has to take the problem of history seriously.

Habermas is an anchor for my discussion, since his Discourse Theory has an interest in bridging the divide. The idea is to preserve the Continental project of critical emancipation, and instead of adhering to the consciousness paradigm of Continental philosophy, to carry it out with the post-metaphysical, linguistic instruments of analytic philosophy. However, in his book *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung*, Habermas develops a critical understanding of neo-contextualism and its method. In particular, he gives up on his idea that securing the ideal conditions for communication could build a pathway towards truth. For Habermas, Brandom’s formal semantics cannot solve this problem. Basically, Habermas acknowledges that truth is always an intrinsically produced phenomenon that depends on our contexts. He explicitly excludes the possibility of a context of all contexts.

Though Habermas’ criticism of Brandom’s conceptual realism turns out to be concise, he understands Hegel as presenting an ahistorical solution that is close to conceptual realism. Habermas therefore follows a similar false construction of Hegel that grounds Brandom’s approach, i.e., Hegelianism as a social theory that can ahistorically justify making progress towards reality.

On the contrary, I have demonstrated that Hegel denies that we have cognitive access to a mind-independent reality. Unlike Habermas, Hegel delivers a viable conception of truth that can be justified for our current communities based on an analysis of history. Hegel’s philosophy is therefore not a desubstantialized philosophy, like Habermas’ approach, but can address metaphysical topics. Contrary to Brandom, Hegel has a tertiary empirical realism according to which we can develop knowledge on the basis of experience in relation to history. History is
therefore the fundamental subject that Brandom neglects and that Habermas ultimately denies as Hegel’s grounding idea.

Based on my analysis it can be concluded that owing to false constructions of Hegel’s philosophy, we still cannot accurately see how our tradition links back to Hegel’s historicist philosophy and trace how our society has been influenced by his thoughts. Since both analytic philosophers and some Continental philosophers still base their ideas on false rejections of what they took to be the Hegelian philosophy, it is crucial to engage into Hegel’s historicism. Only under this condition, the debate can positively contribute to a mediation between Continental and analytic philosophy.

This suggestion on a historicist continuation of the debate is not arbitrary. This is because knowledge and history are fundamentally interlinked to each other. I therefore disagree with a sharp distinction between a philosophy of history and a pure philosophy. With regard to Hegel, only reflection on history can ground our claims of knowledge. Therefore, a new point in philosophy, as well as in any other science, can only be reached if it is built on former views that crucially need to be made transparent. This is because the object that can reveal contradictions depends on the theory about the object. Therefore, a theory cannot be renewed if it already limits the objects that can falsify it. Under this condition, it would only allow a range of experiences that always restricts us to the way of how we already think. Instead of such a falsificationism, Hegel realizes that theories are the results of a historical movement. We cannot move further by positing a gap between theories and objects, but have to grasp their relation as a part of the movement. Through such a reflection, we acknowledge how theories limit our experience and lay out the ground for overcoming them through understanding their historical ground. Absolute Knowing, which is defined as the moment when we have grasped our history, according to
which we can explain all elements of our current historical understanding, means to make all of our theories transparent. This is not yet achieved with regard to the current debate.

However, Absolute Knowing will not resolve all problems. It is not the standpoint from nowhere, meaning that we have finally achieved an ahistorical foundation. Rather, it is a historical grounding that is, however, harder and harder to obtain, since with growing societies history becomes more and more complex. Different cultures, and more people produce more historically relevant events. It is therefore questionable whether such a grounding of Absolute Knowing can be reached for our time. At least, it is more difficult than before. Hegel’s philosophy might therefore fail or reveal itself as inappropriate for our time. Yet, it would not fail, because it is a rigid system. Rather, it would fail because the idea of describing all historically relevant phenomena with regard to one idea has become too complex.

Nevertheless, even here we have to keep in mind that Hegel does not assume one super-spirit that rules all sciences or historical occurences. Sciences, for example, mediate their own positions pragmatically. Sciences, contrary to Hoyningen-Huene’s position, work with respect to their own history and agree on different standards mediated through their history. However, it is possible to explain their occurrence and operations with respect to the concept of a historical spirit. Their development could be described as a spiritual movement so that we take up the project of Absolute Knowing in a qualified sense. Although it remains questionable whether our time can reach a comprehensive understanding of everything that has determined us historically, Hegel’s historicism suggests that philosophy must be continued as a philosophy of history that overcomes the idea of mind-independent objects.

This dissertation was intended to historically determine the status of the divide with respect to Brandom, Habermas and Hegel. With regard to my chapters on Hegel’s linguistic
approach (see 4.1.2.3) it is clear that I am not rejecting analytic philosophy and its focus on language. As already said, analytic philosophy is another historical achievement of philosophy that, however, misinterprets its own position. It falls behind the epistemological achievements of Hegel and defends a dated metaphysical and procedural realism. With our historical knowledge, however, we should have come to the conclusion that analytic philosophy does not provide the last epistemological foundation. Rather, it is the achieved position after a historical development. Analytic philosophy has therefore to take the problem of history seriously and apply it to itself in order to understand itself.

Finally, I would like to indicate that from the problems of analytic philosophy, we observe the emergence of New Realism in Germany. Gabriel’s and Ferraris’ meta-metaphysical nihilism claims to leave the problem of a mind-independent reality behind and denies a mind-independent world. I can only indicate that the question remains whether these new realists can adopt Hegel’s historicist insights or whether they conceive of us as formalized subjects who objectively approach, in their words, a ‘field of sense’ [Sinnfeld]. By posing the question of historicity, my dissertation can contribute to the current movement beyond analytic philosophy’s mind-independent realism.

6. References


