

Ejvind Hansen:

Embedded Critique in a Tensed World.

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PhD-thesis

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I. Introduction.

In this thesis I will continue a by now old tradition of reflecting philosophically on the significance of critique. The tradition has been explicit at least since Kant in 1781 made critique the prime assignment of philosophy. After Kant the tradition was continued in various shapes by (especially early) G.W.F. Hegel, F.W.J. v. Schelling, K. Marx and Nietzsche. In the 20th century, “critical theory” even became a designator of a particular kind of philosophy – i.e. the philosophical approach of the so-called Frankfurt-school (represented by (among others) M. Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno, W. Benjamin, H. Marcuse, J. Habermas, K.-O. Apel, A. Wellmer, A. Honneth). This thesis will be decisively indebted to this tradition. I will in this thesis do “critical theory”. But the so-called Frankfurt-school has since the latter half of the 20th century been characterized by an openness towards other traditions, and it has become clear that critical theory literally speaking is not only found inside one particular “school”. It is rather an indication of a certain approach. I will therefore in this thesis, beside the already mentioned philosophers, draw upon M. Heidegger, M. Foucault and J. Derrida (who represent what has often been called world-disclosing critique); and on the reflections upon the field between epistemology, ethics and critical theory that is found in the writings of C. Taylor, H. Putnam, R. Rorty and I.M. Young. Critical theory as it appears in this thesis does therefore not point towards a particular school. It is rather an indication of a theme: theories about critique.

Critical theory has traditionally often dealt with social critique. My aim in this thesis will be broader. I will not only talk about critique as a critique of social states of affairs. I will also consider critique of epistemological results, critique of subjective expressions, critique of aesthetic, religious, cultural and moral affairs. As will be clear in the thesis, I inscribe my approach in Habermas’ tripartition of the world – i.e. that we should distinguish between objective, subjective and social worlds. My examples will therefore generally relate to these three worlds. This is, however, not to say that I claim the world to be reducible to these three worlds – it is rather an introduction of a focus. I generally restrict my examples to these three worlds because the thesis would become overcomplex if I were to relate my points to other worlds – because some of these worlds (for example the religious world(s)) are even more controversial than the reductive implications of the tripartition.

In extending the field of critique in this way one could object that I conflate critical practices that in decisive ways differ. Is it, for example, reasonable to talk about critique of epistemological

statements in the same terms as critique of social issues? To this objection, I would reply that it could have been raised already in relation to the talk about *social critique* as one kind of practice. In certain respects it is not reasonable. There are decisive differences in the way critique is at play in various contexts. I will, however, on the other hand maintain that there are commonalities between these various practices too – there is a reason why we label them all critique – namely that they in various ways point out tensions between how things are, and how they should be.

I will elaborate on this claim – later in this introduction and (in further detail) in the main chapters of this thesis (III+IV). Before doing this, a word on why we need yet another thesis on critical theory.

The stumbling-block of the thesis has been that I on the one hand have been convinced that there during the 20th century has been developed an insight into various ways in which our understandings and practices are embedded into factors that may be characterized as contingent – even though they are in another respect unavoidable. Examples of this are the configuration of our languages, our ideological embeddedness, our pragmatic orientations, our bodily constitution. I will return to this in chapter (II). This has, I will argue, led to a descriptive reaction – i.e. the critical orientation has been led in the defensive. The insight that we in various ways are embedded in contingent factors that shape our outlook, has led to a humbleness that is reflected in a lack of courage to pose claims of improvement or progress. Since claims of improvement are an inevitable part of criticizing, the humility has had as a consequence that analyses of various actual states of affairs are characterized as merely *descriptive* – i.e. every *critical* implication is denied.

My aim with the thesis is to show that the descriptive approach for one is not necessary. For another, it is not possible. And finally, it is not desirable. The “everything-is-equally-good” attitude, which the descriptivist approach is an expression of, is a misconceived interpretation of the late modern condition. A more adequate attitude would be “nothing-is-good-enough”. Every statement and every action is characterized by being based on a tension – a limited outlook on a diverse world. One could of course say that if “nothing-is-good-enough” then “everything-is-equally-good” – namely in not being good enough. There is, however, a decisive difference, because even though nothing is good enough, this does not have to imply that everything is equally bad. It is well possible to claim that something is better than something else, even though it is not good enough. This is crucial for the possibility and justification of critique. To put forward a critique does not have to imply a perfect starting point – critique merely points out that some actual states of affairs or norms are problematic. It does not necessarily articulate how the norms and the states of affairs could be related in an unproblematic way.

The starting point for the thesis is thus an acknowledgement that philosophy in the 20th century has demonstrated various ways in which our understanding and actions are contingently embedded. I will not in this thesis spend a lot of energy in the justification of these insights. Most of the points are known to every trained philosopher. Not everyone agree upon them, but in order to gain anything from the reading of this thesis, one should agree with me that they articulate a challenge that is not easily overcome. My question is: *if* they are correct – where would this leave critical thinking?

My answer to this question will be that even though the embeddedness-insights relativize the validity of every posed critique – and thus call for humbleness – they at the same time accentuate that critique is always called for. Even though critique is never absolutely valid, it is nevertheless always relevant. This is so because of a dual implication of the embeddedness-insights. When philosophers talk about the embeddedness-insights they mostly focus on their narrowing implications: the various kinds of embeddedness lead to various kinds of blindness. An alternative approach, that has been accentuated by a philosopher like M. Foucault, could however be to focus on the ways in which our embeddedness makes certain things possible. Or even more radically: no practice or understanding would be possible without the narrowing implications of the embeddedness-insights. The focusses that are introduced through the embeddedness are necessary in order to be able to navigate in a complex reality.

The focus of critique most obviously is to *problematize* such narrowing focusses: through critique we point out what is left behind as a product of the contraction; since contraction is a condition for the possibility of practices and understandings, critique is consequently always called for. This can, certainly, not be done without some narrowing focus, and in that sense critique is itself a potential object of a (counter-) critique. Critique can therefore always be avoided by objecting against the foundations of critique. The real challenge towards critical theory today is to demonstrate in what sense this criticizability of every practice and statement does not equal an absolute relativism – which would ultimately dissolve the possibility of critique.

My strategy to meet this challenge is structured around the complementary notions *normativity* and *reality*. Looking at the history of philosophy it is clear that these notions are rather muddled. I claim that the reason why this is so, is that they are on the one hand mutually defining; on the other hand it is important that they are nevertheless not reduced to one another. What can be considered to be real is dependent on our normative outlook; whereas the fruitfulness and validity of normative outlooks are dependent on what they are incited by and directed towards. This has

often led to the short circuit that they can be reduced to one another. I argue, contrary to this, that they both lose their significance without the other part.

This complex and infiltrated relationship certainly makes it hard to distinguish between the two in a philosophical thesis. At the very least, it is important to be aware that the distinction is only an *analytic* distinction – in real life reality and normativity are not separate. The analytic separation therefore has to prove its worth – i.e. it must be shown that the insights that spring from it, cast new light on pressing problems. It is my aim to show that the focus on these two aspects can cast new light on how critique is possible and necessary in the light of the embeddedness-insights. In section (V,2) I will demonstrate how this may prove fruitful in relation to certain practices of critique that appear problematic in the current approaches to critique.

What is my point with the normativity/reality distinction? This will be something that gradually should become clear during the thesis (it is most explicitly articulated in sections (III,1 and IV,2)). Therefore only a brief explication at this point: the normative aspect articulates the ways in which practices are oriented towards a systematization of something. In order to understand something or (more broadly) to act in the world it is necessary to survey what is the subject of understanding/action and what is the possible object or aim of this understanding/action. The present world is thus arranged in relation to previous experiences and future aims. In order to systematize, it is necessary to focus on some aspects of the states of affairs – and hereby downgrade other aspects as less relevant. Normativity is thus in short the aim towards internal systematicity.

Reality on the other hand articulates the aspect of practices that they are oriented towards something that are not itself a product of these practices. “Reality” articulates the point that practices are incited by something, and that they are directed towards something. Because of these two aspects are practices always fallible – practices may be successful, but they may also fail. A practice may be said to fail if it is downright *wrong* or merely *inadequate*. Due to this aspect, no practice is self-contained – every practice points (in some sense) beyond itself. Reality is the aim towards some kind of correspondence with something else; it is the aim of adequacy in relation to some external entity (in a broad sense).

As a matter of clarification, I also use the concept “world” in the thesis. World and reality are certainly intimately related. I will, however, distinguish between the two in the following way: when I use the concept “reality” I talk about the abstraction that is a product of my normativity/reality-analytic. Whereas when I use the concept “world” I talk about the concrete states of affairs, i.e. the point where normativity and reality are non-separate.

I think that it could be argued that the dual aims are inherent in any practice. In this thesis I will, however, focus mainly on linguistic practices – because I want to focus on the critique that is linguistically shaped. This is not to say that I merely consider critique of linguistic practices. Linguistic practices are, like every other practice, characterized by being incited by and directedness towards something else. Taking the linguistic focus, I begin my main analyses (that begin in chapter (III)) with a contemplation of what characterizes these kinds of practices. This is necessary in order to show in what sense critique itself is characterized by the dual aims – and in what sense this situates critique in a tension between relativizing possibilities and constraining restrictions.

Through these analyses, my point will turn out to be that the embeddedness-insights reveals a paradox in relation to critique – that is just as inevitable as the Kantian antinomies: critical claims are on the one hand never justified, because they are always locally founded and reaching beyond this local foundation; i.e. critique is impossible. On the other hand, every claim has critical implications, i.e. critique is unavoidable. Critique is impossible and unavoidable! The way out of this paradox is to realize that the aim of critique is not to reach consensus about how the relationship between normativity and reality *should* be. It is rather a problematization in the sense that it reveals deficiencies in prevailing constellations. It is hereby possible to become aware of restrictions and reductions, which again makes it possible to contemplate the reasonability of these constellations. The aim with critique is not to move *towards* some particular end,¹ but to initiate further critique; i.e. critique rather has a tendency of moving *away from* certain constellations.

This may appear to be a rather negative and homeless notion of critique. It should, however, be noticed that critical *problematization* does not entail a *rejection*. Just because certain constellations have been problematized, it does not have to entail that they are rejected. Sometimes critique *does* entail a rejection, but this is merely the case if the problematizations turn out to be so serious that the constellation can by no means be defended.

A more positive articulation of critique would be that it is a certain awareness or openness as to what is unknown, foreign, external in relation to the present outlooks – an openness towards the limitations of oneself. On a moral level (which I will not justify philosophically in this thesis) this openness is important because the awareness of own limitations makes it possible to be more forgiving in relation to the faults and limitations that are so clearly visible in the outlook of

¹ In a certain sense, critique certainly moves *towards* a problematization, but this is only in very rare cases an end in itself.

others.² Critique as problematization is not homeless because it always has to be at home in certain normative outlooks. Critique as problematization is rather a reflection upon how the home has been furnished, and a pointing out of the home-windows to the home of the neighbour.

The focus on tensions between a prevailing normativity and reality indicates that critique can take two directions – matching the dual aims of practices. This is the focus of section (IV,3) in the thesis. On the one hand, critique can be a reflection upon systematic unities, i.e. on the normative shaping of reality. On the other hand, critique can be receptively based – i.e. we can receptively be made aware that the current outlook is inadequate in relation to the diversity of reality. In the thesis I will argue that this duality of critique is one of the main reasons why there has been a dividing line in critical approaches in philosophy in the 20th century. The dividing line between reflective approaches defended by (among others) Habermas, Taylor, Honneth, Apel, Wellmer on the one hand, and the world-disclosing approaches defended by (among others) Heidegger, Adorno, Foucault and Derrida on the other hand. In the thesis I defend the view that this dividing line is a product of a simplified account of critique from both sides. At least on a methodological level. The reflectively oriented philosophers focus in their methodological considerations too much on how critique is to assess the systematic unity of practices; how some interests have not been taken into the common field of discourse. The receptively oriented philosophers focus on how practices are limiting, how reality is rarefied in order to be able to establish systematic unity – receptively oriented philosophers point out the *costs* of systematic approaches.

The reflectively oriented philosophers are uneasy as to letting dead or passive reality play a role in critical reflections; whereas receptively oriented philosophers are uneasy as to giving too much credit to systematic unity.

I will argue that both approaches are too narrow.³ It is not only possible to take two directions when criticizing – no critique should ignore one of the dual aims. I will furthermore argue that the one-sided focus on one of these directions is the reason why discussion of relativism has been polarized around universalist and relativist/particularist approaches. The reflectively oriented philosophers, focussing mainly on the systematic inconsistencies have been led towards universalist approaches, because they have been unwilling to acknowledge the critical power of receptive implications (because of the fear of defeatism). Whereas the receptively oriented

² I have developed this argument in further detail in Hansen 2005a.

³ At least in their *methodological* considerations. All the mentioned philosophers have made important critical contributions that do not show the same narrowness. One could say that they in their methodological considerations are too reductive in relation to what they actually do, when making critical analysis.

philosophers have been rejecting the critical value of the universalizing or generalizing claims, because they have been unwilling to acknowledge the ways in which it may have critical implications to point out systematic faults (because of a fear of immunization against critique).⁴

The fear of defeatism is met by an alternative account of what it means to be receptive in relation to reality. The fear of immunization is met through a contemplation of the nature of universality (in section (III,2)): universal claims are only immunizing in relation to critique if they are thought of in absolute terms. Contrary to this I argue in favour of a fallible notion of universality: on the one hand universal claims are derived from local grounds. But this does not mean that universality is dissolved, because linguistic practices are characterized by reaching beyond their validity. In order to be able to relate systematically to the world it is necessary that certain claims are not questioned – they are (at least temporarily) considered to be universally valid. This does not, however, entail that they are not open to critique. Being derived from local grounds, they get their validity from being continuously fruitful in relation to local situations. A local foundation is not in contradiction with a universal validity – the universal validity has to prove its worth in relation to local situations. And this demonstration can be justified and questioned in both reflective and receptive ways.

This becomes crucial for the return to the stumbling block of this thesis: how are claims of improvement (that are necessary for critique) possible in the light of the embeddedness-insights? In section (IV,4) I argue that critique as problematization is actually possible with a rather minimal account of improvement. The pointing out of tensions merely implies improvement-claims in the sense that – all relevant things being equal – it would be an improvement if the tensions were solved. The critic does not have to have a firm idea of *how* the tensions should be solved. The critic does not have to imply that the tensions actually *should* be solved – it is well possible that we should accept the articulated tensions, because the dissolution would lead to other tensions that are more severe. As stated above: the limitation in outlook can very well have positive effects, because it makes certain approaches possible. This does, however, not affect the point that the pointing out of tensions is itself an indication of a lack of systematicity or adequacy – and therefore criticizable. To accept such tensions, therefore demands that it is possible to indicate what the gains are that counterbalance the tension.

However, as soon as we realize that practices are committed *both* to systematicity *and* adequacy, it becomes clear that the relativity that we have to accept due to the embeddedness-insights does not lead to an absolute relativism in which critique is not possible. This is due to

⁴ During the work with this thesis, I have published a paper on these considerations: “The Foucault-Habermas Debate: the Reflexive and Receptive Aspects of Critique”, in *Telos* 130 (2005): 63-83.

the notion of a fallible universality. It is still possible to refer to claims that are considered to be universally valid, when posing the critique. It is true that the addressee may reply to the critique by rejecting the validity of these universal foundations. It is possible to inscribe oneself in an alternative normative outlook. The point, however, is that this has further consequences. If you revise your normative outlook this affects what you can possibly say about reality. Because you are still – at least if you want to be considered to be a reasonable person⁵ – committed to the aims of systematicity and adequacy.⁶ The prevailing accounts of universally valid norms most often have proven their value in relation to many aspects of reality. It has therefore often rather serious consequences to reject these norms – in most cases it will appear to be more attractive to accept the critique.

This is not to say that critique will always come to an end in which the critic and the addressee agree. Since there is not *one* relationship between normativity and reality that can claim to be correct (in both being systematically consistent, and adequate in relation to reality) there *is* no stance that in an absolute sense deserves absolute consensus. In real situations we share, however, often so many norms that it is possible to *affect* each other in a mutual discussion.

Where does this view situate my approach in relation to the contemporary discussion inside critical theory? I will in section (IV,1 – esp. subsection c) situate my approach as in agreement with many influent stances in the debate. My main claim is that they should be more willing to *learn* from each other, because the various approaches do not *have* to exclude each other. One could thus say that in humble interpretations (in which the various stances only are said to articulate *some* decisive aspects of critique) I would agree with both Habermas, Foucault, Taylor, Heidegger, Derrida, Putnam – and to some extent even with Rorty (even though it is sometimes harder to maintain the friendly interpretation in this case). In more pretentious readings (in which the stances are interpreted as exclusive, articulating *the* decisive aspects of critique) I would claim

⁵ A common objection against this reasonability-qualification in critical theories has been that sometimes agents do not pretend to be reasonable. In this case my account of critique would probably fall. I will however claim that it is very seldom that this is actually the case. It is often the case that people do not pretend to be *rational*. My account of reasonability is, as will be clear in the thesis, however much broader than this. There is not only *one* notion of systematicity and adequacy that it is reasonable to ascribe to (see Toulmin 2001 for an illuminating reflection on the relationship between reasonability and rationality). It is true that in rare situations people do not pretend to be reasonable even in the broadest sense. In these cases I do, however, claim that it is reasonable to say that no account of critique could be efficient.

⁶ As will become clear in the thesis, when I talk about the aim of *adequacy* it is short for *relevant adequacy*. One of the main points in the thesis is that adequacy in an absolute sense is not possible. On this, see below, p. 116f.

that they are all too reductive in their approaches. In relation to “common” readings of these philosophers one could say that I am less certain about the power of universal claims than Habermas, Honneth and Taylor; if Foucault is to be read as rejecting every implication that reaches beyond absolute locality, I take this to be exaggerated too. Putnam is important in relation to the articulation of reality-intuitions, but too one-sided in his understanding of reality as *constraints*. Rorty on the other hand exaggerates the openness of reality. My contribution to this overall discussion will be to emphasize the way in which the dialectical relationship between the dual aims of practices is the escape from absolute relativism – at the same time as it hinders absolute staticism.

Is it important to read this thesis, in order to improve upon actual critical practices? Yes it is! (1) For one it is important that the myth of descriptivism is buried. At best, the claim of “mere descriptivism” is founded on a misconceived self-understanding. At worst it is a common ideological strategy that is taken to *hide* the critical implications of the subsequent “descriptions”. (2) Secondly, it is an important point in relation to ongoing discussions that critical claims should carry *both* a reflective *and* a receptive approach. If a critique is posed without a commitment to one of the sides, critique becomes too easy to pose – and this can be of ideological consequences (I give an example of this in subsection (V,2,a)). (3) Thirdly, it is important in critical practices to be aware that it is actually only in very extreme situations that normative outlooks are absolutely isolated from other outlooks. It is therefore only very seldom that critique reaches an absolute impasse. This is not to say that critique will always reach its end (as mentioned above), but critique will mostly be able to have an effect. We should therefore only very seldom stop short due to seemingly insurmountable cultural differences. (4) Fourthly, and finally, the moral point that will only be implicit in the thesis: it is my hope to have demonstrated various ways in which we are all always limited in our outlooks. This should teach us all to be more forgiving in relation to the obvious limitations of the others.

The thesis will probably not in itself improve actual critical practices, but it is my hope that it gives us some tools to be able to analyse in more subtle ways what is going on in argumentative practices.

These points I will carry out in the following way.

In chapter (II) I will articulate the problem from which the thesis springs – i.e. how the 20th century revealed certain embeddedness-insights that it seems hard to reject, and how this led to the descriptivist reaction – section (1). In section (2) I will explicate some of the methodological considerations that are important in my approach to the problem.

In chapter (III) I will delineate what I see as two important aspects of the field of critique. In section (1) I investigate a particular aspect of linguistic practices – i.e. the relationship between normativity and reality. In section (2) I discuss the problematic of universality in the light of the embeddedness-insights.

In chapter (IV) I take a deeper look into the critical practices. In section (1) I reflect shortly upon common approaches to critique, and I situate my approach in relation to the contemporary debate. In section (2) I elaborate on the significance of the normativity/reality relationship – this time with special attention to how they can be in *tension* with one-another. In section (3) I discuss the relationship between the Habermasian and the Foucaultian approaches, in which the point is that Habermas articulates a strong notion of reflective critique; whereas Foucault articulates a strong notion of receptive critique. But in their mutual objections against each other, they reveal a narrowness that should be overcome. In section (4) I articulate how it is possible to maintain a notion of improvement in the light of the preceding analyses. In section (5) I summarize, and contemplate the limitations of the preceding analyses.

In chapter (V) I articulate what are the consequences and perspectives of the analyses. In section (1) I articulate how I take this thesis to improve upon the prevailing landscape of critical theory. In section (2) I show how the results of the thesis can be made fruitful in relation to practices that appear to be in the borderland of critique – i.e. cases in which it seems to be too easy to be a critic (I take the Danish writer Bjørn Lomborg as my example); and cases in which critique seems to be impossible (I take the battle between the Israelis and Palestinians on the government of Jerusalem as my example).

In chapter (VI) I conclude the thesis. What has been gained. What should be further done.

HAPPY READING!

II. The Problem.

1. The Present Situation.

a. Embeddedness.

During this thesis I will take it as my starting point that something happened throughout the 20th century that put critical theory in the defence: it gradually became clear that every kind of human practices in various respects are *embedded* in factors that cannot claim to have absolute and universal validity – i.e. that every account and assessment of the world and our place in it has something contingent about it.

The awareness of embeddedness entails that critical theories have to be reshaped. It becomes obvious that critical theories cannot account for some absolute objective standing point from where critique can be posed upon worldly matters. The insights into embeddedness on the other hand also show that it is always possible to pose a critique. The embeddedness-insights on the one hand makes it more difficult to uphold a critique; on the other hand they accentuate that critique is always called for.

I will in this subsection briefly sketch out which insights into embeddedness that I take to be part of present-day philosophical landscape.

To my mind, it is one of the main insights of the 20th century that we are in an important and radical sense in a contingent embedded situation. This is not to say that this is solely the result of 20th century work. It could be argued that this is a very old insight that go back at least to the works of Immanuel Kant and his Copernican turn. But I think that it makes sense to say that the insights were radicalized significantly through the works of Nietzsche, in which it was made obvious that the embeddedness was much more difficult to get free from than had hitherto been thought. Not only were every notion of what is true or good questionable due to the various kinds of embeddedness, but the very *search* for truth and goodness are themselves questionable and

possible results of very specific interests that spring from the ways in which we are embedded (e.g. in Nietzsche 1982/7; 1887).

Nietzsche was not the only one to shape this insight. Marx had earlier shown that the effort to think independently of our material embeddedness leads to ideological corruption (e.g. Marx 1845, 1932a, 1932b). Later, early M. Heidegger pointed out that our relation to the world should be understood as a relation to an *Umwelt* (surrounding world) – i.e. that the objects of the world are better understood as *Zeug* (tool, implement) than as *things*. I.e., our approach to the world is shaped by the pragmatic interests; and there is no objective world but rather something that *surrounds* Dasein – surroundings that may vary when Dasein changes position (Heidegger 1927, esp. §13-27). The later Heidegger gave up the talk about *Zeug* being the *primordial* approach to the world, but maintained that *Zeug* and things are equiprimordial – supplemented with the understanding of the world as a work (*Werk* – paradigmatically in the arts; cf. Heidegger 1950, pp. 5-25). Even later, Heidegger radicalizes this thought and talks about the world as a *Geviert* (fourfold), i.e. an interrelatedness of sky and earth, mortals and gods (Heidegger 1952; 1951). The details of this thought are not of importance here. The main point is that the world is to be understood as a constellation that is historically changeable, and that we are always situated in this constellation as *Be-dingt* (contingent – Heidegger 1951, p. 173). We are embedded in a historical constellation that is not self-justifiable, and our practices in the world are therefore not self-justifiable.

Another important philosopher to mention when talking about embeddedness is L. Wittgenstein. In his late writings, he pointed out that every statement about the world (and other things) is necessarily embedded in language-games that in certain ways are well-founded but only in relation to particular aims, and that every thought hence always should be evaluated in relation to this embeddedness (Wittgenstein 1953; 1969); that it is not possible to find some core-aim from which all the other particular aims may be evaluated. The various language-games are at most connected through family-resemblances (i.e. even though all games have something in common with other games, they have nothing that they all share; they are linked together through *different* similarities – Wittgenstein 1953, §67). The important point in this connection is that, according to Wittgenstein, it does not make sense to talk about truth, goodness, beauty, etc. independently of the linguistic embeddedness from which they have been stated. In order to know whether something is true, good, beautiful, etc. it is necessary to know *according to what standards?*

J. Dewey (and other pragmatist philosophers) showed in another way that we should be careful not to forget that even though we as humans might have elevated from the pure animality, our

abilities are still shaped by various biological interests, and these interests should be taken into account when evaluating the results of these abilities (e.g. in Dewey 1948). It is according to this view important to notice how biological interests shape what we take to be important. Even though philosophy, science and the arts may be called very advanced developments of such biological abilities, they cannot escape the initial biological origin.

My last example of embeddedness-views is the one that is usually associated with M. Merleau-Ponty, but which also is to be found in some of E. Husserl's writings: the pointing out of our embeddedness in our bodily constitution (e.g. in Husserl 1936/54; Merleau-Ponty 1945). The point is here that our bodily constitution has a significant impact on how we approach the world. Issues like sensation, memory, expression, temporality, spatiality and freedom are always bound to our bodily orientation in the world. And even though our bodily constitution in a certain sense is contingent (we might think of other creatures that are constituted otherwise), it is in another sense *necessary* (we cannot escape it). So this leaves us embedded in a necessary contingency, that causes our approach to the world to be contingent in necessary ways too.

One might object whether this last point is not the same as the pragmatist point. But I think not (even though they are related): Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's point is mainly that we should be aware of the necessity of material mediation, whereas Dewey's pragmatic point is about a shaping by some pre-given (but in a certain sense contingent) interests or ends. So the Husserl/Merleau-Ponty point is about necessary contingent media; the Dewey point is about necessary contingent ends.

These are different examples of how philosophers in the 20th (and late 19th) century have pointed out contingent factors in which our so-called objective approaches to the world are necessarily embedded. It is my impression that similar insights have been gained inside other scientific and artistic discourses (such as psychology, anthropology, the humanist sciences, artistic discussions, etc.). Certainly the picture is much more complicated than this sketch. On the one hand, these views have inspired other philosophers to indicate other kinds of contingent embeddedness – or to revise the above views (e.g. Adorno, Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Rorty). On the other hand, there has been counter-movements in which it has been sought to show that these kinds of embeddedness are not as severe as they might appear at a first look – that it is still possible to have some kind of objective approach towards the world – even though not to the extent that was thought earlier (e.g. Carnap, Ayer, Strawson, Chomsky, Rawls, Sellars).

In this thesis I will nevertheless talk about these points of embeddedness as embeddedness-*insights*. I will claim that these views represent very influential views that no philosopher in the 20th and 21st century can ignore. They are so to speak part of the contemporary philosophical

background. It might well be objected that I should have justified the slip from *points* about embeddedness to embeddedness-*insights*. But this would have carried the thesis off my present track. The talk about the talk about the points of embeddedness as embeddedness-*insights* is mainly an indication of the stance that serve as the starting point of the thesis: it is acknowledged that *apparently* we have to accept the loss of absolute objectivity. I am not convinced by the efforts made to reestablish absolute objectivity after the views mentioned in the sketch above. And the succeeding question that I want to raise is thus: how does this leave critical theory?

b. The Descriptivist Stance.

My claim is that one consequence that has *actually* been taken is the turn towards descriptive philosophy. One of the most influential statements of this view has been made by Wittgenstein,

...Alle *Erklärung* muß fort, und nur Beschreibung an ihre Stelle treten... (Wittgenstein 1953, §109).

Die Philosophie darf den tatsächlichen Gebrauch der Sprache in keiner Weise antasten, sie kann ihn am Ende also nur beschreiben... (Wittgenstein 1953, §124).

Die Philosophie stellt eben alles bloß hin, und erklärt und folgert nichts... (Wittgenstein 1953, §126).

So, philosophy should actually merely describe how things are, and not take any stance towards it.

One should always be careful when attributing firm views to Wittgenstein. Most of his writings should first of all be understood as *questions* to philosophy, rather than firm statements (theories) about what the *right* kind of philosophy should consist in. But all the above quotations are formulated in the imperative,⁷ and even though it may be argued that Wittgenstein did not actually himself live up to the expressed ideal, they nevertheless have had an enormous influence on succeeding philosophy.

The ideal that springs from these quotations is that philosophy should be merely descriptive in relation to its object. It should not try to *explain* some deep structures that are thought to lie behind the positive given, and it should not try to *change* things (or to give indications of *how* one should change things). It should be fairly clear that such an ideal, in its pure form, leaves no room for critique, since critique is (as I will argue) exactly the pointing out of a tensed relation between

⁷ Actually, the quote from §126 is not explicitly formulated in the imperative. It is formulated as a description, but since the underlying assumption is that “philosophers” actually *do not* just put-down, an imperative of so doing is implied.

some reality and an avowed normativity, with the underlying assumption that there potentially could be room for some kind of *improvement*.

I will leave it open whether or not Wittgenstein himself actually followed the ideal. In manuscripts by T. Wallgren and S. Brock I think that one can find interpretations of Wittgenstein as a critical philosopher, and one could also ask the very obvious question: in formulating this ideal is Wittgenstein then just *describing* his object (philosophy), or is he trying to indicate a *change* that *should* be made to philosophy? I think it would be hard to maintain the former view. So the following is by no means an exegetic critique of the writings of Wittgenstein.

But the fact remains that the ideal has been very influential in the philosophy of the late 20th century. I think that it can be found in writings of T. Kuhn (his descriptive history of science, Kuhn 1970), C. Taylor (Taylor 1989, p. 207), Foucault (most explicitly in Foucault 1969). Also the focus on *interpretation* and *understanding* in the writings of (among others) P. Winch and H.-G. Gadamer (Winch 1958; 1964; Gadamer 1960) can be interpreted in this light: the main focus is to “come to terms” with the studied objects, not to have an *auseinandersetzung* with them, not to change, evaluate or criticize them. This is especially clear in Winch’ writings. In Gadamer’s writings the case is more complex, since he takes understanding to be a *mutually* influencing event, where the *Horizontverschmelzung* only can happen through changes on both sides (Gadamer 1960, pp. 311-2).

In fact none of the above mentioned philosophers can be reduced to *pure* descriptivists. They are all quite aware that descriptions can have further implications, i.e. that it is not without further consequences to describe an object. So even if it can be argued that they mainly try to describe how things are (to *understand* them), they realize that this is not the same as leaving things as they are (were). But on the other hand, they are very cautious about *explicating* the normativity that springs from their descriptions (maybe Kuhn is an exception here – see Kuhn 1970, pp. 207-10), since they want to leave the normative implications open for the reader to draw. This implied openness, which actually must entail some kind of purity-view on the text, I think is an illusion.

Richard Rorty is probably one of the most consequent representatives of the descriptivist approach, explicitly inspired by a certain (some would say controversial) reading of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Dewey, Davidson and Sellars (among others). His descriptivism is most explicitly articulated in *Contingency, irony, and solidarity* (1989). He formulates it thus,

The latter “method” of philosophy [...] is to redescribe lots and lots of things in new ways, until you have created a pattern of linguistic behavior which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it... (Rorty 1989, p. 9).

Her [i.e. the ironists, among these: Rorty] method is redescription rather than inference.

We redescribe ourselves, our situation, our past, in those terms and compare the results with alternative redescrptions, which use the vocabularies of alternative figures. We ironists hope, by this continual redescription, to make the best selves for ourselves that we can. [...] there is no answer to a redescription save a re-re-redescription. Since there is nothing beyond vocabularies which serves as a criterion of choice between them, criticism is a matter of looking on this picture and on that, not of comparing both pictures with the original (Rorty 1989, p. 80).⁸

It should be clear from the above quotes that description plays an important role in Rorty's ironist understanding of philosophy: philosophy is not primarily about inferences or arguments, but rather about making redescrptions of the apparently well-known, hereby suggesting alternatives.

At a first glance this might look like a contrast in relation to the anti-representationalist view that is presented in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979): how does it make sense to have description as the main task on the one hand, and on the other hand deny that it is possible to talk about "something" that is described? As becomes clear in the final quote, the point is that the "something" that is described in descriptions is not a *fixed* entity. Rorty's anti-representationalism is motivated by the view that there is nothing *essential* to say about the representational relation – but this is not to say that we can have descriptions that in a certain variable way point "outside" language itself (this is elaborated in Rorty 1988, p. 97; 1991, p. 5). I disagree on this analysis, but for the moment I will just conclude that there is no necessary contradiction between anti-representationalism and descriptivism.

There is a significant twist between the Wittgenstein-quotes and the Rorty-quotes. Rorty claims that philosophy should *re-describe* whereas Wittgenstein demands description. And the implication of Rorty's "re" is not just "do it again" but "do it in a new way". This means that Rorty is very well aware that the descriptions can *change* something (even though he sometimes says the opposite – Rorty 1993, p. 44-5). And in the last quote above he actually says that the redescrptions replace what was formerly thought of as critique. The difference between redescription and critique, in Rorty's view, is that redescrptions do not carry any authority. The redescrptions do not entail any improvement-claims; they are merely suggestions – without any pretensions. The question arises, however, can redescription actually replace critique – can we achieve the same things through redescription as through arguments, inferences, etc.? I will now turn to a discussion of in what sense I take the approach to be a wrong reaction towards the embeddedness-insights.

⁸ The point of redescription is repeated in Rorty 2000, p. 3. I think there must be a "re" to many in Rorty's talk of "re-re-redescription".

c. The Problem with the Descriptivist Stance.

One of Rorty's main arguments in favour of the descriptivist stance is articulated in relation to the often-used distinction between the argumentative/persuasive/violent force of linguistic expressions. Rorty claims that there is no significant difference between the argumentative and the persuasive force of linguistic expressions, but that one should rather talk about the significant difference between the argumentative/persuasive force on the one hand, and the violent force on the other hand (Rorty 1989, p. 83-4; 2000, pp. 3-4+19-22). Critical arguments do therefore not differ significantly from persuasive descriptions. If Rorty's version of the argument/persuasion/violence-triad is accepted, it will be difficult to repudiate his view on the critique/redescription-relationship.

Rorty's view on this matter is explicitly turned against Habermas, who claims that the significant difference lies between argumentation on the one hand, and persuasion/violence on the other, since persuasion actually is a kind of *verbal* enforcement (e.g. in Habermas 1981, vol. 1, pp. 386-7). Rorty accepts that verbal communication can be a kind of enforcement, hence that sometimes there has to be done some analytic work on whether performed speech-acts actually end up realizing inexpedient enforcement – meaning that it should be repudiated. I think, however, that he still owes a convincing explanation of why (given his overall view) enforcement always should be repudiated. But for the moment it is more important to deal with his claim that it is not possible to separate argumentation and persuasion.

This distinction has been one of Habermas' main concerns throughout his oeuvre. It had an early systematic treatment in his "Wahrheitstheorien" (1973). One of the main points in that paper is that the validity of arguments has to be intersubjectively testable, whereas this is not the case with the changes that evolve from persuasion. Certainly persuasion may (and mostly does) lead to intersubjectively recognizable changes, but essentially persuasion is a psychological change that is not open to intersubjective sharing. On the other hand, the effects arguments are founded on a number of validity-claims that should be open to intersubjective tests, and they should be resistant towards such tests. If the arguments are initially valid, they should not be weakened by being laid out in the open (even though certainly the assumptions may be questioned). Rorty agrees that this would be a fair characterization of the difference, but denies that it is possible to say anything substantial about what criteria an intersubjective test would have to be founded upon (Rorty 1989, p. 84) – the distinction therefore falls.

In “Wahrheitstheorien” Habermas seeks to found the intersubjective test on what he calls “Die ideale Sprechsituation” (the ideal speech situation – Habermas 1973b, p. 174): if it can be shown that arguments are not in accordance with the rules of this speech situation, then it turns out that they are not arguments at all, but should rather be characterized as examples of persuasion. At the outset the ideal speech situation is thought as a critical idea, rather than as a substantial normative idea (I will return to this below, p. 81). Habermas is well aware that no ideal can exist independently of a concretion that is locally shaped. But Rorty radicalizes this by claiming that any ideal can be reduced to “us as we should like to be” (Rorty 1993, p. 52) – the point being that it is not possible for us to transcend our local conditions through a turn towards ideals.

As I will argue below (see section III,2), I think that this expresses a too narrow view on the relationship between universal ideals and local horizons. Even though it may be acknowledged that ideals vary through history, this does not change the fact that every linguistic action *has* to presuppose some universal reference points – even though this universality may be only fallibly valid. I think that Rorty misses the point with Habermas’ turn to ideals: the point is not, that the relationship between argumentation and persuasion in its essence has some unvariable kernel. The point is that the distinction is always at work – i.e. we respond differently towards speech-acts if we consider them to be acts of persuasion, than if we consider them to be acts of argumentation.

To take an example:⁹ if I am told in a commercial that using a particular shampoo will make me more popular among the opposite sex, I am not supposed to ask for the backing of that statement. The intention with the statement is that I just take it in, not necessarily that I believe in it, but that I am *affected* by it. The speech-act is supposed to *do* something to me, and these affective mechanisms are weakened if they are laid out in the open. If I am made aware that this commercial is trying to draw on my inferiority-complex in relation to the opposite sex, in order to make me buy something that I actually do not need (since I have already a much cheaper shampoo, that does the work just as well), then the persuasive act will fail – or at least be subsequently neutralized.¹⁰ If on the other hand, an agricultural consultant says to the farmer that

⁹ The following can be considered as a paraphrasing of “Erste Zwischenbetrachtung” in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, pp. 369-452). The example is mine however.

¹⁰ It could be objected that not all persuasions are based on aims that are hidden. It is thus possible to think of a situation in which the speaker says that “I am trying to persuade you to X, I have not really any arguments in favour of it, it would just suit me well if you were thus persuaded”. I would, though, claim that this would actually be a preliminary stage to an argumentation – rather than a persuasion – since the presuppositions of the act are laid out in the open. The succeeding arguments will probably be drawing on subjective feelings of both the speaker and the addressee, but as will be clear in subsection (III,1,b – esp. paragraph 2 & 4) these are validity-claims that are just as legitimate in argumentative practices as objective and social validity-claims.

he should fertilize his crop because he then will get a better harvest, this speech-act certainly also *affects* the farmer, but in this act it is implied that the speaker is ready to give good reasons for his claim – it is so to say part of the validity of the claim. Questioning the validity of the argument is not in itself a threat towards the argument. As long as it is a good argument, such questions will merely serve to explicate the reasons (the warrant and the backing) that the consultant has for making his argument. If the argument turns out to be bad (e.g. if the farmer already *had* been fertilizing), the consultant will not have failed reaching some (hidden) aims (to make the farmer fertilize) – he would simply have been proven *wrong*: the farmer should actually *not* fertilize his crop. And it is not that the consultant has been *persuaded* to think so. He has been *convinced*, and the reasons for the conviction are out in the open.

This is not to say that it is always possible in concrete situations to make a sharp distinction between the two kinds of speech-acts. Rorty may have a point in stating that it is not always (perhaps never) possible to determine whether an actual speech-act is intended as an argument or a persuasion. This is obvious since the subjective intentions are not openly accessible to the others (and according to some psychologists: not even to oneself). And further, he may have a point in stating that it is not always (perhaps never) possible to determine whether the resulting effect of the speech-act actually has an argumentative or a persuasive character, since this would demand a likewise deep insight into the psychological mechanisms of the addressee. So, the distinction cannot be explained on a purely subjective level (the intentions of the speaker) or on a purely objective level (the actual results of the act). But on the intersubjective level, it makes a difference whether speech-act are *taken* as arguments or persuasions. The speaker acts differently towards the listener if she is trying to affect the listener argumentatively than if through persuasion. And the listener reacts differently whether he considers the relationship to be an argumentative relationship or a persuasive relationship. Both participants may be wrong in their evaluation of both the intentions and the realizations, but this does not change the reality of the distinction: it has real consequences on the intersubjective level whether speech-acts are considered to be argumentative or persuasive. The distinction should hence not be abandoned.

So, I do not accept Rorty's repudiation of argumentation. I do furthermore not accept his claim that critique can be *reduced* to redescription – understood as just showing new aspects of the already known, without taking any stance towards the normative implications of the relationship between the description and the object of description. Consequently, I cannot accept his point that argumentative critique is actually *mere* redescription. I will explicate my idea of critique in details below (chapter IV), but spelled out in headlines, what I think is wrong with Rorty's concept is that even though it catches the very important (and often overlooked) role description and

redescription can play in critique (something that is going to be important below, subsection IV,3,b), it becomes reductive in missing the claim of *improvement* that is a constitutive part of critique: critique points out tensions in the relation between a normativity and a reality, *and* it is entailed that it would (locally, and in a certain sense) be an *improvement* if this tension could be solved. So there is always two levels of normativity entailed in critique: on the one hand, the normativity that is pointed out as in tension with reality (the criticized normativity); and the normativity that shapes how we think about the revealed tension (the norm of improvement – the reason for posing the critique). And even though Rorty might legitimately claim that none of these normativities transcend local backgrounds in an unproblematic way, they nevertheless should not be reduced to one another, since they in the actual argumentation play very different roles.

I will in this thesis argue in favour of a closer relationship between description and critique than is often found in critical theory, but my argument will, contrary to Rorty, aim at showing that the traditional concept of description is too narrow – I will show that description always *also* entails critique. One could say that whereas Rorty *reduces* critique to description, I will *extend* the notion of description by showing its critical implications. Even though we cannot rely on some universal standpoint from where to criticize, this does not mean that we are inextricably isolated in an atomized local horizon. Critique understood as an evaluation and an attempt to change other views is not ruled out together with the loss of robust universalism.

A possible reason why Rorty is misled to this view, can be found in his constructivism. When he states that truth is something we create, and when he denies the importance of how this creation corresponds with the world (Rorty 1989, ch. 1), it becomes difficult to see how it should be possible to transcend *one* horizon and hereby have something significant to say about another, because it becomes difficult to see how a meeting could take place (since no restrictions are put onto the constructions). Against this view, I will take a more H. Putnam-like view and argue that even though it is difficult to say something final and fixed about the world, it is nevertheless a constitutive aspect of what it means to “have a view” that it is incited by something, directed towards something, and fallible in relation to something. I.e.: even though it is uncertain whether it is possible have one fixed notion of the world, it may nevertheless be possible to meet on the fact that the various horizons all in some sense claim to be incited by, directed towards, and fallible in relation to reality (even though we may have differing accounts of reality – I will return to this below, section (III,1)), hence it is possible to discuss how well this is done (there is of course still a lot of work to be done on how to define the “well”-being). The point for which I will argue is, that even though Rorty may be right that the world is something that is open to various interpretations, I think that Putnam has got a point in saying that it is not *infinitely* open to

interpretation: inside local horizons it is quite definite whether a view is “according to how things are” or not.

In order to criticize views based on foreign horizons it is certainly necessary, to some extent, to be loyal towards the local foundations of the addressee. And certainly, it is often possible to reject such criticism by objecting towards its foundation on other local norms. But this does not necessarily lead to an immediate draw, because both local horizons point beyond their local foundation towards some states of affairs in the world. And the world is accessible to both the critic and the addressee. It is true that they may (most probably do) have differing accounts of the world. But even though the disputants differ in their accounts of the world, this does not mean their worlds are absolutely separate. Actually, as I will argue below (paragraph IV,2,b,1) the worlds that are objects of critical exchanges are always to some extent *shared* worlds. It is therefore possible to discuss how well a certain horizon accounts for the world. There is always both a meeting (the world) and a difference (how to approach and comprehend the world). And this is, as I see it, the starting point for critique.

I will substantiate my critique of Rorty’s position below (esp. subsection IV,2,b and pp. 186ff). I will now sketch out what I take to be problematic about the descriptivist stance in general.

The descriptivist stance is a way to handle the embeddedness-insights: if *any* starting point is embedded, we should try to avoid posing our normativity onto others, because we cannot claim our normativity to be better than the normativity of others. Or in other words: it is not possible to found a trans-local concept of improvement.

My first objection against this stance is that it does not make the investigation less contingent just to *describe* the objects of investigation. The foundation of descriptions is just as embedded and contingent as that of critique. Reflected descriptivists like Rorty would not claim them to be so. The aim of neutrality has been given up long time ago. Rather, the reason for preferring the descriptive stance is that, since no approach is neutral, no approach can justifiably pose its norms onto fields that transcend the foundational field of these norms. An therefore, it is argued, we must avoid “should”-claims and only produce “is”-claims.

I will not deny that it *is* problematic to pose norms that have only limited validity onto fields in which their validity is not immediately recognizable. But my point is that this is not to be avoided inside the descriptivist stance either. Descriptions, being linguistic practices) also entail a normativity that both is posed from within a local background, and claiming validity outside this background. At the very least, descriptions entails a claim about *relevance* which one has to understand in order to assess the content of the description. When I for example describe the entity in front of me as a “computer”, I imply that this is the relevant thing to say about it in the

present situation. I imply that it is not relevant to talk about e.g. the scent of it – I have said nothing about the scent of it, and if someone thinks that the description characterizes the olfactive properties of the object, she will probably be quite confused in the subsequent dialogue. This is even more obvious when describing social entities: when describing the situation of employees in a supermarket as being very open-minded, it is implied that this is a relevant characterization of the situation. Nothing has been said about the wages, nothing has been said about *who* are open-minded (the employer or the employees) and in what sense it is the case, nothing has been said about the length of the employees fingernails. Again: if the listener thinks that the description is about these circumstances, she will not be able to relate to the description.

This is not to say that descriptions *preclude* that other aspects may be relevant. But in order for this to be apparent the initial descriptions have to be supplemented by further characterizations or by reservations about what also might be relevant, but has been left out of various (even more relevant) reasons.

Why do descriptions always entail a claim of relevance? I will answer that question in the succeeding chapters, but it should be noted that it is not so much an actual argument as it is an explication of my presuppositions. The first part of my answer is intuitive: worldly circumstances are always open to various and different descriptions that may simultaneously be correct. Since this is so, no description can be said to be *exhaustive*. A description is a conceptualization of something concrete, particular, individual (rich on details) into something abstract, universal, general (rich on systematism). In order to have that conceptualization it is necessary to draw some aspects out in the light at the cost of others – it is necessary to *focus*. In order to get a focus it is necessary to downgrade certain aspects in relation to others – it is necessary to bring-out certain aspects as that which in the situation is most relevant.

The answer still needs a second part, however, because the question arises whether it is fair to say that all objects in reality are open to different descriptions? Would it not be possible to think of objects that are not open to different descriptions? Do we not sometimes relate to certain states of affairs that are so narrowly defined that only very few descriptions are possible; and that an exhaustive description is consequently possible? My answer to these objections will be pragmatic: I accept the point, but the question of relevance still pops up as a question about, *why* we would do so? Take an example: in a philosophical class on formal logic, the teacher says that the Modus Ponendo Ponens may be described formally as $\{p \rightarrow q, p \vdash q\}$ (due to the standards of formal logic in Western Europe and North America).¹¹ This would be a very precise and – due

¹¹ One could argue that $\{p \rightarrow q, p \vdash q\}$ is a *normative* definition of MPP rather than a *description*. To this, I would say that it depends on the situation in which it is stated. It is true that it *can* be used as a normative definition, if for

to the implied standards of western formal logic – there could not have been given a better description of MPP. In this case, the quest for relevance comes out of the pragmatic point that it is always possible to ask for reasons for doing something. We may not always be able to answer such questions, and often it may be said that we are not aware of reasons for our actions, but it is never fundamentally out of place to *ask* for reasons (at least if we are ready to receive quite diverse kinds of answers). So, it is possible to ask *why* it is relevant to operate with this narrowly defined normativity (that gives us such precise answers). What may be expressed inside this normativity? How do we *apply* the results that spring from this normativity onto reality?¹² The quest for relevance pops up because no linguistic practice is self-relying but relates to and is justified by its relation to something else.

In this thesis I will reflect upon this intuition as a dual aim of linguistic practices: on the one hand the aim of having some kind of success in relation to something else (I will call this the reality-aspect of practices); on the other hand the aim of seeing the connections, relations, continuities that makes it possible to *apprehend* this otherness (I will call this the normativity or systematicity-aspect of the practices). These aspects cannot be thought of in abstraction from each other, but they should not be conflated or reduced to one another either. But I will come back to this below.

So, the descriptivist approach does not solve the problem from which it springs. In addition to that, it can be objected that there is something lost in the approach. The descriptivist stance springs from the idea that we should not (or at least as minimally as possible) pose our norms onto others (since they have no validity outside their local horizon). I think that it is correct that we should be cautious about it when we do it, but I think that it is wrong to claim that we should avoid doing it at all. It is always justified to pose norms onto others, if it will lead to an *improved* state of affairs. That is of course a truism, and descriptivists only reject norm-posing because they claim that it is impossible to justify claims about improvement that transcend the local horizon from which they are posed. I agree that it is not possible infallibly to justify a notion of improvement – we may always be wrong. But I do not agree that we from the fact that our attempts of improvement may show to fail (or even sometimes lead to deterioration) should stop

example the teacher examines the student, and corrects her understanding of the argument. In the present example, however, I take it that the teacher is describing the logical aspect of what we do in certain argumentative situations.

¹² This is a pragmatic point that also found its way into the philosophical hermeneutics of H.-G. Gadamer: “Denn wir meinen [...], daß Anwendung ein ebenso integrierender Bestandteil des hermeneutischen Vorgangs ist wie Verstehen und Auslegen” (Gadamer 1960, p. 313).

trying to improve at all. I think that this would lead to a reduction of the future-temporality that is not phenomenologically tenable. As I will argue below (pp. 43), norms cannot be reduced to a relationship between the system of past experiences, confronted with and organizing the present experiences. Norms also articulate ideas about how the world should develop – norms also articulate future *aims*. I will not claim that descriptivists like Rorty cannot account for the future-temporality at all, but it is reduced to ideas about what is the *immanent* aims of the locally embedded agents – aims that the agents (or groups of agents) have for their own future development. This is an ego-centred notion of future that is only tenable from a pure subjectivist approach. I will argue (drawing upon Habermasian arguments) that subjectivist aims cannot be separated from aims about the objective and social worlds either. This does not in itself lead to a more subtle view of the future, but it at least shows that the ego-centred account of future is neither necessary nor desirable. This is especially clear when it comes to linguistic practices (which will be my main field of discussion in this thesis): linguistic practises do not only articulate subjective aims: communication indicates that somebody wants to *engage* with another. Perhaps not wanting to *improve* on the other in a traditional sense. But to pose an improvement-claim that can be discussed in a further discussion, and eventually (if agreed upon after the discussion) sought realized in the world.

Summing up, there are (at least) two problems with the descriptivist stance: on the one hand it does not help us to avoid posing locally founded norms on other local fields. On the other hand, it rests on a reduced notion of the future-temporality. Both of these mistakes spring from a misguided notion of what linguistic practices are about. As I will argue, critique is a practice among other linguistic practices. Analyses of the conditions for linguistic practices will consequently be significant for the discussion of critique. I will in the following chapter make an analysis of certain aspects in linguistic practices that are relevant in the subsequent analysis of critical practices. As already stated, I agree with the representatives of descriptivism that it is *problematic* to pose norms that are locally founded onto other local fields. But problematic is not the same as impossible, and as I will argue, the descriptivist worry can be partly met by analysing the notions of locality and universality, showing that just as absolute robust universalism is not possible to reach at, the idea of “local” horizons in an atomic sense does not make sense either.

Before doing this, a few words upon the character of the following analyses.

2. Methodological Considerations.

Since I grant that the various insights into our radical embeddedness to be tenable, I will in certain respects have to be quite modest as to the validity of the analyses in this thesis too. I cannot claim them to be of absolute validity in the sense that they deliver the tools for assessment of every future critical theory. How is it possible to develop critical theories? This I will consider in subsection (a). If I take it that any critique is open to further critique and that hence no point of view can claim non-questionable validity, I certainly cannot claim my own analysis of critique to have such validity. So what character and validity can be ascribed to the following analyses? This I will consider in subsection (b). Finally, I will in subsection (c) make some statements about the degree of conceptual clarity that I think is realistic in an investigation of the linguistic character of certain practices (in this case: the critical practices).

a. How can we Think of Critical Theories in Light of the Embeddedness-Insights.

On the one hand, I acknowledge the embeddedness-insights and that they entail that no view is independent of certain contingent factors. At the same time, however, a radical particularity-approach (the denying of every kind of generality) is untenable. This has consequences for how we can think about critique. It is no longer possible to think about critique as an independent approach from where we can evaluate our general approaches towards the world (e.g. we cannot talk about critical theory as opposed to traditional theories as Horkheimer did in Horkheimer 1937, esp. pp. 180ff). Critique is on the other hand, due to the duality in the aim of practices, still necessary since there will inevitably be a tension between the foundation of statements and views and the validity claims that they imply.

If we accept that all views are contingently relativized, we must accept that the views are only valid as long as these contingent factors are relevant (the complexity of Beethoven's late string quartets would, for example, change radically if humans lost their auditory senses (as Beethoven himself did). Or if we were to hear them without knowing anything about what happened before and after inside this genre of musical composition). This threatens to particularize the views, since the contingent factors seem to point down to very particularizable aspects (psychological, bodily constitution, historical context, language games, etc.).

However, the mechanism of “taking a view” on something means exactly to counteract this particularism. To take a view on something means to introduce a hold against radical particularism; to take a view on something means to affiliate something with something else, which is to say that there are certain connections or relations that endure. This leaves us with a tension between on the one hand a foundation that is particularizable, and on the other hand validity claims that point beyond this foundation: if I claim that Beethoven’s late string quartets are complex, I engage in a particular field of discussion, but at the same time the claim points beyond this field, since it entails that I claim something about an object that is not exhausted by the field of discussion – i.e. the objects of discourse, the string quartets. Even though the quartets may be said to be shaped by this field, their existence (and what may be said about it) is not exhausted by the field of discourse. The sound of the quartets is accessible to those who do not engage in the field of discussion.¹³ This tension between embeddedness and transcendence, I will argue, is what makes critique necessary.

But certainly, since it is not possible to separate out critique as a unique approach that escapes the above sketched tension, the embeddedness is also a severe challenge towards critique: if it is not possible to claim something positively without tension, it is not possible to claim negatively that something is wrong either, without presupposing that the stance from where the critical claim is put forward has some validity that transcends the critic’s own local outlook – namely that the negative claim can be relevant in relation to the criticized view. So the critique is itself embedded in a tensed relation. This has as a consequence that it is never possible to get the final word (in an absolute sense) in a discussion. But this does not say that critique and debate is not possible and important at all. It just means that the character of critique is other than was earlier thought. But what can then be the basis point for the critique?

This challenge can be approached in (at least) three different ways: (a) We can try to trace some kind of standing point that nevertheless transcends all kinds of embeddedness; that is valid in spite of all contingent shapings. Habermas is often associated with this approach. (b) We can try to specify in what way we can have criticism even though we accept that all critique is performed from a local horizon – i.e. we can argue that critique does not need to pretend to be performed from a universal non-embedded starting point that is more valid than the criticized view. This view is often associated with Foucault. (c) Finally, we can maintain a view in-between: on the one hand, accept that it is not possible to find a robust universal *starting point*

¹³ Even in a radical sense: it is possible to think of other species that had no auditive senses, that might however be able to note the existence of the quartets – if for example they were able to perceive the movement of the molecules or atoms. They would – however – certainly not perceive the quartets as *music*.

for critique; but on the other hand point out certain weak issues which it makes sense to say are always (in varying forms) to some extent at work in worldly relations, and, this being so, that they can serve as *reference* points for argumentation. I.e. when it apparently is not possible to find some shared notions through which argumentation can take place, the reference points can serve as tools for localizing the sources of disagreement – through analyses of agreements/disagreements on these issues. These weak issues do not necessarily serve as the *starting* point of argumentation, since they may vary as to their actual content, but they can serve as *reference* points, i.e. points through which we can hope to be able to *locate* our points of agreement and disagreement.

I will navigate within the (c)-strategy.¹⁴ Through a pragmatic phenomenological analysis of what it means to engage in linguistic practices, I will argue that universal claims are both possible, and in some contexts even necessary. These universal claims are, however, not robust in the sense that they will never be questioned and – ultimately – rejected, given up. This is because so because universal claims are extracted through concrete situations where they prove their worth, and the validity of them is dependent on this continuous justification. The universal reference points are points that are not *actually* questioned in concrete practices – it could however be that it at some point turns out to become necessary to do so – because they make it difficult (for some reasons) to maintain a systematic and adequate approach to the world.

The relationship between the (c)-strategy on the one hand, and the (a) and (b) strategies on the other is open, depending on how robust one is willing to define the “weak issues” that is seen as the reference point for worldly relations. If the weak issues are denied any form of robustness, one could argue that the position actually comes down to a (b)-strategy. On the other hand, if the weak issues are seen as open to interpretation, but at the same time some specified aspects (non-interpretable) are pointed out as unavoidable, the position comes close to the (a)-strategy. So the question is: is it possible to maintain the (c)-strategy without actually being committed to either the (a) or (b)-strategy?

I will try to illuminate this with an example: take the notion of subjectivity. It can be argued that we cannot think of worldly relations without some notion of subjectivity. But in what sense is this not a universalist approach (in the robust sense); and in what sense is it not a particularist approach?

¹⁴ Actually, Habermas and Foucault could be interpreted as belonging to the (c)-strategy too. Perhaps, at the end of the day, only very few can be clearly situated inside *one* of the polarized strategies.

As to the difference to the universalist approach (the (a)-strategy): let's say, I characterize subjectivity in terms of internality, freedom, intentionality, being-situatedness.¹⁵ Taking the (c)-strategy, one could claim that these characterizations show some reference-points that are universally at work when talking about subjectivity. The reason why this does not lead to the (a)-strategy is that these characterizations themselves are open to further interpretation. Or put in another way: even though it may be admitted that e.g. freedom is involved when talking about subjectivity, the explication of what freedom means has not necessarily a universal essence. Freedom is just thought as a reference-point for discussing subjectivity. The claim is that whenever we have a notion of subjectivity, we must have *some* notion of freedom. The notion of freedom, as it were, articulates the very distinction between the subject and its "otherness" – how the subject *differs* from other parts of the world (what the subject has freedom from-, freedom of- and freedom to-). And if different notions of subjectivity seem to be at play in a discussion, it may be useful to analyse and articulate these differences through an explication of the entailed notions of freedom.

Then, however, it becomes necessary to articulate the relation between the (c)-strategy and the (b)-strategy (anti-universality), because if the notion of freedom is just as open to interpretation as the notion of subjectivity, what has then been won in terms of robustness? I will put it like this: it makes a difference whether we on the one hand must realize that subjectivity is no necessary notion at all, and that there is no general issues that are implied by it (the (b)-strategy). Or we on the other hand can say that subjectivity is always to some extent at work and can always be characterized through certain issues that are also at work (such as internality, freedom, intentionality, being-situatedness) – even though these issues are open to variation (the (c)-strategy). In the latter case, some issues are indicated that we can turn to (and try to navigate within) when deep discrepancies appear. We can look into how the foreign view positions itself inside this frame and whether this navigation seems to be coherent and adequate. And this can then be a reference point for discussion. Through the weak universal issues it becomes possible to *locate* discrepancies and hence also to discuss them. But certainly, this does not mean that we through the (c)-strategy always can come to an end, when discrepancies appear. It only means that we have some tools to turn towards.

¹⁵ I am certainly aware that these characterizations have themselves been subject to a very extended dispute throughout philosophy, and that many would question that for example freedom is something we have to attribute to subjectivity. The quick answer to this objection is that removing freedom (in any form whatsoever) from subjectivity equals denying the existence of subjectivity. This is certainly a circular argument. The subtle answer would however have to be very extended – and is actually not necessary in this context. I merely want to demonstrate the *structure* of a the (c)-strategy – the relationship between subjectivity and freedom will not be of importance in the subsequent analyses.

b. The Status of my Investigations.

It should thus be clear that I do not claim the insights of this thesis to be of absolute validity. I will nevertheless argue that some aspects or points are important to consider when discussing various critical practices. How is that to be understood? What is the status of the thesis?

Universal claims are both unavoidable and impossible (cf. below, section III,2). This also goes for this thesis. I do not think that it is possible to write a philosophical thesis without presupposing some points as being of universal relevance – at least as reference points in the understanding of the investigated object(s). In relation to critique, some of my universal reference-points are reality, normativity, tension, reflectivity, receptivity and improvement. Similarly, I recognize some of the points made by e.g. Habermas (potential openness to all participants, *Verständigung*, the three validity-claims), Honneth (recognition), Foucault (non-domination, freedom), Derrida (aporias such as death and justice) and others as very relevant when talking about critique. It should, however, be emphasized that this is universal importance in a very humble sense! All these claims of universal importance are indeed open to critique. That is one of the reasons why the thesis has to be as extended as it is. There are a lot of relevant counterarguments that must be considered. In many cases it is not possible to make a knock-down argument pro or contra. The arguments will in these cases be more weak (that my view is more “fruitful”, “useful”, “intuitively correct” or the like). Such arguments are open to simple disagreement, and part of the task is to present my case in such a way that as few as possible will feel tempted to such disagreement. But this will always be a task that is “on its way”. New aspects may always be revealed as relevant counter-aspects, new interpretations may always be stated in relation to the presented field, and new (hitherto unrecognized) presuppositions of mine may always be drawn out into the light.

Hence, the status of the following investigations has not a special authority due to its “philosophical” character. Philosophers do not in any robust sense understand things better than others, and the philosophical approach is not more reliable (in any robust sense) than other approaches. As I see it, the relevance of the philosophical approach is rather that it is *strange* or *different* in relation to other approaches. As will be clear after reading this thesis, I consider difference or change in background as a very important feature in critique: approaching an object through a different background will make it possible to notice new aspects of the object. The main quality of philosophical investigations is therefore that they happen on a background that differs to some extent in relation to other approaches in culture. Hence, philosophical

investigations are important as *counter-players*¹⁶ to other areas of culture. In relation to critique, I think that philosophy is an important counter-player to political-, journalistic-, economic-, and certain human- and scientific approaches. Not because philosophy can definitively show these approaches to be wrong. But because philosophy can – by pointing out other aspects of their fields – show them to be too narrow-minded in relation to certain aspects of the objects they are dealing with. Philosophy can – due to the different background – point out aspects that are invisible (or at least ignored) in the other approaches. And this necessitates practitioners of these other approaches to reconsider their approach and at least (if they do not want to revise their practice) explain *why* these aspects should be ignored (for example by pointing out limitations in the approach of the philosophers). Philosophers cannot claim their point of departure to be more adequate and less tensed than the others. They are only different.¹⁷

I think that Charles Taylor has expressed this in a way to which I would like to subscribe: the thesis should be read as an *articulation* of a certain ongoing practice in the following sense,

[...W]e can speak of some articulations as the ones which fit, which capture the spirit of a certain unreflecting practice. But at the same time articulations can also alter practice. The life good [EH: or the practice] itself becomes something different when one is induced to see the constitutive good differently (Taylor 1989, p. 308).

Articulations of practices may at the same time both *fit* and *alter* the described practices. This is so, because the articulations cast light on certain structures in the described practices that are already there (but perhaps without the participating agents being aware of it). This highlighting of certain aspects often has as a consequence that they are further emphasized in the practice. The articulation happens through fixation (we conceptually get a hold on the practice), whereby it is made open to evaluation (because the structures are made conscious). At the same time, though, the fixation may sometimes have negative side-effects: we are induced to focus on certain aspects of the practice – to the disregard of others. Hence, the focus may – just as it makes us see new aspects – entail that we become blind in relation to certain aspects.

¹⁶ “Counter-players” is not to be equalled with “opponents”. Often the critique gives rise to a fruitful rearticulation of practices, whereby the critique actually *further*s the practices.

¹⁷ By the way, this is also the reason why it sometimes is a misplaced remark to say that philosophy is “standing aloof from the world”. One of the main reasons for the importance of philosophy is that it has a remote character (to a certain degree) – that is what makes it possible for philosophers to see things in an alternative way. Of course the remoteness should not be exaggerated so that philosophy loses contact with reality. Philosophy (as all other specialized approaches) has to balance between being strange enough as to challenge other approaches, but not so strange that it becomes unintelligible.

This is not to be avoided. I will therefore not claim that my analyses cover the critical practices adequately. I will not claim to be merely *reproducing* the practices either: my investigations do not merely *fit* the practices, to a certain extent they also *alter* them. I.e. I will in the following emphasize certain aspects as important for the critical practices, and in chapter (V) I will relate the result of this against certain areas in culture (neoconservatism and the Palestine-problem) in which one might say that critique actually is at work – or could/should be. Sometimes my approach will let me agree to actual critical practices, in other cases it will not. In the latter cases I will then have to show why it is reasonable to distinguish between these practices and critique as I understand it. Hence, chapter (V) is an important part of my argument: it is where I show the actual fruitfulness, reasonability and relevance of my analysis.

On the one hand I affiliate myself with the pragmatic stream in contemporary philosophy: philosophy is thought as an investigation into conditions for certain practices. But on the other hand I would like to distance myself from what could be called a tendency inside this stream: a tendency to focus only on the spontaneous (in the Kantian sense: reflective, spontaneous) aspect of these practices. As I will show below (IV,3) this has to a certain extent determined the discussions around critique. I think that the receptive aspect of the pragmatic situation has been downgraded. To use the language of John Dewey (who does thus not make the mistake) it might be said that certain pragmatic thinkers focus more on the “Doing”-aspect of the pragmatic situation than on the “Undergoing”-aspect. (Dewey 1934, p. 50+62-66+251): when acting in the world, we obviously do something. But doing does not make sense in abstraction from an undergoing: we act because we are affected in certain ways (undergoings). And our doings lead to certain new affections. This is so with all kinds of doings – be it ploughing the crop, chopping wood, investigating the structure of the atom, exercising politics, creating art, doing philosophy, etc. I am not saying that philosophers have claimed practices to exist without being accountable in relation to a reality. A philosophical view that claimed something like that would be too obviously wrong to call for counter-arguments. But I *will* claim that some philosophers have focussed too much on the spontaneous side, and this has shaped the contemporary discussion. So, at the same time as I subscribe to a pragmatic approach, I will try to make the concept of “pragma” more balanced.

c. On Conceptual Certainty.

Finally a word on the conceptual clarity, transparency and accuracy of the thesis. I hope to be able to reach both clarity and transparency, but I am aware that some might object against the

conceptual accuracy (in a traditional sense). In trying to articulate intuitions about the “outside” of language (reality, the non-linguistic aspects of practices, the limitations of universality) it is not to be avoided that sometimes language becomes metaphoric. Hence, I will not always be able to give non-ambiguous definitions of the concepts I am using. But I hope that I will nevertheless be able to describe the articulated intuitions so clearly that it is possible for the reader to recognize what I am writing about, and to do it in such a transparent way that it is possible to assess the points made.

It might be objected that clarity and transparency cannot be combined with inaccuracy. In a certain sense, I agree, but this accuracy is not always to be reached through *conceptually* framed definitions – e.g. if one is trying to articulate some of the deficiencies of language. On the other hand, since a philosophical thesis has to rely on language, it cannot escape these very deficiencies that I am trying to point out. The method therefore has to be that I point out instances in which it in some sense is rather obvious that language goes wrong (for example if there seems to be some systematical leaks), or in which it is possible to say that language “does not quite get it” – without being able to say exactly *what* is wrong or inadequate. I will often have to point at and draw on feelings or intuitions, whereby my arguments become vulnerable towards objections against the existence of such feelings and intuitions. In this case, the “accuracy” of my arguments rest on the readers recognizing these intuitions. *This* kind of accuracy is reached by letting language circle around the intuitions, often by stretching the meaning of the concepts to the limit, in such a way that this recognition inevitably (hopefully) is invoked in the reader. Hence, the accuracy is not reached by using accurate concepts (meaning concepts with a very narrow and limited scope) but by letting concepts stretch, letting concepts point out in the less certain, in order to strike a chord of recognition that perhaps has not been struck before. Hereby making it possible to discuss the limits of language and how these limits determine how we can think of critique.

III. The Field of Critique.

The overall starting point for my approach to critique is that it is to be understood as a linguistic practice. I will reflect upon the reasonability of this in chapter (IV). At this point this is mainly important, because it means that it on the one hand has to be analysed inside a linguistic scheme, but that it on the other hand also should be noticed in what way critique is a special kind of linguistic practice. In this chapter I will explicate some aspects of linguistic practices in general that will turn out to be relevant for the succeeding chapters discussion of critique.

Linguistic practices certainly have been subject to extensive philosophical investigations during at least the latest two centuries, and it is impossible in one thesis to draw on all the insights that have resulted from these investigations. During the thesis I will defend the following view on the linguistic practice. I will not claim that it exhausts the linguistic practices. The aim is rather to draw out a certain aspect which in the following will be illuminating in relation to the critical practices.

Linguistic practice are characterized by a meeting between normativity and reality that are in a mutually illuminating but also tensed relation.

The problem with this account is that it balances between being trivial on the one hand, and being highly metaphysically based on the other. So further clarification needs to be done, and most of the rest of this thesis will be an attempt to do this.

In the first section of this chapter (1) I will focus on two of the aspects of linguistic practices that appear in the above characterization (aspects that will show to be significant in the subsequent reflections upon critique): the relationship between normativity and reality. After this, I will (2) discuss in what sense the embeddedness-insights force us to revise our understanding of the relationship.

1. Linguistic Practices.

In the wake of the 20th century, it is a daring enterprise to think that it should be possible to say anything new about linguistic practices. Predecessors like Wittgenstein's *Philosophische*

Untersuchungen (1953), Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), Habermas' *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981), C. Taylor's *Human Agency and Language* (1985), Putnam's *Realism with a Human Face* (1990) – to mention just a few – all have accentuated the relationship between language and practice in various ways. I am not sure whether the following considerations (at least singularly) actually express new insights in relation to the already traversed discussion. My aim will rather be to emphasize some aspects that I consider to be relevant in relation to the succeeding (chapter IV) analysis of critique.

As indicated in the opening of this chapter I take the following characterization of linguistic practices as my template in the following reflections,

Linguistic practice are characterized by a meeting between normativity and reality
that are in a mutually illuminating but also tensed relation.

In some weak sense, one could call this my working-definition. Definitions in philosophy often have a narrowing function: they make it clear on which presuppositions the succeeding analyses are founded, and they define which directions the analyses can take. In this case, however, it might be said that there is no such narrowing function, since the definientia (normativity, reality, illumination, tension) are too vague and open to various interpretations. I will return to this problem in a moment.

But before doing this, I would like to emphasize that it is not a definition in the sense that it builds an unbridgeable gap between linguistic and non-linguistic practices. The definition articulates some aspects that I take to be *necessary* in order for having linguistic practices – these aspects are not *sufficient* for this to be the case. In a very general understanding of normativity/reality, I think that it *does* make sense to talk about a meeting between (some kind of) normativity and reality that is not linguistic. For example when someone experiences something that evokes an (unarticulated) emotional feeling of disgust in the perceiver, it *may* be said that this is a meeting between a reality (in this case: what has been experienced) and an emotional version of some norms. I am not sure, however, whether the idea of “emotional norms” actually can be equalled with the notion of normativity that will be developed in the following. In section (IV,1) I will shortly touch upon how “emotional norms” may be a basis for something that could be called critique, and why this is only going to be of remote importance in this thesis. It is not an important point of mine, whether or not it is possible to have non-linguistic norms.

* * *

The above characterization or definition consists of four definientia: (a) normativity, (b) reality, (c) a mutually illuminating relation, (d) a tensed relation. Definientia (d) will be of prime concern

in chapter (IV – esp. section 2). Definientia (c) will not receive self-contained treatment. It is meant to articulate the “successful” aspect of the relation, and even though it is of high importance in evaluating whether to accept the “unsuccessful” aspect of the relation (in a weighing of pros and cons that may follow upon the critique) it is not of main importance in the critical version of linguistic practices.¹⁸ So, definientia (a) and (b) remain to be treated in this chapter. I will show that they are on the one hand very open to various interpretations (since they are meant to cover quite diverse kinds of critical practices), but on the other hand not so open that they lose significance.

My distinction between normativity and reality is related to the distinction between *Spontaneität* and *Rezeptivität* in the famous opening of the transcendental logic in Kant’s *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*,

Unsere Erkenntnis entspringt aus zwei Grundquellen des Gemüts, deren die erste ist, die Vorstellungen zu empfangen (die Rezeptivität der Eindrücke), die zweite das Vermögen, durch diese Vorstellungen einen Gegenstand zu erkennen (Spontaneität der Begriffe); durch die erstere wird uns ein Gegenstand *gegeben*, durch die zweite wird dieser im Verhältnis auf jene Vorstellung (als bloße Bestimmung des Gemüts) *gedacht* (Kant 1781/7, B74 – emphasis by Kant).

Kant’s aim (at least at this point) is narrowly epistemological. That is the reason why he very soon translates “Spontaneität” to “Begrifflichkeit”/“Verstand” and “Rezeptivität” to “Anschauung”/“Sinnlichkeit”. The overall aim with the opening (which appears totally unargued) is, however, that in order to approach the world (an activity) it is necessary both to consider a reflective, intentional, creative (spontaneous) side and a more passive, receiving, constrained (receptive) side. In more plain words: we must consider both our freedom to do something, and the situation that this doing is incited by, directed towards and constrained by. And very

¹⁸ Taylor has (in Taylor 1980, pp. 269-70) stated that linguistic practices mainly are illuminating (together with expressive and constitutive). In Taylor 2001, p. 59 he points out that this is the very condition for there being critique at all, because the illumination (articulation) means that something is brought out in the open, hereby making it a possible object of critical reflection. I agree that illumination is a precondition for critique, but I have two problems with the view: (i) on the one hand, it is important that the illumination goes two ways – and not just one, as Taylor seems to imply. Just as normativity illuminates (certain aspects of) reality, reality also illuminates how to understand normativity. Illumination as a merely one-sided phenomenon would only show one dimension of what can count as critique. Furthermore, (ii) because the illumination (focus) entails that something is “put into shade” (that what is ignored due to the focus) illumination cannot be thought without some kind of *tension* as to what it is directed at. One could of course object that there is nothing else than what is illuminated (that language is *purely* constitutive) but that would on the one hand mean that it would be hard to understand the idea of resonance that is inherent in “illumination”, and on the other hand, it would mean a pure constructivism or idealism, to which Taylor certainly does not subscribe. It should be noted that he (in Taylor 1978, pp. 230-1) actually also expresses some of the above intuitions about linguistic reduction that I point out. But in the 2001-paper they are only *occasionally* of critical relevance – namely when a break-down occurs or we have some intrinsic interest in so doing.

importantly: spontaneity and receptivity can neither be separated nor reduced to one another. They are *analytically* separated phenomenons that point out aspects of our approaches that are categorically different. Normativity is not a subspecies of the realities, just as reality is not a subspecies of normativity – even though normativity is shaped by reality and reality is shaped by normativity. The analytic separation of the two aspects has to prove its worth. In *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* this is done in the *Tranzendentale Methodenlehre*. In this thesis the succeeding chapters will (hopefully) prove the fruitfulness of the separation.

When I talk about normativity, it is primarily to be understood in its etymological meaning. The term is derived from the Latin *norma* (meaning “a carpenter’s square, a rule, pattern”¹⁹). I take the term in a rather broad sense, covering rules, concepts, sentences, values, morality, rights as well as laws. I hereby confine quite heterogenous normativities, but I think that it is reasonable to do so: they all shape how we relate to what is given to us. They constitute the *backgrounds* against which we understand the world. Part of this background-aspect is the *order* or *systematism* (pattern) that is constituted by them. One can think of normativity as that which constitutes some unity between diverse parts of reality. Order and systematism are constituted by notions of consistency and correspondence, but notions of relevant consistency and correspondence are also constituted by order and systematism. Normativity is not exhausted by its background-character (at least if we take background to mean a relationship between past and present – cf. footnote 25), because norms also entail a view on what to expect from the future, and visions about what to do about the future. So there is a three-parted temporality inherent in normativity: it is a product of *past* events (which kinds of structures, systems have shown to be fruitful), applied in the *present* (in relation to what we meet), with an idea about what to expect from- and do with the *future*. In sum, normativity is how we *relate* to what is given. I will elaborate on these points in subsection (a).

Likewise, when I talk about reality a Kantian caution is important: reality is not meant to articulate some being that is independent and unknowable to us. Drawing on Putnam’s pragmatic writings, I think of reality as defined internally in relation to our normative backgrounds and aims, but at the same time not exhausted by this normativity (e.g. in Putnam 1986; 1987b). Reality should furthermore not only be understood as “things” – as the external objects that we meet through our senses. Drawing on Habermas’ ideas of three worlds (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, pp. 141-51+410-27) I will claim that it makes sense generally to talk about at least two other kinds

¹⁹ According to *Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*. London: dilithium Press, Ltd., 1989.

of reality²⁰: a subjective reality (the reality that we are bound to have an “inside” that is constrained and gifted in various (limited) directions) and a social reality (the reality that there are other subjects in the world to which we are related and bound). Reality is what makes certain things possible and what constrains us in certain ways – it is our incitement and what we are directed towards; and it is consequently something in relation to which we can fail. Reality is what we try to come to terms with in our practices. As such reality is not at the outset committed to systematicity and unity in the same way as normativity is. It may very well be that reality shows to be more diverse than can be grasped by normativity. As such, reality appears as a diversity towards which normativity points. Reality is the diversity that is sought apprehended through normativity. Reality furthermore means that it has consequences to subscribe to some normativity: if someone accepts only the normativity of late baroque music (say in J.S. Bach-style), then it is not possible to maintain that Bela Bartók’s third string quartet (1927) sounds harmonic. The aim of systematic unity (normativity) and adequate correspondence with reality would hereby be broken. Reality is not independent of normativity, but rather what we receptively can feel/understand through the normative outlooks. We know only about reality as the aims and constraints of our normativity. But at the same time, it is an important aspect of reality that it is not per se identical with the normativity: if the aims and constraints of normativity were inherent in the normativity, it would lose the external direction that characterizes normativity – and language.²¹ I will elaborate on my points about reality in subsection (b).

Normativity and reality are, as it were, two *dimensions* or *aspects* of linguistic practices, rather than two opposed substantial entities. Normativity articulates a certain doing or regulation, and reality articulates that this doing is related to something. In a certain sense, they are incomparable because they are on different levels. But nevertheless, they do not make sense in abstraction from one another. They illuminate each other, but still they are also (and this is the reason why it is possible analytically to distinguish between them) in tension with each other.

In relation to linguistic practices: linguistic practices are characterized by applying language – i.e. concepts and sentences connected by rules (both syntactical, grammatical, social, moral, etc.) that constitute what is counted as a coherent system – on the received world, due to rules for

²⁰ And it may be added: all three kinds of reality have multiple aspects that might be considered to constitute worlds themselves.

²¹ I think that Heidegger expresses the same, when he in Heidegger 1951 points out that if we only consider reality as *Gegen-stände/Wirklichkeit* – and hereby overlook its thing-character (*Dinglichkeit*) – we lose distance in relation to it, hereby missing a point: just as reality may be said to *conform* with a successful normativity, it is important to notice that reality always also may *upset* or *reject* normativity . This will be of importance when considering the critical implications of reality.

what is counted as relevant correspondence. By this systematism (that determines what is counted as relevant) it is possible to articulate an (indefinitely) plural or diverse reality in a finite language: through language it becomes possible to unify, universalize and conceptualize what is diverse, particular and material.

I will now return to my characterization of linguistic practices, trying to further substantiate it. In subsection (a) I will show in what sense it is both significant and reasonable to state that there always is normativity at work in linguistic practices. In subsection (b) I will explicate in what sense reality is a necessary part of linguistic practices too. In both subsections the mission will be to distil the normative and realistic aspects that will be relevant in the following analysis of critique. That is: an objection against the triviality of the following two subsections will be met by a pointing towards the succeeding chapters. Analysing normativity and reality separately in two subsections could lead to the idea that I consider them to be two independently existing notions. In subsection (c) I will stress that this is not the case. The subsections represent an analytic of an originally inseparable relationship. Reality will mostly be defined negatively against normativity and vice versa. The main aim with the analytic distinction is to point out in what way there is always *tension* at work in linguistic practices. By showing the distinction between normativity and reality to be reasonable, I aim at showing the tension-claim to be likewise.

a. Normativity in Linguistic Practices.

Keywords in this subsection will be *systematism* and *relevance*. I will seek to demonstrate that normativity is (among other things) an endeavour to achieve systematic unity, and that it is guided by a notion of relevance. As mentioned above (p. 40), I will maintain a quite broad concept of normativity. I find it reasonable to characterize rules, concepts, sentences, values, morality, rights as well as laws as various kinds of normativity. Normativity has certainly got quite different shapes in these fields – differences that are important if we want to make a thorough investigation of each of the fields – but at the same time there is something common in them: the move of expressing and constituting unity among manifolds (through systematization), and the ability to reflect or relate to what is given (reality). It is true that sometimes normativity itself makes up a manifold that needs systematization. Normativity is just as much a part of reality as more “thing”-like entities, and as such may need systematization, but this can only happen through another normativity that are in that situation thought of as of a higher order.

Reality can show normativity to be wrong or inadequate.²² So in a certain sense, it may be said that reality is a measure for normativity. But this does not mean that normativity has merely to *adapt* to reality. In many cases it may just as well be that it is reality that has to change. This is most obvious in the normativity that is at work in rules, values, morality, right, law (i.e. norms for practices): it does not follow from the fact that such norms are not respected that they should be revised. It might just as well be that the actual practices should be revised instead. But also the more epistemic normativities (like concepts and sentences) may be said to function both ways: if (for example) the normativity for the concept of blackbirds is challenged by blackbird-like animals with a red tail feather, it may follow either that we revise the norm (broaden the concept so that it can also account for these animals) or that we decide not to consider the red-tailed bird to be a blackbird at all. It is true that the last option does not change reality “an sich” but as I will explain in the following subsection, that is not the kind of reality that I want to discuss.

There is a certain *including* move in normativity: in the normativity/reality relationship it makes sense to say that normativity is a *placing* of the unknown in a system of known entities. The inclusive character of normativity is often articulated as “background”. The background consists of (among other things) who we are, how we came to be who we are, our conceptual outlooks (that to some extent are products of what have shown to be successful so far), patterns of thought (which kinds of normativities do we normally apply), what the current problems are, etc.²³ But at the same time it is important not to focus too narrowly on background as the only way to understand normativity. The problem with a focus on background is that it mainly has to do with two temporalities, namely past and presence: how to relate the present situation to a given system that is a product of past situations. Normativity tends to become conservative if it is understood only as background.²⁴

The conservative view on normativity is problematic for (at least) two reasons: for one, it may very well be a norm to be innovative, or in other words: to transgress the bounds that spring from the background. For another, norms cannot be understood in abstraction from plans for the future.

²² In subsection (IV,2,b) I will elaborate on the sense in which reality may show normativity to be wrong or inadequate.

²³ Gadamer is one of the most outstanding analysts of how the background (or *Horizont*) shapes our linguistic practices (in Gadamer 1960). A later formulation of some of the same insights can be found in J. McDowell’s thoughts about second nature being a precondition for approaching the first nature (McDowell 1994, ch. 5; 1996, p. 183-92). Both point back to Aristotle’s notion of *phronēsis* as the source to this point.

²⁴ This is a criticism that Habermas has posed against Gadamer in the so-called Gadamer/Habermas-debate (e.g. in Habermas 1967a, pp. 271-330; 1970). Honneth has made a similar objection against McDowell (in Honneth 2001, pp. 394-402). See also M. Williams 1996, ch. 7 on the relationship between focus on coherence, past and conservatism.

To my knowledge, Heidegger was the first to point out that the temporality of linguistic practices (Rede) has (according to Heidegger: as generally every practice) to be thought *at the outset* as “gewesende-gegenwärtigende Zukunft” (Heidegger 1927, §68d).²⁵ The point is that our ideas of what to expect and how we would like the future to develop is also an integrated part of how we systematize and reflect on the present situation in relation to the past. Our notion of future is, according to this view, not only a product of past systematization in relation to present experiences and problems. If we (for example) are afraid that communism might conquer the world, the Velvet Revolution will be considered to be a revolution towards freedom (the peoples liberation), while some communists probably felt that it was a massive attack from the bourgeoisie. Someone who wants to reveal the atomic structure of a certain material will not consider it to be relevant what colour the necktie of her assistant has. Someone who wants to become a famous musician will on the other hand not consider the atomic structure of her piano as relevant – unless it is shown that this structure is decisive for how well the music sounds. In short: what we want for the future determines whether we assess the present and the past as an obstacle to overcome, a source for further development, a time of good fortune, or as irrelevant.²⁶ As stated above (p. 28f) this is one of the points where descriptivism is founded on a reductive view on normativity.

Hence, temporality (understood as an effort to bring past, presence, and future together) is an important aspect of linguistic practices. I am not saying that normativity *consists* of this temporality. Rather my point is that through normativity, it is possible to articulate some kind of consistency between these three temporal dimensions. Normativity is a measurement of present meetings with reality in the light of certain systems that have developed through past experiences, whereby it becomes possible to reflect upon what to expect and do about it in the future (or if there is nothing to do: what to “think” about it – how to evaluate the situation), and this reflection again reflects back into the past/presence relation.

An important organizing principle in normativity is *consistency*. Loss of consistency means lack of systematism. The degree of consistency equals how well the manifold is held together. If

²⁵ Early-Heidegger actually takes the future-temporality to be *primary* in relation to past and presence. This can be seen in the fact that he sets the “gewesende-gegenwärtigende” as a *characterization* of “Zukunft”. But it is even more obvious in his famous analysis of temporality in Heidegger 1927, §65. See also Heidegger 1929a, p. 187.

²⁶ It should be noted that the link between background and conservatism is not absolute. It is possible to think of background as already containing the future in it. The Heideggerian notion of *Ereignis* (as it is developed in e.g. Heidegger 1961, p. 481-90) may be said to entail such a view. But that is a quite broad notion of background, and does not as such preclude my main point: that it is important to be able to account for the future-temporality in normativity – just as background (in a more narrow sense) is important.

parts of the manifold does not fit into the holding-together, the considered norm has in practice been proven inappropriate. But as M. Williams has pointed out, consistency is not just *one* formal idea (like: “non-contradictority” – Williams 1996, pp. 279-99. See also Putnam 1979, p. 157 on this issue): since the given manifolds are open to various kinds of systems, the claim for consistency itself depends on what interest we take in the considered manifold. Or in other words, the idea of consistency is embedded. Whether or not to consider a normative outlook to be consistent, depends on what we take to be a *relevant* consistency. In informal argumentation we are often rather inconsistent, due to certain pragmatic reasons (e.g. when the health authorities tell us that “an apple a day keeps the doctor away” even though they know that this is not always true). But also in more strict scientific discourses the notion of consistency is variable: if an experienced biologist, specialized in blackbirds, suddenly came upon a bird that in all respects seemed to be a male blackbird (having the right size and shape, singing the right tunes, eating the right things, reproducing normally with other (female) blackbirds, having the male-blackbird genes, etc.) except that it had a red tail feather (I take it that this has never happened before and that it happens only once) she will not necessarily revise her notion of male blackbirds. She will rather still maintain that male blackbirds are purely black, and that this blackbird was consequently an exception (“a sport of nature”). And this is quite reasonable, because the concept of male blackbirds would lose its utility if it were to be broadened every time an exception was found. Hence, the mere pointing out of inconsistencies does not in itself finally settle a discussion. Pointing out inconsistencies *is* a powerful argument, because the normativity under consideration is shown to be faulty, but sometimes other norms (governed by other kinds of consistency) may overrule the considered kind of consistency, and it may consequently in some respects be reasonable to be inconsistent (a point also taken by Toulmin – in Toulmin 1958, p. 177).

The point is that the notion of consistency is narrowly interrelated with the notion of *relevance*. A consistent concept of “blackbird” is determined through certain aspects of certain birds that we take to be more relevant than others. In different contexts the relevant aspects differ. The ornithologist would take the looks, singing, behaviour to be relevant in order to evaluate a consistent use of the concept. The microbiologist would take the genetic constitution to be decisive. The ornithologist probably very seldom even *knows* what genetic constitution the birds have. It is not possible, once and for all, to decide which criteria are best: of course, it may be said that the genetic criteria are more precise. The microbiologist can often more definitively determine whether a concrete bird belongs to the one or the other species. But this precision is on the one hand derived partly through insights gained from ornithologists: how much genetic variation to take as decisive in order to have a change in species, must be arrived at through a

knowledge about when the bird seems to be decisively different than other blackbirds (Putnam has made a similar point in relation to atomic purity of iron and water – e.g. in Putnam 1990b, pp. 68-9). And, furthermore, the gain in precision is at the cost of not being able to answer certain questions – such as “Have blackbirds got a beautiful singing?” (yes, they have), “Are they dangerous?”, “Should they be considered as moral agents?”. If someone wants to know whether blackbirds are dangerous, the exact genetical constitution is not relevant. How exact a genetic correspondence there is between the considered birds is in that context “only of academic relevance”. Of course, the microbiologist can *help* determining whether the birds are dangerous. If for example there are two kinds of birds looking exactly alike, but the one being dangerous, the other not, a genetic analysis can determine which of them the considered birds belong to. But this is only possible on the basis of a non-genetic knowledge about what dangerousness means at all.

Having taken a pragmatic stance, the notion of *relevance* is unavoidable. Relevance may be said to be a norm that is always at work. But this does not mean that relevance is one universal point from which we can analyse every situation, because relevance is itself embedded in factors that are not shared by everybody. The notion of relevance becomes unavoidable as soon as one realizes that the Hegelian ideal “Das Wahre ist das Ganze” (Hegel 1807a, p. 18) – i.e. that we can (or at least should) have truth-claims and a notion of truth that grasps everything – is untenable (I will elaborate my view on this Hegelian sentence below, subsection IV,4,b).²⁷ Then it becomes clear that every notion of truth is limited. But in order for this limitation not to be reductionist it is necessary to be able to articulate (and hence evaluate and discuss) these limitations. The notion of relevance demarcates a certain *outlook* in relation to others. The notion of relevance determines the way one approaches reality; what is perceived; what is emphasized; towards what one’s efforts are directed. It has normative bearings because it entails that it is not necessary to consider aspects that lie outside the demarcation, but at the same time the demarcation is – as soon as it has been articulated – laid out in the open, and hereby the limitation of the outlook is made visible, and the entailed normativity has become questionable and revisable. So the notion of relevance both points at a fixity and an openness of the linguistic outlook (this point has been pointed out in Bohman 1993, p. 564). As soon as it has been realized that a certain view is defended because it is more relevant than others, it has also been realized that there actually *are* other possible outlooks. Relevance leads to a more gradual notion of truth than the Hegelian, because it is possible to defend the underlying outlook as more or less relevant.

²⁷ Some (e.g. James Bohman in Bohman 1993, pp. 564-6) have argued that the “Ganzheits”-approach is not even *desirable*, because it would become impossible to navigate in the world. The limitations that spring from the norms of relevance not only constrain.

In chapter (IV) I will argue that the inevitability of relevance in every linguistic act is a reason for critique always being potentially at work in linguistic practices. Hence, I will in the following legitimate this claim further. Relevance-claims are at work in linguistic practices in (at least) three related but still different ways: (1) relevance-claims determine or justify a *selection* in reality. (2) Relevance-claims determine or justify which normativity to take as overruling others. (3) Relevance-claims are used as ways to cope with an inability towards complexities. I will elaborate on this.

(1) Relevance as determining or justifying selections in reality is unavoidable in linguistic practices because of their reductive character: in order to obtain the systematism it is necessary to focus on certain aspects of reality at the cost of others. It is only possible to come to a concept like “blackbird” if certain aspects of actual bird-like animals are considered as more relevant than others. In order to come from particulars to generality it is necessary to focus on what is common between the considered exemplars and tone down how each particular is special. In relation to the objective (thing-like) reality this could be said to be what we call induction. But the same goes for subjective and social realities: e.g. in order to characterize a person as “sad” it is necessary to focus on certain aspects of her expressions, behaviour, looks (tone of voice, a certain hesitance in actions, tears in her eyes) at the cost of others (her telling that she is all right, her curled hair).²⁸

One might object against this point that it rests on a metaphysic realism (which I in the following subsection will reject), because I have to presuppose some once-and-for-all-given reality that always is more complex than our concepts. But that is not so: the above argument rests on an analysis of normativity itself. My point is that normativity itself means to focus. In order then to establish that normativity of this kind always is at work in linguistic practices, it will certainly be necessary to presuppose at least something that is *open* to various kinds of focus or outlooks, but I do not have to presuppose that this “open reality” is always one and the same thing. I do not even have to presuppose that the reality itself is untouched by this being-opened. It is, for example, reasonable to think that it makes a difference to people and society in general (and consequently also on reality) whether they understand themselves as citizens, consumers, animals, members of a world of freedom, etc.

Another possible objection could be that even though relevance-claims of this kind are unavoidable inside assertive linguistic practices, this is not necessarily so inside other linguistic practices – such as imperatives, warnings, questions, social talk. But imperatives and warnings

²⁸ Since my notion of reality is closely related to Habermas’ notion of three worlds (objective, social and subjective) it is appropriate to note that I depart slightly from Habermas here, since Habermas links relevance mainly to the world that has to do with rightness – i.e. the social world (cf. Habermas 1981, vol. 1, pp. 418).

certainly direct the attention towards certain aspects at the cost of others. Questions are more open because they can lead to re-evaluation of narrowing presuppositions, but questions still determine that there are *relevant* aspects of reality that may lead to such re-evaluations. Only social talk in its pure form – i.e. talk in which the aim of the linguistic acts is pure being-togetherness rather than actual communication – may be said not to presuppose a notion of relevance. In many respects it would, however, makes sense not to count this practice among the linguistic practices (since the words used are not actually used *as* words, but rather as well-known sounds that result in certain mutual relations).

(2) Relevance as determining or justifying which normativity to take as the most fundamental is unavoidable in linguistic practices because it is possible to approach reality through various kinds of normative systematism, hence it is necessary to be able to determine and justify what approach to be most relevant in the current situation. Or in other words: it is necessary to establish a hierarchy among norms. Since it for example is possible to approach the relationship between men and women as a necessity for the reproduction of the species; as molecular mechanisms; as love-relations; as a means of getting sexual relief; as a battle between the sexes, etc. (several of these approaches leading to quite different and contradictory understandings) it is necessary to determine what approach to subscribe to in actual situations.

(3) Finally, relevance is also necessary in order to navigate in a complex world. If we were to take all possible parts of reality and all kinds of possible normativity into account this would lead to an inability to act at all. The possibility of acting presupposes an ability to determine when we have *enough* knowledge or reasons for acting – even though granting that our knowledge and reasonability is not perfect (at least in relation to an absolute ideal). It is, for example, *possible* that, even though I have started crying every time I go to funeral, I will not do it the next time. There might be some reason for not doing so that I have not been able to think of. But all the relevant reasons that I can think of (my relation to the deceased, my psychological constitution) tell me that I will be crying. Hence, it is reasonable to bring a handkerchief – even though I have not taken *all* possible factors into account. The reductions that spring from our norms of relevance are not only negative and exclusive. They furthermore make certain practices possible.

Summing up, relevance is necessarily at work in at least three ways: selection among different parts of reality, hierarchy among norms, ineptitude in relation to complexities that stem from reality/normativity-relations.

* * *

In the foregoing, I have pointed out certain “decisive” aspects of normativity (systematism, inclusion, three-parted-temporality, consistency, relevance). One of the main reasons, however, why normativity actually cannot be separated from reality is that it is a decisive part of normativity that it points outside itself. It is an aim of normativity that it fits to reality. In a way reality is consequently also part of normativity (just as I in the subsequent subsection will argue that normativity is part of reality). This actually is a Hegelian insight. As Hegel pointed out in the *Vorrede to Phänomenologie des Geistes*, pure normativity²⁹ would lead to no development – but to mere repetition (Hegel 1807a, p. 17). Normativity points towards reality, and not as a merely external constraint,

Die Bestimmtheit scheint zuerst es nur dadurch zu seyn, daß sie sich auf *Andres* bezieht, und ihre Bewegung ihr durch eine fremde Gewalt angetan zu werden; aber daß sie ihr Andersseyn selbst an ihr hat und Selbstbewegung ist, diß ist eben in jener *Einfachheit* des Denkens selbst enthalten (Hegel 1807a, p. 40 – emphasis by Hegel).

On the one hand normativity cannot be thought in abstraction from a relation to reality. But on the other hand, normativity would become empty if reality is reduced to normativity. Normativity *inherits* otherness, and this is why (according to Hegel) it makes sense to talk about a “sich selbst bewegende und unterscheidende Gedanke” (Hegel 1807a, p. 40): normativity already entails a potential for self-movement (correction, or in Hegelian terminology: *Aufhebung*) – but only as long as it relates to something else.³⁰ Certainly, it is possible to think of normativity without such link, but that would – according to Hegel – be an abstraction, and the problem would be the lack of negativity: that a notion of being right only makes sense with the possibility of being wrong (Hegel 1807a, p. 34-5 – a point that is also well-known from Wittgenstein 1969, §§91, 114-23, 151).

This connection between normativity and reality of course makes my present analytic appear somewhat artificial. I want, however, to show the *relation* as such, and in order to do this I have to show that it is possible to think of two sides in the relation; that it is always possible in actual practices to distinguish between a normative and a realistic side, two sides that may be mutually dependent, but still also in a tension with each other.

²⁹ I here translate Hegel’s notion of *Ideen* into my notion of normativity. This is certainly not an innocent translation. I will not, however, go into a detailed justification of this translation (even though I certainly do think it could be done), since my aim with this Hegelian digression is not exegetic but merely to indicate a source of inspiration for my approach.

³⁰ I must admit that I find the idea of a “sich selbst bewegende Gedanke” too idealistically articulated. Even though it is inherent in thought to be moved, the movement itself is not instantiated *only* by thought.

b. Reality in Linguistic Practices.

To talk about reality in relation to linguistic practices is thus a difficult task. A purely negative articulation is much easier than a positive one: reality is not the same in relation to all kinds of linguistic practices. A quick list of such negative statements could look like the following: reality is *not* one unchangeable thing. Reality is *not* something wholly independent of the normative grip. Reality is *not* exhausted by this normative grip either. Reality is somehow what is *external* to the linguistic area. In relation to the normative grip reality appears as *non*-unified, but to claim that reality is a pure manifold is *not* justifiable either.

§1. Pragmatic Realism.

In developing a notion of reality that is fruitful both out of epistemic and critical reasons, I have taken great inspiration from Putnam's account which he at the outset characterized as *internal realism* (in opposition to *metaphysical realism* – Putnam 1981, ch. 3), but now he (due to certain developments in the account) prefers to call it natural- or commonsense realism (Putnam 1994a, pp. 453-4, 469, 489). The main point with this view (and which Putnam to my knowledge still holds on to) is that

...it is characteristic of this view to hold that *what objects does the world consist of?* is a question that it only makes sense to ask *within* a theory or description. (Putnam 1981, p. 49 – emphasis by Putnam).

At the outset, it was further said that internal realism entails the view

... that there is more than one “true” theory or description of the world. “Truth”, in an internalist view, is some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability – some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences *as those experiences are themselves represented in our belief system* – and not correspondence with mind-independent or discourse-independent “states of affairs” (Putnam 1981, pp. 49-50 – emphasis by Putnam).

This further characterization has been widely discussed, and this led Putnam to point out that the account is not a definition of truth as such (at most, it is a characterization of how truth may be differently at work in different language games), and that the notion of “idealized rational acceptability” should also be thought of in internal terms: different kinds of language games – or normative outlooks – define different kinds of what to take as a high or low degree of acceptability (Putnam 1990a, p. vii-viii). The nuclear physicist has other norms for acceptability than the old lady that is looking for a chair to sit in.

These are important clarifications. But besides ongoing clarifications and elaborations, I take it that Putnam's revisions in relation to this early stance, should mainly be seen as a revision as

to which questions the account is meant to answer³¹: whereas Putnam in the early 80's also wanted to say something absolute about how it is possible to approach reality (trying to find a relation between computational states and propositional attitudes – Putnam 1994a, p. 479-80) he now takes realism to be less problematic. Reality is not seen as something physical that our non-physical minds only can approach through media (such as the senses – Putnam 1994a, p. 452-3). Instead it is seen more phenomenologically or pragmatically: reality is what we perceive experientially and relate to through our linguistic activities. Reality is an internal part of experience and language, at the same time as reality may seem to transcend them. This is less paradoxically than it may sound, since reality is the part of experience and language that is not experience and language itself, but what they are incited by and point towards. So, the account is understood as an explication of how reality is differently at work in different practices,

truth is sometimes recognition-transcendent because what goes on in the world is sometimes beyond our power to recognize, even when it is not beyond our power to conceive (Putnam 1994a, p. 516).

Even though it is true that the representation-picture of language is untenable (a point well taken by Rorty in Rorty 1979), because there is not a “something” beyond the things as they appear in language, it still makes sense to talk about a representing activity: an activity where language is incited by and directed towards something that is not language itself (Putnam 1994a, p. 505).³²

There are no good names for various kinds of realism. In the following I will use the term “pragmatic realism” about my own account. Putnam has also often ascribed to that name as well (e.g. in Putnam 1987a, p. 17), and in many respects my succeeding analyses are indebted to his works. Instead of Putnam's talk about theory and description, I mainly talk about normativity as a more general term. “Internal Realism” is an unhappy term, since an account of realism that is purely internal is hard to distinguish from anti-realism (if reality is through and through defined by the normative outlook that it is meant to stand opposed to, it is hard to see how reality can actually conflict with or constraint the conceptual outlook).³³ The “pragmatic” characterization

³¹ A point confirmed by Putnam himself – Putnam 1994a, p. 457.

³² Putnam is generally unhappy about the term “internal” realism (since he thinks that it is too open – Putnam 1994a, pp. 461 (footnote 36) and 463 (footnote 41)), but actually it may be said that his latest pragmatic revisions radicalizes the internality of his approach, since he denies that there is *one* way (independently of normative outlooks) of confirming whether the reality-claims of language are appropriate.

³³ Actually, the realism in Putnam's account has often been questioned. In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (the 1998-edition), entry word “Realism and Antirealism”, E. Craig finishes his description of Putnam's account with the following statement: “‘Internal realism’, it should be noted, is certainly not a form of realism, since it admits only language- or theory-relative assertions of existence”. Also part 2 of Putnam 1987b, in which Putnam feels urged to explain how he differs from Rorty's anti-realistic (or cf. Rorty 1991, pp. 2-8 perhaps better: non-realistic) account,

does not necessarily have the same drawbacks: it is true that pragmatic analyses often focus on the internal embeddedness of the actors. But pragmatic conceptions that fail to account for (a) the incitement for-, (b) the directedness of-, and (c) the fallibility of the activities, fail to explain what it means to act at all (to be pragmatically embedded). As announced above (p. 35f) I take it that the very account of pragmatism cannot be reduced to a mere doing-relation. I will therefore argue that it entails some notion of limitation and possibilities (the incitement), a notion of a relationship between actor/non-actor (the directedness), and a notion of some ways of acting that are more or less “convenient” (constraints, resistance, fallibility). Putnam does not explicate reality in relation to these three aspects, but I think that he would subscribe to them, if confronted with them. On the other hand, Rorty’s pragmatism seems ignorant of the significance of these realistic aspects of our pragmatic situation (I will return to this discussion below, pp. 70ff and 118ff).

In order to make sense of these notions, it is necessary to presuppose an external angle (in order to have an “in-relation-to-what” account) – even though this idea of externality has to be articulated internally. This is also the driving intuition behind Putnam’s circling around realism: on the one hand reality is necessary in order to understand practices, but on the other hand reality is not the same in relation to various kinds of practices – because reality is differently at work in different normative outlooks: the incitement, directedness and fallibility are different for the nuclear physicist than for the young man in unlucky love. Of course it might be said that the object of the young man’s interests consists of atoms, but such a notion of truth in that situation would not be very helpful in his efforts to win the love of his beloved – because the outlook of the physicist cannot account for the reality that the young man seeks.

The point is that the *incitement*-aspect of reality is both normative and real at the outset: what kinds of incitement we are invoked by depends on something external that we are met with, but the meeting is also shaped by how this externality fits to the normative systematization. If a young woman expresses ignorance towards you, this will have a different incitement-significance if you are a young man that tries to gain her love; a behavioural psychologist that wants to study her “natural” behaviour (i.e. as it would be if she was not under observation); or a sociologist that wants to know something about how young women interact with sociological scientists. *Directedness* is also both normative and real: we are directed towards something else, but the kinds of directedness may differ as to our general situation (background and plans for the future). And the *fallibility* is also both real and normative: different outlooks call for different kinds of

shows that the moment of realism in Putnam’s approach has been disputed.

failure,³⁴ but that does not mean that failure may sometimes be absolutely avoidable: accepting the nuclear-physicist outlook, it *will* be a failure to state that protons have the same weight as electrons. Accepting the outlook of a young man, inviting a beloved woman to dinner, it *will* (probably!) be a failure to motivate the invitation with her nice abilities as a dish-washer.³⁵

Hence, just as normativity cannot be thought in abstraction from reality, reality cannot be thought of in abstraction from normativity. They have to be understood in their unification, and this unification is (cf. Foucault 1969, p. 66) not just “une mince surface de contact, ou d’affrontement, entre une réalité et une langue”, it is not a meeting between two independent entities, but a unification that defines both parts – in their heterogeneity. The point that the meeting should not be understood as a thin surface is important. A similar point is made by Putnam and McDowell when they point out that we should be careful to think of the relationship between mind and world as mediated through an interface.³⁶ I agree to that point, but still I think that we have to think of the relationship as a heterogenous *compound*: normativity is not a “medium” to get at Reality (with a capital R) but it is an integral part of normativity that it “reaches” towards something else (something external). And this externality is itself shaped by the normative grip – or at least: reality as we can know of (and hence is relevant) (1) cannot be distinguished from the normative grip and (2) norms affect reality whereby they become real themselves (e.g. as “guidelines” for actions, as systems that guide thought, in institutionalizations).

§2. Reality in Habermas’ Writings.

In linguistic practices reality is related to through concepts. This means that reality is related to through norms for conceptuality, sentences, statements, expressions, judgements (in a broad sense), speech-acts, etc. All of these aspects of the linguistic practices entail quite complex normative systems which cannot be analysed in detail in this thesis. But in order to demonstrate

³⁴ And different kinds of laws for failure: in traditional chemistry it is much more certain that if we take water not to be boiling at 100°C then certain experiments would clarify for certain that we are wrong. The young man in love is not always so lucky – but then again he may perhaps feel lucky that not all mistakes are that irrevocable...

³⁵ The *directedness* and *fallibility* together constitute the *corresponding* aspect of linguistic practices. But just as the directedness and the fallibility can have varying shapes – according to what normative outlook they spring from – also correspondence cannot be understood in abstraction from the normative outlook it is embedded in.

³⁶ E.g. in Putnam 1994a, pp. 488-90; McDowell 1994; 1996, esp. pp. 182-5. As they both make explicit, this is not a new idea, but can be found in the thought of James, Wittgenstein, Husserl, Austin. But still it is a relevant point to make, since many recent accounts of reality are shaped by the interface-view.

how widely the reality-aspect is to be understood in the following reflections, I will take a digression into Habermas' analyses of the validity claims that are at work in linguistic practices.

To turn towards Habermas when analysing reality-intuitions may seem a little surprising, since it has been an ongoing critique of his view that it does not take reality into account in an adequate way (e.g. Wellmer 1989; 2001; Lafont 1993, p. 505; 1995, pp. 112-69 – I have earlier criticized Habermas' notion of reality in Hansen 2005b). I think that the criticism of Habermas' account of realism is well put (at least in relation to his early writings – paradigmatically in Habermas 1973b). But at the same time, I think that his translation of (three-parted) validity-claims into world relations (in Habermas 1981) is quite thought provoking, since it may help to broaden the notion of reality. Hereby it will become clear that reality should not only be understood as thing-like objective reality, but that it also makes sense to talk about the subjective and social as realities that are possible incitements, directednesses and conditions for fallibility. In *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung* (1999) Habermas has tried to take some of the remaining critique into account.

In *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981) Habermas develops a formal-pragmatic notion of reality that is developed through a reformulation of the linguistic validity-claims into world-relations. The talk about validity-claims was introduced between 1970-3 in "Vorlesungen zu einer sprachtheoretischen Grundlegung der Soziologie" (1970/1), "Vorbereitende Bemerkungen zu einer Theorie der kommunikativen Kompetenz" (1971) and "Wahrheitstheorien" (1973). At the outset they were introduced in a discussion of various kinds of theories of truth. Habermas criticized the existing theories for focussing too narrowly on truth as it appears in assertions about the outer world (Habermas 1973b, p. 137-9). Habermas proposes instead to talk about at least four classes of different – but equiprimordial (Gleichursprünglich) – validity-claims: (1) comprehensibility, (2) Truth (claims about objectively existing states of affairs), (3) Rightness (claims about the social context being proper for the present linguistic act) and (4) Truthfulness (claims about subjective veraciousness about the expressed intentions).

They are introduced together with what Habermas at the outset calls a consensus-theory of truth. Truth is defined in the following way,

Die Wahrheit einer Proposition meint das Versprechen, einen vernünftigen Konsensus über das Gesagte zu erzielen (Habermas 1973b, p. 137).

In the quote, it is clear that it is not a *simple* consensus-theory of truth that is presented. It is not enough to gain consensus about the content of the proposition; the consensus has to be

reasonable.³⁷ This of course raises the question about how to settle when a consensus has been reached on a *reasonable* ground. In answering that question it is quite striking that Habermas rejects that this question relates to the states of affairs (Tatsachen). The reasonability of reached consensus moreover has to do with “eine *Aussage* über eine *Tatsache*” (Habermas 1973b, p. 129 – my emphasis). The point is not that reality is without importance at all. But reality is only relevant in ordinary practices – it is not of prime concern in discursive reflections upon these practices. This means that, even though we in everyday practices pose validity-claims about things (Gegenstände), as soon as we start reflecting upon these claims it is (according to Habermas) clear that they are founded on something else. We can only redeem (einlösen) validity-claims through *arguments* – not through *experience*,

Darüber, ob Sachverhalte der Fall oder nicht der Fall sind, entscheidet nicht die Evidenz von Erfahrungen, sondern der Gang von Argumentationen (Habermas 1973b, p. 135. See also Habermas 1984b, pp. 108-9).

Instead of articulating the reasonability of validity-claims through states of affairs, Habermas introduces the idea of an *ideal speech situationsituation* (Habermas 1984b, pp. 116-8; 1971, pp. 129-36). I have already been discussing this idea (above, p. 22) and will return to it later (in which I will defend some of its critical implications – below, p. 80). What is striking about Habermas’ explication for now is that it is articulated purely in social and normative terms,

(1) Alle potentiellen Teilnehmer eines Diskurses müssen die gleiche Chance haben, kommunikative Sprechakte zu verwenden [...] (2) Alle Diskursteilnehmer müssen die gleiche Chance haben, Deutungen, Behauptungen, Empfehlungen, Erklärungen und Rechtfertigungen aufzustellen und deren Geltungsanspruch zu problematisieren, zu begründen oder zu widerlegen [...] (3) Zum Diskurs sind nur Sprecher zugelassen, die als Handelnde gleiche Chancen haben, repräsentative Sprechakte zu verwenden [...] (4) Zum Diskurs sind nur Sprecher zugelassen, die als Handelnde gleiche Chancen haben, regulative Sprechakte zu verwenden... (Habermas 1973b, pp. 177-8).³⁸

The reason for this is that – being a linguistic *act* – validity-claims cannot be separated from how we interact. The validity of claims is to be measured as to how we socially have come to reach a consensus about them. Valid claims are defined in relation to a world that we *share* – namely the world of mutual discussion.³⁹

³⁷ Which is why it is somewhat misleading to talk about Habermas’ account as a “consensus-theory of truth” – something Habermas realizes already in 1973. He suggests “discourse-theory of truth” instead – Habermas 1973b, p. 160 (footnote).

³⁸ In Habermas 1984b and 1971 the ideal is formulated slightly differently. I refer to the 1973-version since it is the latest, and since it is that version Habermas himself most often refers to.

³⁹ This exposition only renders the view in outline. The view is formulated in opposition to the correspondence-theory of truth, and this is probably one of the reasons why experience is downgraded. If Habermas had been accused for anti-realism, he would probably have pointed out that realism comes in through the arguments – that it would be a funny kind of argumentation that was not bound by reality (this is actually the direction his later revision takes – see

Even though the four validity-claims are introduced as equiprimordial, Habermas also points out (rightly, I think) that actually the claim for comprehensibility is a precondition for any of the others to succeed (Habermas 1984b, p. 111; 1973b, p. 139). In later writings this notion still is important as the notion of “sich verständigen”, and the remaining three validity-claims are seen as an explication of (some of) the formal-pragmatic conditions for the *Verständigung*⁴⁰ to take place.⁴¹

The fourth validity-claim (truthfulness) is also given a rather peculiar status,

Nicht alle vier Geltungsansprüche sind darauf angelegt, diskursiv eingelöst zu werden. Wahrhaftigkeitsansprüche können nur in Handlungszusammenhängen eingelöst werden (Habermas 1973b, p. 139).⁴²

The validity claims are on the one hand generally not thematized unless the common action-contexts are troubled – that is when it is necessary to reflect discursively on the claims that are entailed in these games (Habermas 1973b, p. 138). But in the above quote Habermas states that the subjective validity claims can never be given such discursive treatment. This is, to my mind, an unnecessary contraction in Habermas’ theory: it is certainly true that subjective intentions, understood as what *really* goes on in the head of the actors, are not in the reach of discursive reflection – since they are not equally available to all disputants. And as Habermas points out, validity-claims only make sense if they are related to some kind of *shared* world (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, p. 82). But the question is in what sense the subjective validity-claims differs from the objective and social on this point.⁴³ Of course, subjective intentions are not *immediately* accessible for evaluation, but does this exclude them from being relevant for discursive reflections? Not all claims about the objective and social worlds are accessible for immediate evaluation either (e.g. “The Big Bang”, “The society as a whole”). In such cases we evaluate them mediately. This certainly makes the evaluation less certain (the risk of being mistaken increases), but not impossible. Likewise with claims about the subjective intentions: even though they are not immediately accessible, this does not mean that we are wholly prevented

Habermas 1999, p. 262-3). But the fact remains that it is a quite reduced kind of reality that Habermas is able to take into account in this view. I will return to this in a moment.

⁴⁰ In the following, I will use this German concept, since it is very difficult to translate adequately into English.

⁴¹ It should be noted that Habermas shortly touches upon comprehensiveness as a validity-claim in Habermas 1981, vol. 1, pp. 43-4 and 65-6, but it gets no systematic treatment in the rest of the book.

⁴² The truthfulness-claims are also quite under-represented in the explication of the ideal speech situation.

⁴³ A. Wellmer has made a similar objection against Habermas in Wellmer 1989, p. 359.

from evaluating them. Habermas himself demonstrates that this is often done (e.g. in Habermas 1981 – esp. vol. 1, pp. 397-427). The subjective validity-claims in linguistic acts are often evaluated – e.g. by doubting the veraciousness of the speaker. And this criticism does not have to be without reasons. The critic may infer that the speaker is untrustworthy e.g. by appeal to her facial/bodily expressions, earlier behaviour in similar situations, what she has said about her intentions in other contexts, etc. These inferences are fallible, but so are inferences about the objective and social world.

In later writings Habermas does not deny that subjective validity-claims play a role in discursive reflections. On the contrary he stresses several times that the objective, social and subjective validity-claims cannot be thought of in abstraction from each other (e.g. in Habermas 1981, vol. 1, pp. 149; 1988b, pp. 76-7; 1988c, p. 125; 1988d, p. 184).⁴⁴ So, in his general approach Habermas talks about three kinds of validity-claims that are always at work in every linguistic act. In relation to the subject of this subsection, it is decisive that Habermas in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* asserts that in order for these three kinds of validity-claims to be criticizable, it is necessary to be able to distinguish between these claims and what they are about. Hence, it is necessary to distinguish between three worlds that answer these claims – i.e. an objective, subjective and social world (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, pp. 79-85).⁴⁵ The subjective world is introduced in the following way,

Erst in dem Maße wie sich das formale Konzept einer *Außenwelt*, und zwar einer objektiven Welt existierender Sachverhalte wie einer sozialen Welt geltender Normen ausbildet, kann sich der Komplementärbegriff der *Innenwelt* oder der Subjektivität ergeben, der alles zugerechnet wird, was der Außenwelt nicht inkorporiert werden kann und wozu der Einzelne einen privilegierten Zugang hat (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, p. 83 – emphasis by Habermas).

At a first look, this quote could be understood as indicating that the subjective world is derived from the objective- and social worlds – the subjective world merely being what we cannot account for objectively or socially. But I think that would be a misunderstanding. The reason why

⁴⁴ It is true that Habermas often states that the subjective “I” cannot be thought of in abstraction from social relations – drawing on writings of G.H. Mead and E. Durkheim (Habermas 1981, vol. 2, pp. 7-169; 1985, pp. 26-33; 1988e). But in other occasions he claims that it is likewise necessary to have subjectivity in order to get to sociality (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, p. 106; vol. 2, p. 99). This shows that Habermas’ point is that these different worlds are *mutually* interdependent. Habermas’ general emphasis on the social constitution of the subject, should consequently be understood in the light of his confrontation with a very influential philosophical current – the confrontation with the “Bewußtseins-philosophie” – not as a statement that this foundational relationship is the *most* important in general (on Habermas’ more differentiated view on the relationship between the mentalist vs. linguistic paradigms: Habermas 2003, pp. 16-8).

⁴⁵ Notice that, just as was the case with Hegel, Habermas gets to reality through an analysis of what is at work in claims about it.

Habermas makes the above statement is that it is only insofar as the subjective world is accessible for more than one person that it can be subject to linguistic validity-claims. You can certainly *express* inner realities (such as pain, happiness, suffering from stress) but unless these realities are somehow accessible for the listeners – whereby the expression becomes assessable in relation to these realities – this will not count as *linguistic* acts, because no validity-claims are being put forward.⁴⁶ They may, though, serve as a basis for evaluation of future claims about the subjective state of affairs.

In Habermas' account of the worlds, it is a crucial feature that they are *shared* (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, p. 82⁴⁷) – i.e. the three worlds are understood as aspects of the *lifeworld*. I will in this thesis subscribe to Habermas tripartition. I furthermore agree that in order for the various kinds of world to be available for linguistic practices they have to be understood as something we can *share* – that the worlds are where we, as it were, meet. But I would like to translate the notion of three worlds into a notion of three kinds of reality. And the significance of this translation would be that the three kinds of reality still are where we meet, *but that there is always a possibility of the meeting being inadequately conceived*. Reality should not be *reduced* to being shared. Just as is the point with the subjective world that it is a (normatively based) transformation of some kinds of inner states of affairs (to which the agent in a certain sense has privileged access⁴⁸) also the objective and social worlds are (normatively based) transformations of outer and inter-human states of affairs. The establishment of all three worlds happens through a meeting between normativities and realities – a meeting that is always reductive (due to the inherent relevance-claims). Reality may thus appear as a disturbance of the shared lifeworlds.

Habermas knows of course that the world is not always as we take it to be (!) – if not, there would be no reason for his main point, that validity-claims are at the outset criticizable. But as will become clear in the following chapter (below, subsection IV,3,b), it leads to a too narrow notion of critique if reality is thought of in too *stable* terms. Reality should not just be conceived of as a secure basis that makes pure relativism impossible. In some occasions reality is the

⁴⁶ Habermas does not mention Wittgenstein at this point, but the argument seems related to his private-language argument (e.g. in Wittgenstein 1953, §§ 246, 253, 257-71). Wittgenstein's private-language argument has been interpreted in both a reductive (behaviouristic) and a non-reductive sense. As will be clear in the following, I think that the non-reductive interpretation is most fruitful: Wittgenstein's point is not that inner states of affairs should be reduced to their expressions, but rather that in order to "sich verständlich machen" (paraphrase of §257) about them, it is necessary that they are available to others – or else the *Verständigung* will fail.

⁴⁷ This point is also made by Putnam (in Putnam 1994a, p. 454). See also Lafont 1995, p. 112; 2001, p. 196.

⁴⁸ But in a certain sense perhaps not: are we always the best judges about how we feel?

relativizing factor itself. Hence, it is important that the lifeworld-version of for example subjectivity is not exhaustive – i.e. that lifeworld-subjectivity is *fallible*. In stressing the *shared* aspect of reality, Habermas runs the risk of reducing the heterogenous character of the world-relation, hereby making it less clear why criticism is called for.

In his latest writings on epistemological issues (collected in *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung* (1999)), Habermas has acknowledged that his earlier notion of reality needs revision.⁴⁹ His self-revision is mainly formulated in opposition to the account of reality and truth that can be found in *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (1968/1973) and (more clearly) “Wahrheitstheorien”: the discourse theory of truth. But also the “sharing”-conception of reality is disputed. Rorty’s idea that “‘being in touch with reality’ derart *in Begriffe* von ‘being in touch with a human community’ übersetzt [wird]” (Habermas 1999, p. 238 – emphasis by Habermas) – which also was a crucial idea in Habermas 1981 – is shown to be problematic. The problem with the sharing-notion of reality (which is a result of the linguistic turn in philosophy) is that it is unclear how we can understand the difference between a claim being justified (which is enough in order to have consensus) vs. a claim being true. Habermas acknowledges that Rorty “mit Recht betont” that truth cannot be *separated* from justification, but this does not mean that justification “*hinreicht*, um die Bedeutung des [...] Wahrheitsbegriff zu klären” (Habermas 1999, p. 246 – my emphasis). As M. Williams asks “why does the fact that our beliefs hang together, supposing they do, give the least indication that they are true?” (Williams 1996, p. 267). There are (at least) two realist intuitions that (even ideal) consensus cannot account for,

Der “warnende” Gebrauch des Wahrheitsprädikats zeigt, daß wir mit der Wahrheit von Aussagen einen unbedingten, über alle verfügbaren Evidenzen hinausweisenden Anspruch verbinden (Habermas 1999, p. 247).

“Immer wenn wir Wahrheitsansprüche auf der Grundlage guter Argumente und überzeugender Evidenzen erheben, dann *unterstellen* wir..., daß in Zukunft keine neuen Argumente oder Evidenzen auftauchen werden, die unseren Wahrheitsanspruch in Frage stellen würden” (Habermas 1999, p. 260 – a quote from Wellmer 1991, p. 163; emphasis in original).

On the one hand there is the unavoidable possibility of being shown to be wrong even if the defended view was fully justified. This aspect of truth is founded in reality as fallibility. On the other hand, the insight that truth in a certain sense is context-transcendent. If something is claimed to be true, it is claimed to be so despite of any context of justification. If it *is* actually shown to be false, then it has always been so and we were wrong in believing the opposite.⁵⁰ This

⁴⁹ In rearticulating his view, Habermas draws on realistic writings by Putnam, Brandom, M. Williams, Wellmer, and C. Lafont.

⁵⁰ See Lafont 1995, pp. 120-1 for further explication of this intuition.

aspect of truth is founded in the fact that language points outside itself – i.e. in reality as directedness.⁵¹

Habermas' turn towards reality-intuitions is accompanied by a less rigid separation of the common linguistic- vs. discursive actions – the reality that is at work in ordinary linguistic practices (cf. above, p. 55) is no longer thought as irrelevant for discursive practices (Habermas 1999, p. 262). In the late formulation reality is also taken to be relevant in discursive reflections, “Aus dem performativ erfahrenen Widerstand der Realität können wir nur in dem Maße etwas lernen, wie wir die implizit in Frage gestellten Überzeugungen zum Thema machen und von den Einsprüchen anderer Diskursteilnehmer lernen” (Habermas 1999, p. 24).

§3. A Remaining Shortcoming of Habermas' Notion of Reality.

The writings of Wellmer have been important in Habermas' turn towards a closer investigation of the role of reality in relation to validity-claims. Wellmer has criticized early Habermas for neglecting that there is an un-epistemic component in truth-claims (a “surplus” – Wellmer 1986, pp. 69-81 (esp. 71+73+80); 1989, p. 340; 2001, pp. 44-5). This has led C. Lafont (e.g. in Lafont 1994, p. 1016) to state that truth-claims should be understood both in gradual and binary terms: they are gradual since they have to be understood in terms of justification; and they are binary since (according to the second realist intuition above) they are either true or false, with no in-between. This is a point that Habermas acknowledges in his late writings.⁵² Late Habermas concedes to that point – at least in relation to epistemic truth-claims. In fact he states that this is one of the main differences between epistemic truth-claims and moral/social rightness-claims,

Die binäre Codierung von Wahrheitsfragen ist, wie gezeigt, durch die ontologische Unterstellung einer objektiven Welt motiviert, mit der wir als Handelnde “zurechtkommen” müssen. Der sozialen Welt fehlt jedoch die Unverfügbarkeit, die der Grund für eine entsprechende Codierung in der Wertedimension sein könnte. Die binäre Schematisierung ist nicht einmal ohne weiteres mit dem rechtfertigungsimmanenten Sinn von “Richtigkeit” verträglich (Habermas 1999, p. 315).

Generally, Habermas' realistic turn is only in the epistemic field, whereas he repudiates that realism is important in the justification of moral and social claims (e.g. Habermas 1999, pp. 296-

⁵¹ Notice, that Habermas does not reflect on the incitement-aspect of reality. This will become significant below, p. 121.

⁵² I am not sure whether Wellmer himself would actually subscribe to the picture of the truth/false-relation as being binary. If one looks in Wellmer 2001, p. 27 for his explication of what falsehood means (“falsch sind Welt- und Selbstverständnisse, sofern sie zu unauflösbaren Inkohärenzen und Widersprüchen, zu unproduktiven Sackgassen oder schlechten Alternativen oder schließlich zu systematischen Selbsttäuschungen führen”), it is not at all certain that this notion calls for a *binary* idea of what the surplus could mean. This is also a point made by M. Dummett (his questioning the idea of bivalence – e.g. in Dummett 1976; 1982; 1992).

301).⁵³ At a first glance this might lead to the idea that Habermas could not account for a tension between normativity and reality in the moral and social fields, and hence (cf. my notion of critique – below, chapter IV) not make critique in such fields. And since he actually *does* perform critique on both of these fields, it would have to be argued that either my notion of critique is (at best) inadequate, or that he is inconsistent. I will in the following argue that the difference between the rightness of moral and social claims is less different from the epistemic claims than the above quote seems to indicate. In doing this, I will argue that (1) the distinction rests upon a wrong notion of reality; that reality *is* important in moral and social fields, and that (2) even though the above quote rightly shows that reality has a different character in moral and social claims than in epistemic claims, this does not mean that moral/social claims can be justified independently of epistemic truth-claims. I will argue that even though the reality-relation is different in moral and social claims than in epistemic, the difference is gradual rather than absolute.

(1) My first objection to the distinction is against the binary-picture of truth. It is true that *inside* a certain normative outlook, truth-claims will necessarily have to be either true or false, and if claims that were taken to be true is shown not to be so, then it should be said that the earlier view was *wrong* – inside that normative outlook. But that is not the only way truth-claims can be refuted due to new evidence: there is also always the possibility of the claims to be shown *inadequate* or the entailed relevance-norm to be unfruitful (I will elaborate on this below, subsection IV,2,b). And (as shown above, p. 45f) this is not to be avoided by making the normative outlook more precise, because the outlook will always itself potentially have its relevance questioned. Hence, there is no waterproof bipolarity between the truth/falsehood of an epistemic truth-claim. It could of course be objected that this is what Habermas considers when saying that truth-claims have *both* a binary and a gradual aspect, but my point is that the (so-called) binary aspect *itself* is not waterproof: to talk about bipolarity presupposes a view of normative outlooks as sharply delimited in relation to other outlooks – which I in the preceding subsection have argued to be untenable. Bipolarity is consequently not something that distinguishes epistemic truth-claims from other truth-claims.

(2) My second objection to the distinction (2) is against the idea that moral and social claims have got no right/wrongness that points “outside” pure justification.⁵⁴ This is a highly difficult

⁵³ In the quote Habermas only talks about social normativity, but the Habermasian notion of morality is *derived* from normative rightness – see Habermas 1983; 1991b.

⁵⁴ Whereas Wellmer does not subscribe to the bipolarity-part of the distinction, he clearly subscribes to this part – it is the very starting-point for his repudiation of Habermas’ discourse-theory of truth (e.g. in Wellmer 1986, p. 58-9).

question, because it is quite unclear in what sense the Habermasian notion of justification already entails an external link. I am not quite certain about this, since he on different occasions point in different directions on this issue. But either (a) he claims that there is not, and then I have to show that there *is* such a link. Or (b) he acknowledges that there *is* such a link – then I will have to consider in what sense the link is *different* in epistemic claims than in moral/social claims. I will in the following argue that (a) moral and social claims *cannot* be justified purely through internal justification, and (b) try to sort out how the moral/social external link relates to the external link in epistemic claims and demonstrate that the difference is less absolute than Habermas seems to imply.

(a) Do moral and social claims point “outside” themselves? In a certain sense this is too big a question to settle in a paragraph of a subsection of a thesis about other issues. At least in relation to morality, it has been an ongoing discussion whether the moral part of actions should be found in the underlying intentions or in the consequences of actions. But it is not my issue here to discuss what “morality” and “sociality” really is, and where to situate these issues. The issue is much more down to earth: how are actual made moral/social validity-claims redeemed? Is consensus-based justification enough for this, or do moral and social validity point outside such justification. Habermas articulates his view rather clearly in the following quote,

Ideal gerechtfertigte Behauptbarkeit *ist* das, was wir mit moralischer Geltung meinen [...] sie *selbst* erschöpft den Sinn von normativer Richtigkeit als Anerkennungswürdigkeit. Die ideal gerechtfertigte Behauptbarkeit einer Norm weist nicht – wie im Falle eines rechtfertigungstranszendenten Wahrheitsanspruchs – über die Grenzen des Diskurses hinaus auf etwas hin, das unabhängig von der festgestellten Anerkennungswürdigkeit “Bestand” haben könnte (Habermas 1999, p. 297 – emphasis by Habermas).

So, the validity of moral and social claims is *defined* through their “ideally justified” status. If this ideal justification is understood through the ideal speech situation that was articulated in “Wahrheitstheorien” (cf. above, p. 55), that is if “ideally justified” means inclusion and symmetry between all potential participants (which the contrast against the “transcendental” aspect of the truth-claims seems to indicate), then I think it is an inadequate notion of both moral and social validity claims. As I have argued above (p. 47f) exclusion is not a merely contingent aspect of norms. In order to get a normative systematism it is necessary to focus on certain aspects of reality, at the cost of others. Hence, it is unreasonable to let inclusion be a sole ideal for normativity. Not only because it is “unrealistic” in the sense that we *unfortunately* cannot act without exclusions, but because exclusions are *constitutive* for normativity being possible – hence also for moral and social normativity. This does not mean that we do not have to be careful about exclusions. Very often exclusions have negative consequences (especially if we are unconscious about them – i.e. we forget to ask for the reasonability of the exclusions). Exclusions in the

epistemic field can lead to inadequate truth-claims, exclusion in the moral field can lead to the misrecognition of moral obligations, exclusion in the social field can lead to repression of certain groups of population. But it does mean that exclusions *also* have productive and desirable effects.⁵⁵

To take an example: in §78 of the Danish Constitution the freedom of association is secured. But in subsection 2 the freedom is withdrawn from associations that employ violence, or aim at attaining their object by violence, by instigation to violence, or by similar punishable influence on people of other views.⁵⁶ In order to justify this restriction, it is necessary to exclude the views held by those who would like to make such violent associations. The point is that *if* we want to have an argumentatively based democracy, *then* it is necessary to prohibit violently acting associations (because violent actions cannot be stopped by arguments). The exclusion is constitutive for the possibility of (this kind of) democracy. The point is that exclusions may be reasonably furthered, if it is possible to show that they – due to certain standards – lead to a good (or at least better) state of affairs. The relationship between the standards of goodness/improvement and the resulting states of affairs is certainly open to discussion. And this discussion has to go beyond the mere *standards* of goodness/improvement. It is also necessary to take reality into account: is the actual result of the norm better than what could have been the result of other norms? The answering of such questions call upon some kind of consensus, but the consensus cannot be reached independently of some awareness of an external world. The point is not that consensus is irrelevant, rather that it is not sufficient in redeeming moral and social norms.

(b) I will now turn to the second part of my second objection against Habermas' distinction between epistemic truth and moral/social justification: in what sense the external link is *different* in epistemic claims than in moral/social claims. It would certainly be odd to claim that there is *no* difference between the external link of epistemic and moral/social claims. And Habermas certainly has a good case in saying that the moral/social world is much more sensitive to justifications than is the objective world. The use of justifications in relation to the moral/social world not only affect how we *see* this world – they may also actually change the very formation

⁵⁵ This is also Foucault's point when he distinguishes between a critical and a genealogical investigation of power-formations: critical investigations are to analyse the constraining aspects of exclusions, whereas genealogical investigations are to analyse how discourses (in the later writings: dispositives) are *created* despite *and through* these exclusions (Foucault 1971a, p. 62-3). In Foucault 1984g, pp. 726-7 he turns this point against Habermas.

⁵⁶ "Stk. 1 Borgerne har ret til uden forudgående tilladelse at danne foreninger i ethvert lovligt øjemed. Stk. 2 Foreninger, der virker ved eller søger at nå deres mål med vold, anstiftelse af vold eller lignende strafbar påvirkning af anderledes tænkende, bliver at opløse ved dom" (*Danmarks Riges Grundlov*, §78).

of it. For example if someone succeeded in establishing a new justification for the use of Muslim headscarfs that convinced most of the population in Western countries, then this would not only change how Muslims wearing the headscarfs *are seen* by critics of the headscarfs. It would also change the social interaction between headscarf-users and the (earlier) headscarf-critics. And this would be an exhaustive change in the social reality.

So, there are differences between epistemic and moral/social claims because the worlds that they focus most clearly upon are different. But the differences are more gradual than Habermas seems to think. For one, the social world is not always exhausted by the claims that are put forward about it: descriptive claims about the social world may very well be true/false – if we do not actually interact in the described way. For another, just as Habermas claims that (moral/social) justification has a role to play in relation to epistemic claims (even though it is not exhaustive), it can be argued that moral/social rightness-claims cannot be justified in abstraction from epistemic truth-claims. The point with this is, that even though it is important to distinguish between various kinds of worlds that cannot be reduced to each other, it is also important not to think about them as wholly separate either. Claims about one world cannot be redeemed in total abstraction from what happens in other worlds (this is actually also a Habermasian point). To continue the above example: when stating a moral and social claim like “We should wear headscarfs”, it would be possible to object against this claim that it is unjustified because it would lead to certain unattractive effects in the objective world. Perhaps a radical Christian would object that we should not wear headscarfs, because people wearing headscarfs are starving because they call upon themselves the wrath of God. And the answering of this objection could then be to show that this is actually not the case – which would be done through certain truth-claims about the objective world.

There is still a question remaining in relation to the interrelatedness of the various worlds: are they related in *all* aspects. Will a change in one world *necessarily* entail changes in the others? Understood as an ontological question (“do changes in for example the subjective mind necessarily entail changes in for example the natural world”) this is a question to which it is difficult to think of a possible answer (or ground for an answer). I must admit that my knowledge about natural-, social-, and psychological sciences (and the sciences in-between – such as social psychology, neuro-psychology, genetic sociology, etc.) is too poor to serve as a possible basis for an answer. But I do not pretend the assertion to answer an ontological question. Rather it is an assertion about the relationship between normativity and reality in linguistic practices. It is about how reality can be a part of- and interfere in linguistic practices. And here it is my claim that there always is a *possibility* of objecting against claims made about one world, by pointing towards

certain states of affairs in other worlds that seem to indicate the fallacy of the claim. Hence, justification of such claims cannot *at the outset* ignore such possible objections. Consequently, it is not possible to understand moral and social claims as independent of objective truth.

My conclusion is that the late Habermasian turn is an important step in rehabilitating the importance of reality in linguistic practices, but that he still (wrongly) seems to believe that reality should only be understood in consensus-breaking terms in relation to the objective world.

§4. The Three-partition of Reality.

As stated above (p. 58) I subscribe to Habermas' idea of three kinds of worlds: an objective, subjective, and social world. In Habermas' account this division is justified by the fact that they correspond to three ways in which *every* linguistic statement can be disputed (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, pp. 148-9+411-2). When met with a linguistic claim, the addressee can

entweder die normative Richtigkeit der Äußerung bestreiten [... oder] die subjektive Wahrhaftigkeit der Äußerung bestreiten [... oder] bestreiten, daß bestimmte Existenzvoraussetzungen zutreffen [...]. Was sich an diesem Beispiel demonstrieren läßt, gilt für *alle* verständigungsorientierten Sprechhandlungen (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, p. 411-2 – emphasis by Habermas).

The reason why Habermas can make this strong claim is that he focusses on the *Verständigung*-aspect of linguistic acts, which he understands as an act that is made

um sich *mit* einem Hörer *über* etwas zu verständigen und dabei *sich selbst* verständlich zu machen (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, p. 413 – emphasis by Habermas).

This definition is an intuitively based definition, and I will in the following just subscribe to it, in the sense that it shows *necessary* aspects of any linguistic act.⁵⁷ But whether, and in what sense, it is *exhaustive* needs further clarification.

As a first remark, it should be noted that Habermas does not say that there are only these three kinds of validity-claims or that all other kinds can be derived from them (see Habermas 1981, vol. 1, pp. 45+65-71). His reason for giving them special attention is rather that they are *universally* at work in linguistic acts. That should not, however, lead us to the conclusion that reality adequately can be thought of in the three corresponding worlds. Welmer has convincingly shown that the reality of artworks cannot exhaustively be accounted for through the tripartition of the world (Wellmer 1985a, p. 23-38): even though we *can* relate to art in terms of objectivity, sociality, and subjectivity (we relate to artworks through our senses, and we speak about them), the problem with this is that art is then reduced to speech-acts. But

⁵⁷ Certainly, *what* it means to be objective, subjective or social is not something that can be settled in only *one* way. How to define objectivity, subjectivity and sociality is something that must be done inside a life-world perspective.

im Kunstwerk *sagt* der Künstler nicht (buchstäblich) etwas; daher entscheidet sich das Authentische eines Gebildes nicht an der Frage, ob der Künstler wahrhaftig war [...] Weder Wahrheit *noch* Wahrhaftigkeit lassen sich dem Kunstwerk *unmetaphorisch* zusprechen (Wellmer 1985a, p. 36 – emphasis by Wellmer).

In addition to the *expressive* aspect of art, there is also a *revealing* aspect: artworks “show” (new) aspects of the world without claiming these aspects to be true in a manifest sense. Rather the artistic truth-claim is to be understood more vaguely as a “Wahrheitspotential”.

It is furthermore a question whether it is possible to understand “transcendent”⁵⁸ claims (such as “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” – *John* 1,1) adequately through the tripartition. Even though claims about transcendent beings, powers or forces that have *no* effects in the objective, social or subjective worlds would have a very odd status in linguistic practices, it would nevertheless be reductive to *reduce* these claims to be about the objective, social or subjective worlds. In relation to the objective world, such claims are often said to be about something meta-, trans-, inter-, or pan-physical. In relation to the social world, they are often said to determine an *attitude* towards the other – rather than changes in real actions. In relation to the subjective world, they are often said to be about *unconscious* mechanisms. And all these characterizations point at deficiencies in the objective, social and subjective categories.

Both examples (artistic and transcendent claims) point out deficiencies in the three-parted notion of reality. To some extent the division can be saved by extending the notions of objectivity, sociality and subjectivity. Objective validity-claims are not restricted to be only about natural-physicalist (mechanistic) notions of reality. Social validity-claims are not only about power-based interaction (certainly an important point in Habermas’ account), subjective validity-claims are not only about egocentric interest-securing volitions. Then it might for example be possible to extend our notion of rightness-claims to embrace rightness in the use of artistic values (such as beauty, artistic authenticity, and the like), and our notion of objectivity might be extended to cover transcendent beings, powers, forces. But this will threaten to broaden the notions so much that they lose their significance (at least in the transcendent case, in which the transcendent God is often understood as something that is situated *outside* the known objective world). The division will come under suspicion for being artificially restricted to *three* dimensions – out of certain philosophical quests for systematism.

Another strategy might be to stress that even though we can in a certain sense talk about artistic and religious realities, these realities are not relevant in linguistic practices, since they

⁵⁸ I use the term “transcendent” in a Kantian sense, which is sharply distinguished from “transcendental”. The present issue deals with claims about “entities” that lie outside our common conception of experience. Claims about such things as “The Beginning”, “The Creator of the World”, “The Overall Structuring Power”, “God”, etc.

cannot be *shared* by the actors. *If* that was true, however, this strategy would be available to Habermas (in Habermas 1981, vol. 1, pp. 40-2 he actually takes this strategy when discussing aesthetic validity-claims) but not to me, since I (as mentioned above – p.58) do not want only to talk about *shared* worlds, but also about realities that *disturb* what is shared. But I do not think that it is fair to say that artistic and transcendent worlds cannot be shared. Habermas' argument against aesthetic worlds is that the aesthetic⁵⁹ validity-claims do not claim *general* (Allgemein) validity, but it seems unclear to me what that is supposed to mean. Certainly, he is right that there is a certain amount of cultural relativity when claiming and assessing artistic claims, but the question is whether the relativity is fundamentally different than in objective, social and subjective validity-claims or whether there is only a *gradual* difference. I think the latter: the aesthetic validity-claims are founded on a meeting between a normativity (the standards of the perceiving agent) and a reality (the artwork) too, and even though there is a high degree of variety in normativity on this field, there *are* certain restrictions to the way we can assess the realities. The aesthetic assessment is not purely contingent, something that can be inferred from the point that it is easier to understand artworks that are created within well-known cultural spheres. We are not isolated subjective islands that have pure subjective experiences. Through our embeddedness in certain cultural fields, we are taught to experience in particular ways. That is why it is very difficult to cultural westerners to grasp the values of for example Indian music, Chinese drawings, Zimbabwean sculptures, etc. This shows that *if* we accept certain standards for assessment of art, *then* it is not immediately possible for us to accept certain objects as artworks. Our assessments only have validity inside a certain normative outlook (or “shared lifeworld” in Habermas' terms), just as is the case with objective, social and subjective validity-claims. It is true that the outlooks – at least in today's cultural landscape – seem to vary more in the artistic field than in other areas, but the difference is not fundamental. The subjective world has a great variety in possible outlooks too, which leads to less generality of subjective claims. Habermas acknowledges this in relation to the psychotherapeutic practices.⁶⁰ Here he states that the shared kind of subjectivity (that corresponds to the truthfulness-claims) has to rely on a social and objective mediation. And that is certainly true, but just as this does not *reduce* the subjective

⁵⁹ As is commonly done, Habermas conflates aesthetic and artistic validity-claims. As I have argued in Hansen 2003, I do not think that art is adequately understood through its aesthetic qualities. But this will not be important in the following, so I follow Habermas' terminology here.

⁶⁰ Closing the above reflections on aesthetic validity-claims he states: “Ähnliches gilt für die Argumente eines Psychotherapeuten, der darauf spezialisiert ist, einen Analyseanden in eine reflexive Einstellung zu seinen eigenen expressiven Äußerungen einzuüben” (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, p. 42).

world to its objective/social manifestations, also the aesthetic world cannot be reduced to its objective/social (and subjective) manifestations. Even though the sharing relies on these manifestations, the character of *what* is shared cannot be reduced to the manifestations. We do not understand for example “beauty” if we try to reduce it to a certain object in the world, a way of interacting, a certain sentiment in the subject – or a compound of these.⁶¹

A similar argument could be put forward in relation to transcendent claims: even though it is true that we can only share a transcendent world through objective and social manifestations, this is no reason to reduce the realities that lie behind these claims to objective and social realities. Even though the Jewish God had to reveal himself to Moses through a talking burning bush (*Exodus* 3,2-4,17), it would be a fatal non-understanding of the significance of this event to equate the Jewish God with this bush (it would certainly also make the following events in the Old Testament quite inconceivable). And even though the further sharing of this religious reality has to be found in ways of social relations between the Israelis (and also between the Israelis and the other people they meet on their way), it would be a misconception of these actions to understand them as only between *people* – in the sense that arguments against the convictions held by Jews will lead to nothing if one merely speaks about the gains and losses of other people. And notice, that this is *not* only a misconception if the Jewish God *really* exists.⁶² Rather it is a misconception because one fails to understand the character of the claims made. The *denial* of the existence of a God is also a transcendent claim, and cannot be justified in pure objective, social and subjective terms either.

So, I do not take the Habermasian tripartition to exhaust pragmatic reality. The reason why I nevertheless in the following will use it as a reference-point is that I want to show the *inevitable* potential relevance of critique. In doing this, I will need to show that there is always a potential tension between normativity and reality, and as a consequence the discussed kinds of reality will have to be universally at play in linguistic practices. And this is – as far as I can see – not the case with realities like the artistic and aesthetic. They are only accentuated in particular situations.

Perhaps the case is somewhat different with transcendent realities. In a certain sense it may be argued that we are always under the bounds of the realities that correspond to transcendent claims.

⁶¹ In Habermas 1985, Habermas elaborates his view on art in his criticism of Derrida’s employment of literature for critical means (Habermas 1985, pp. 219-47). But the perspective of this elaboration is quite different from the present, so I will not comment any further on it in this context. Some aspects of this critique is treated below, pp. 146ff.

⁶² This question is a matter of whether their conception of the transcendent is right or wrong. And it would not be a *misconception*, to try to convince the Jews that they are *mistaken* about the transcendent – even though it probably would be difficult.

Whether there is or is-not an omnipotent God that guides the world as we know it, certainly is potentially at play in any linguistic claim. The reason why I nevertheless will not consider this reality in the following is that it is a highly discussed issue whether transcendent claims make any sense at all (whether it is possible to account for a transcendent *content* of such claims). As should be clear from the above, I think they do, but in relation to the main theme of this thesis (the possibility of critique) the notion of transcendent reality is problematic, since it is often used as an *immunization* against critique – because the realities to which they relate are often said to be beyond our reach. Furthermore, a complete demonstration of a possible pragmatic content of claims about transcendent entities would threaten to dissolve the focus of the main theme of this thesis. In subsection (V,2,b) I will discuss how transcendent claims can be a problem in relation to critique, and what to do about it.

* * *

Summing up, I understand reality as the incitement, directedness and fallibility of practices. These notions are to be understood through notions of limitation, possibilities, otherness (externality), constraints. In linguistic practices it makes sense to think of reality in terms of objective-, social- and subjective realities. Other kinds of realities are relevant too, but these three dimensions seem most clearly to be at work in every linguistic practice. It is an important aspect of (linguistic) reality that it is what we share when we communicate, but at the same time it is important to acknowledge that reality is not exhausted by the sharing. Reality is also (due to its diverse character) what may *disturb* the taken-for-granted sharing of certain views – because reality is not at the outset committed to absolute systematic unity. In that sense, reality is the external aspect of linguistic practices.

c. Normativity and Reality in Linguistic Practices.

I come to the closing of this section on linguistic practices. I have sought to establish the reasonability of understanding linguistic practices as a relation between normativity and reality. This has been done by showing in what sense both aspects are at work in these practices. On the one hand, normativity is understood as the systematic and reflective element of such practices. On the other hand, reality is understood as the incitement, directedness and fallibility of such practices. Normativity is the including effort of these practices (consistency, coherence), whereas reality is what is included, hence at the outset external to the practices (correspondence). Normativity simplifies reality through relevance-claims.

The point is not that these aspects are to be sharply distinguished from each other. On the contrary, it has been an ongoing point that they should be understood as *oppositions*. That is: the shape of the normative outlook settles what possibly can be counted as reality, since the ways of incitement, directedness and fallibility are shaped by which “otherness” can be counted as relevant. And reality determines what can count as a fruitful normativity, since the systematism will be hard to sustain if they do not in some sense “fit” to reality. Hence, the point that normativity and reality shape each other, but that none of them can be understood wholly in terms of the other. Both notions would be empty without the other notion as its constraining opposition.

I termed my stance on realism a “pragmatic realism” (above, p. 51), stressing that this is not to say that reality is reduced to our doings. To term the stance pragmatic indicates that reality cannot be understood *independently* of our doings. But *doing* cannot be understood in separation from something that is *undergoing*. An adequate pragmatism has to focus on *both* of these aspects. One could of course question who would disagree to such a view. Probably no one would, when asked directly, but I think that the debate in the 1980’s and 1990’s between Rorty and Putnam on how to understand realism in a pragmatic outlook⁶³, demonstrates that the implications of the view may help overcoming certain disagreements. I think the implications are very clear in relation to the following Rortyan quote,

The antirepresentationalist [e.g. Rorty himself] is quite willing to grant that our language, like our bodies, has been shaped by the environment we live in. [...] our minds or our language could not [...] be “out of touch with the reality” any more than our bodies could. What he or she denies is that it is explanatorily useful to pick and choose among the contents of our minds or our language and say that this or that item “corresponds to” or “represents” the environment in a way that some other item does not. [...] antirepresentationalists suggest that we throw out the whole cluster of concepts (e.g., “fact of the matter,” “bivalence,”) which are used to make us think we understand what “the determinacy of reality” means [...] because they see no way of formulating an *independent* test of accuracy of representation (Rorty 1991, pp. 5-6 – emphasis by Rorty).

Rorty’s argument seems to be that even though language certainly points towards something that it is sensible to label as reality, philosophers should stop focussing on it because it cannot – due to its pure embeddedness – have any explanatory force. As he says in another occasion,

For aboutness is not a matter of pointing outside the web. Rather, we use the term “about” as a way of directing attention to the beliefs which are relevant to the justification of other beliefs, not as a way of directing attention to nonbeliefs (Rorty 1988, p. 97).

The “aboutness” (or directedness) does not, according to Rorty, point outside the justificatory web of beliefs, but can be explained through other kinds of justification. So, in the end, Rorty’s pragmatism leads to a radical internal notion of reality, being exhausted by its degree of coherence (Rorty 1979, pp. 291-3; 1989, pp. 49).

⁶³ See Putnam 1987b; 1992; 1994b; 1995a, pp. 32-8; 1995b; Rorty 1979, ch. 6; 1992; 1993.

Putnam has rightly pointed out that one cannot infer from the fact that we have no *independent* access to reality, to the fact that reality consequently cannot have *any* significance in our linguistic practices (Putnam 1994b, pp. 297-300; 1995b, pp. 7-9). He demonstrates the paradoxical character of that claim in the following way,

But it doesn't follow that language and thought do not describe something outside themselves, even if that something can only be described by describing it (that is by employing language and thought) (Putnam 1994b, p. 297).

The embeddedness of reality rather implies that we cannot have an *undisputed* notion of reality. Rorty's rejection of reality as a relevant notion rests on a surprising quest for certainty: if we have got no absolute certain notion of reality, it must be empty. A quest for certainty that is certainly not in accordance with the general Rortyan account.⁶⁴

But what *is* then the significance of reality? In Putnam's thought, reality is generally considered to be a hold against relativism: that even though reality is open to various kinds of normative outlooks, it is not infinitely open (Putnam 1981, pp. 54-5). As soon as we subscribe to a particular outlook, we are also committed to a particular view on reality. And that it makes sense to distinguish between good and bad normative outlooks by considering how well they fit to reality. As should be clear by now, I sympathize with this view. But I also think that it needs a slight reformulation. Reality is not *only* a hold against relativism. Sometimes reality is the relativizing factor itself. This becomes clear when reading the writings of Michel Foucault.⁶⁵

In the main chapter of this thesis (chapter IV) I will argue that a notion of reality is important in order to understand the character of critique. I will argue that critique is generally a pointing out of tensions between normativity and reality. As I indicated above (p. 37ff), this does not mean that normativity and reality *only* should be seen as in tension with each other. Reality and normativity both to a certain extent determine each other – there is a mutual *illuminating* relationship between them. But this illumination happens through a reduction of reality. And reality can show the illumination to be wrong or inadequate. In the discussion between Putnam

⁶⁴ Williams has put forward a similar argument against scepticism: scepticism about the possibility of knowledge is only relevant on the background of an epistemic notion of reality that rests on four ideas: “an *assessment* of the *totality* of our knowledge of the world, issuing in a judgment delivered from a distinctively *detached* standpoint, and amounting to a verdict on our claim to have knowledge of an *objective* world.” (Williams 1996, p. 22 – emphasis by Williams). It would not be fair to characterize Rorty's account as scepticism, but his rejection of the reality-notion seems to rest on similar assumptions.

⁶⁵ Putnam as well as Habermas (who have been the “heroes” so far) have great difficulties with the works of Foucault. I think that *part* of the reason why they are generally sceptical towards it, is that they fail to see how he presents an account of reality as a *critical* factor. More on this below, pp. 157ff.

and Rorty, I think that the putnamian notion of reality is most fruitful in a critical context. I will, however, argue that Rorty's objections point towards a slight revision of Putnam's notion: reality is not merely a *hold* against relativism; it is also what sometimes calls for relativization.

Before going into detail with this analysis, I need to take a last digression in the field of critique. In the light of the embeddedness-insights the notion of universality in linguistic practices have been highly discussed. It is certain that universality cannot be taken for granted, if one accepts that the embeddedness-insights are unavoidable. I will however claim that the universality-claims in a certain sense cannot be *avoided* either. The mere rejection of universals is therefore not a fruitful strategy. This will be the subject of the next section.

2. Universality as Unavoidable and Impossible.

As demonstrated in subsection (II,1,a) it has, due to the embeddedness-insights become difficult to defend a robust notion of universal validity. The implications of the embeddedness-insights have been intensively discussed throughout the latter half of the 20th century. On the one hand we have Habermas, Honneth, Taylor, and Wellmer who have sought to found their notion of critique on some kind of (weak) universal claims or notions (e.g. in Habermas 1976; 1985, p. 375; Honneth 1992, pp. 278-9; Taylor 1989, ch. 25; Wellmer 1986, part 3), and accusing their opponents of hidden transcendental implications (e.g. in Habermas 1985, p. 322). And on the other hand we have people like Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard and Rorty being very suspicious about universal claims, because they are seen as *blocking* the openness to critique (e.g. in Foucault 1977b; 1984g; 1990; Rorty 1985, 1995).

I have already indicated my stance in this discussion (in section II,2): the embeddedness-insights should not lead us to reject the notion of universality altogether, since it may be argued that universality is not so easy to avoid nevertheless. In this section I will substantiate this claim. I will argue that something is lost, if we reject the notion of universality altogether. It seems as if we are situated in what one could call the antinomy of universality: on the one hand it seems to be unavoidable – on the other hand it seems to be impossible. I will argue that this antinomy should be solved in the somewhat paradoxical solution: we should realize that universal claims are fallible. Universal claims have the form “It is always the case that X – but it may turn out not to be so”.

a. Reflections on Universality.

In relation to critique the question of universality is of significant importance. If it is not possible to pose a critique from a non-questionable stance, then it becomes questionable why critique should be important at all. And even more radically: if the universality-claims are being disputed to such an extent that the very notion of improvement tends to crumble into mere particularity, then it becomes questionable whether critique makes sense at all (on the importance of improvement-claims in critique – see section (IV,4) below). So the continuous attacks on universality-claims in philosophy of the 20th century, is an important source to the defensiveness of critique in the same period.

The question of universality is a very complex one. It is intimately related with the question of necessity, hence it would probably make sense to distinguish between as many different kinds of universality as there are kinds of necessity. A list, probably incomplete, could look something like this: logical-, empirical-, pragmatic-, moral-, juridical necessity (could be further divided into categorical vs. hypothetical necessity). In continuation of this, one can talk about universal definitions, concepts, sentences, facts, rules, values, norms, rights and laws (the universality of laws is in itself very complex, since we can distinguish between many different kinds of laws: logical-, empirical-, pragmatic-, prudent-, moral-, juridical laws). And it is not at all certain that it is the same kind of universality that can be ascribed to these various kinds of normativity. The foundation of the various kinds of universality is therefore quite varying. And this affects the questionability of them. The universal validity of an empirical sentence like “There are protons in the nucleus of atoms” is questionable in a different way than the universality of a logical sentence like “Bodies have extension”.

It goes without saying that it falls outside the scope of this thesis to take this complexity fully into account, so some “quick” reductions in the problem have to be made: I do not consider logical- and empirical universality (in their pure forms) of relevance in critical investigations, since they involve no possible tension between a normativity and a reality: a purely logical universality (e.g.: $p \rightarrow q$, $p \vdash q$) is not questionable because it does not actually state anything – as long as the *key* for p/q is not given (as long as they are not translated into real sentences). Likewise, purely empirical universality is not relevant in critical investigation, since it just expresses something about all hitherto made observations (how reality hitherto has appeared). And this kind of universality is actually just an extended form of particularity (Note: as I will

argue below (p. 75) pure empiricism is actually not an option because a pure particularity-view is not possible).

Generally, I will in this subsection not focus much on the differences between the various kinds of universality, but rather focus on what I take to be the common question, despite all the differences – i.e. is it possible to have sentences, rules, laws, values, norms, rights that express a universal relationship between normativity and reality?

In the discussions inside critical theory on what are the implications of the loss of robust universality, some (most famously Habermas) have sought to save critique by showing that it *is* nevertheless possible to extract some weak universal notions, through transcendental arguments about conditions for communicative action that it would be very difficult for us to dismiss. On the other hand there is the strategy (most famously taken by Foucault) of trying to show that the letting go of universal claims is not a problem for critique, but will on the contrary lead to a *radicalization* of critique: considering a critique as being of mere local validity keeps it open to the possibility of being questioned from another local horizon (Foucault 1977b). In this view, the Nietzschean letting go of a universal starting point is not seen as a loss in relation to critique, but as an empowerment of critique.

In this discussion I think it is important to distinguish between two levels of normativity involved in critique, because the universality-problem links differently to them. On the one hand critique does not make sense without a notion of improvement (see below, section (IV,4)). Improvement is the aim of critique, that which is intended to be the result if the critique is followed. And certainly this norm of improvement cannot be questioned through the critique which it is a constitutive element of. On the other hand critique is at the same time a pointing out of a problem (tension) between the normativity-reality relationship. On this level any norm can be considered in a critical investigation, since any norm can be in tension with reality (on the relationship between tension, reality and critique, see below, subsections (IV,2,b+c)). This does not mean that all norms are on equal footing – some norms can still be considered more “worth-fighting-for” than others – hence be more resistant to critique.

Foucault’s point is that if we accept some norms as universal starting points for critique, then we would have to refrain from investigating these norms, since such an investigation would be seen as self-refuting. And indeed, if it is possible to establish some universal starting point for critique (something that would always be considered as an improvement) in an absolute and unlimited sense, then this starting point could never itself be an object of critique. So, if it is true that this kind of universality is an illusion, Foucault is right that it is important to have an approach to critique that does not presuppose it.

I am, however, not convinced that we have to choose neither the Habermasian nor the Foucaultian approach. At a closer look, the concepts of universal and local validity do not have to be fundamentally exclusive. Universal validity-claims should be understood as general ideas (e.g. norms or concepts) about the reality (in the broad sense – cf. above, paragraph (III,1,b,4)) – in which “general” is understood in the logical sense, and not just as “usually” or “most of the time” (cf. below). But the world in toto is beyond our grasp, so any universal idea in this sense will always to some extent have to be either hypothetical (“as far as we know by now, ‘p’ is a universally valid idea”) or it can only have validity under certain restrictions (“in the ‘p’-areas of the universe, to the period ‘q’ the particles ‘r’ (defined in relation to their ‘s’-attributes) appear due to the ‘t’-laws if affected by ‘u’-powers (defined by ‘v’, ‘x’, ‘y’, ‘z’)”). The problem with the restriction-strategy is that in order to reach absolute universal validity universal through this strategy, it would have to become particular (we can only know about the cases that we actually have perceived) or it would have to be analytic (valid pr. definition). So universality in this absolute sense is a sterile idea, tending to crumble into dust.

An absolute particularity-approach, however, also tends to dissolve into a non-approach – or at least into a chaotic confusion. The question is whether we, to avoid this extreme, have to have *universal* starting points (in a modified sense) or whether the more vague notion of *generality* can do that job.⁶⁶ In order to answer that question, some distinctions have to be made: what kind of universality and generality are “available” to us? Is it possible to show them as significant alternatives?

If one uses the above absolute notion of universality, I would certainly agree that generality should be preferred when doing critique. I think, though, that it is possible to have a more modest concept of universality that have certain advantages over generality. A definition of generality as opposed to universality, could be somewhat like the following,

A general norm is a norm that holds in “most cases”. There are no rules for when
it holds.

“Most cases” is held vague because in various contexts we have different criteria for general validity.⁶⁷ The second half of the definition is necessary, because if it was possible to give rules for when the norm in question was in accordance with reality, then the general norm would either

⁶⁶ Foucault has suggested that the notion of universality is substituted by the notion of generality – most explicitly in Foucault 1984c, pp. 1393+1396.

⁶⁷ Can be shown through an argument similar to the one Putnam gives for “identity” being a notion to which we demand varying degrees of exactness in various contexts – see Putnam 1990b, p. 68-9.

(if the exception-rules were without exceptions) just be an incomplete version of a universal norm consisting of the general norm, restricted by the exception-rules, or (if the exception-rules were general themselves) it would be an incomplete version of a general norm consisting of the compound of the first general norm and the general rules for the exceptions.

An alternative concept of universality, that also takes the above considerations on absolute universality serious, could look like this,

A universal norm is a norm that (under certain potentially specifiable circumstances) always holds. We may be mistaken, but this will have to be proven through good reasons.

The first part of the definition articulates the “always”-aspect that is the significant difference in relation to the generality-concept. The second part articulates a fallibilist modification of the absolute universality-idea. One might object that I, with this addition, have articulated the hypothetical version of the absolute idea of universality mentioned above. I would, however, prefer to call it fallibilist rather than hypothetical, whereby I subscribe to the following distinction: a fallibilist universal norm is not *considered* as being hypothetical – it is merely *actually* not questioned. It is a norm that *constitutes* approaches – the approach only being possible because not everything is questioned all the time. To take an example: inside physics it is taken to be a universal rule that the energy inside a closed system is constant. It is one of the constituent ideas inside this approach, which is used as a guide in general physicist investigations. But certainly one day the physicists may find out that the idea leads to a fragmented and unsystematic notion of the investigated object to such an extent that it threatens the unity of the approach. In such a case, one could say that the universal norm has been proven wrong or inadequate. So “good reasons” in this case would be that empirical evidence, together with the other norms in the field, make better sense inside a revised view on the original universal norm.⁶⁸

In the shift from a hypothetical to a fallibilist view on universal norms, there is also a shift in view on universality as such; in the view on what the role of universal norms are; how they connect to what they are about. On the one hand, universal norms are not evaluated in relation to how exactly they express a metaphysical reality, but rather as to how well (their pragmatic usefulness⁶⁹) they interact with the reality of which they have been incited, and towards which

⁶⁸ What to consider to be “better” varies in various contexts – but notions of systematicity and adequacy will be important.

⁶⁹ The relationship between fallibilism and pragmatism is made clear by (among others) R. Bernstein (Bernstein 1991 – esp. pp. 327+336-7) and Putnam (Putnam 1990a; 1995a, pp. 20-1).

they are directed. The reality itself is not seen as some *absolute* otherness to which the norms should fit. Reality is, rather, the “other” of norms and cannot be understood in abstraction from its meeting with the norms, but it is not in itself a norm. Therefore the relation is always tensed, which is the reason why the norms always must be seen as fallible (cf. the previous section).

In relation to critique such a notion of universality has certain advantages over the notion of generality: if a norm is just considered to be a general norm, it has no immediate consequences to point out its deficiencies, because a general norm does not “pretend” to be flawless. The general norm is so to say too “modest” to be a target for critique – it is simply too unclear *when* the norm has been proven wrong. Since the cases of exception are considered as without norm, the giving up of the general norm ends up being a mere matter of subjective choice made by those subscribing to the norm. Also the universal view catches better how some norms actually function: in a norm like “you should not lie except when p”, it is certainly impossible to state the full extension of “p”. It would nevertheless be wrong to say that it is only *generally* valid, because when breaking this norm (if we acknowledge its validity), it is demanded (from ourselves and others) that we are able to give reasons for so doing. Some such norms will be seen as good, others as bad, but not being willing to give reasons at all would be the same as rejecting the validity of the anti-liar-norm. To reduce universality to mere generality would hence threaten to abandon the notion of argumentative interaction, which I, as stated above pp.21ff, take to express an inadequate phenomenological account of our linguistic practices.

The important difference between the hypothetical and the fallibilist account of universality is that in the fallibilist case the norm is to a certain extent immunized against revision. For revision to take place, good reasons, rather than just exceptions, are demanded (sometimes, though, exceptions *can* be at least part of the good reasons). In the above notion of hypothetical universal norms, an exception will immediately prove the norms not to be universally valid. On the other hand, if a fallible norm seems to be contradicted, it is not necessarily given up at once. And this is due to the change in the underlying view on reality: if the “aboutness” of the norm is not some fixed independent otherness, but rather the meeting between a doing and an undergoing then both the norm and the significance of the contradiction are open to interpretation. Hence it makes sense to try to save the universal norm by reconsidering whether the seeming contradiction actually necessarily *is* a contradiction – whether it is possible to reinterpret the significance of the occurring contradiction, and hereby save the norm. But the fallibleness of the norm certainly indicates that at some point, it can be necessitated that the norm is revised fundamentally. Again in relation to the underlying reality view: even though reality is open to various interpretations,

it is not unlimitedly open: the “undergoing” is only open to interpretation to a certain degree. At some point it will be more reasonable to change the norm.

It should thus be clear that I take Foucault’s rejection of universality to be exaggerated. Even though it is possible to reject every notion of universal norms, I think that this strategy would miss certain important points about the conditions for critical theory. Even though it may be granted that universal norms can always be criticized, the question is how this can be done? When somebody for example wants to question a particular – normatively based – account of an ideal speech situation (cf. above, p. 55f; more on this below, pp. 80ff) she will have to draw on other norms (e.g. that the questioned – apparently universally valid – norm has been shown to be wrong, unfruitful, insignificant, etc.) that *are taken to be even more universally valid* than the questioned norm. And in that sense, universalism is inevitable – at least as long as one wants to challenge norms that are taken to be universally valid.

A possible objection against this view could be that I later in this thesis demonstrate an alternative approach against universals (below, in subsection (IV,3,b)) that does not have to presuppose alternative universal standards: the receptively oriented critique. I.e. that it is not necessary to presuppose universally valid norms in order to refute universal norms – it only takes one *actually existing* exception to refute an (apparently) universally valid norm. This objection does, though, not actually affect my point, since it itself presupposes certain norms to be universally valid. In order to demonstrate this, I will reflect a little further on how such a refutation of the idea that the Habermasian account of the ideal speech situation as defining an argumentative practice (cf. above, pp. 22ff): what would a solid exception (i.e. an exception that would *inevitably* refute the norm) of this norm amount to? This is hard to think of, since the norm is understood as *defining* (or describing) what constitutes argumentative practices, and if a defender of the view were presented with a counterexample she could merely claim that the counterexample is not actually an argumentative act. In order for the norm to be refuted it would thus be necessary to give an example of a practice that for “certain reasons” *should* be understood as argumentative. And these “certain reasons” would furthermore have to be taken to be *even more universally valid* than the criticized norm (more on the possible refutation of Habermas’ account of the ideal speech situation, below, pp 82ff).

It is true that in other cases, it is not as unclear what a rejection would amount to. It is for example rather clear what a rejection of a norm like “The sum of angles in a triangle is 180 degrees”. A rejection of this norm would be, if it was possible to create or think of a triangle in which the sum of angles did not amount to 180 degrees. Still, however, in this example it would be possible to claim that a rejection of this norm (which is being argued for in certain non-

Euclidian mathematical approaches, of which I unfortunately know too little) would at the same time be a modification of our very notion of triangles. That it consequently does not actually refute the our old norm for triangles, but rather demonstrates the limitations of the pragmatic relevance of the old concept. So also in this example the refutation of the universal norm would entail that one subscribes to norms that are held to be even more universally valid.

One could say that the two investigated examples are equal in being examples of norms that are hardly refutable, because they have defining status: the ideal speech situation defines (in Habermas' outlook) argumentative practices, while the 180 degree-rule defines a triangle. A rejection of these norms therefore calls for rather serious external norms that are found to be of even stronger validity than the challenged norms. Would less defining norms be refutable merely by demonstration of exceptions? I think not. Even if the 180 degree-norm of triangles were not considered to be *definitional* – but nevertheless universally true – and we were presented with a figure that seemed to be a triangle, but the sum of angles was (e.g.) 190 degrees, this would only be accepted as a refutation of the 180 degree-norm, because other norms for triangles were considered to be even more universally true (that “any plane figure that is composed of three straight sides that meet at three corners is a triangle”). The same goes for the refutation of any norm that is taken to be universally valid: it can only be refuted due to exceptions that fits other norms that are even more fundamental for our understanding of certain phenomenon. The point of receptivity is not intelligible in abstraction from a certain systematism, and sometimes not even from a systematism that is held to be universally true. It is merely an attitude of not holding too rigidly on to norms if reality indicates that they should be modified. Receptivity can indicate that the prevailing norms of relevance should be modified – not that we should (or could) be *without* norms of relevance. I will return to the relationship between universality and receptivity below, pp. 189ff.

So, *if* there are views that are held to be universally true, *then* a refutation of these views would presuppose the possibility to demonstrate a conflict between these views and other views that are held to be even more universally true (often together with new, receptively received, evidence of the actual states of affairs). Being a hypothetical argument, this is not a knock-down proof of the inevitability of universality, since it could be objected that we are actually not holding certain norms to be universally valid. But I take this objection to be a sophism that needs no further consideration. I take it as a fact that certain views *are* actually held to be universally valid. This should therefore also be the starting point for a critical theory – rather than an abstract possibility of the dissolution of every kind of universality.

So, on the one hand, universality is unavoidable. But at the same time universality is challenged all the time (it has to appear as reasonable in a broad pragmatic context), and ultimately it may be proven (for example through critical assessments) to be wrong or inadequate – and hence rejected. Even stronger put: every universal norm is articulated from a locally embedded point of view, and hence dependent on local contingent factors that ultimately threaten to dissolve their status of being universal. This leaves us in what one could call the antinomy of universalism: universal norms are on the one hand necessary, on the other hand impossible. We should therefore understand universal norms – paradoxically – as fallible. And this is the reason why critique is a central assignment for philosophical contemplation.

b. Exemplification and Consequences.

I will now demonstrate in what way this view has consequences in relation to certain of the ongoing discussions of critical theories. I will take Habermas' notion of the ideal speech situation as an example of norms that have been put forward with some pretensions of universal implications. It should be noted that in this I will not commit myself to the actual explication of Habermas' idea. It is only taken as an example of the relevance of universal ideas. Habermas himself actually also seems more interested in the universal foundation *as such* than in the precise content of it (e.g. in Habermas 1991c, pp. 159-66).⁷⁰

A way to handle the paradoxical situation that I sketched in the preceding subsection has been to interpret articulations of universal norms as being open to various (concrete) interpretations. But this opens some questions: (1) how open to interpretation can a norm be, and still be considered to be *one* norm? (2) How open to interpretation can a norm be, and still have practical consequences? I will discuss these questions, in an *auseinandersetzung* with Habermas' norms for "die ideale Sprechsituation". This ideal has been characterized as being unrealistic (Gadamer 1967; Foucault 1984g, p. 1545-6), dependent on western values (Tully 1999, p. 112-4; Rorty 1989, pp. 67+84), without any force (Wellmer 1986, Foucault 1984g), etc.

As mentioned above (p.55), the ideal is formulated in social terms,

[1+2] Alle potentiellen Teilnehmer eines Diskurses müssen die gleiche Chance haben...[...3+4] Zum Diskurs sind nur Sprecher zugelassen... (Habermas 1973b, pp. 177-8).

This has often lead to the misunderstanding that Habermas was trying to explicate an ideal of how society should be organized. This is partly due to certain formulations by Habermas himself, in

⁷⁰ Even though he seems generally to hold on to the idea, Habermas has himself expressed doubts about the actual explication of it (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, p. 47).

which he seems to indicate that the ideal speech situation also describes an ideal life-form (Habermas 1984b, pp. 121+126; 1971, p. 139). But this was not initially the prime aim with it: the idea is presented as a condition that “Revision zunächst gewählter Sprachsysteme erlaubt” (Habermas 1973b, p. 174). The idea was that in order to be able to criticize general systems of truth (zunächst gewählter Sprachsysteme) it is necessary to have a regulative idea in relation to which these systems could continuously be evaluated. But if this regulative idea was a robust and absolute universal idea, it would not primarily have served as a tool for continuous revision, but rather as an ideal which one should seek to reach – the primary goal would then not be revision, but accomplishment.

So already in this opening paragraph on the notion, it is clear that the notion of an ideal speech situation is not to be understood as a fixed view on an ideal society, which we should try to accomplish.⁷¹ On the contrary one might say that it is a *point* that the ideal speech situation is counterfactual, because if the ideal speech situation was realized, then it could not function as a tool for revision of the existing linguistic system. So, to point out that Habermas with the ideal speech situation is aiming towards something unrealistic, is not to say something of which Habermas is unaware. But how can an unrealistic universal idea be of any relevance – e.g. to critical research? This leads to the objection of the ideal having no force, because being too abstract or removed from daily reality.

As a reply to this objection, Habermas has pointed out that to say, that abstract ideals per se can have no relevance or influence on practice, is simply wrong (Habermas 1991c, p. 160). In actual practices, abstract ideals play a decisive role all the time. As an example he directs the attention to the role Euclid’s ideal triangle has played as an exemplar to recognize different concrete figures as being (incomplete) variations over the same geometrical figure, hence being able to extract some universal norms about them (relate scientifically to them) – with all the practical consequences this has had. The scientific approach would not have been possible, without abstractions and idealizations, because in the realizations all triangles are different. The ideals serve as a normativity for establishing relations between various entities. As argued above (subsection III,1,a), language as such would not be possible without this kind of normativity – i.e. without being able to recognize expressions in different situations as, to some extent, saying the same thing despite the actual differences.

⁷¹ Habermas has stressed this point in Habermas 1980b, p. 500: “Weder betrachte ich die vollkommen transparent gewordene Gesellschaft als ein Ideal, noch möchte ich *irgendein* ideal nahelegen...” (emphasis by Habermas). Certainly, the last part of the quote is surprising, since Habermas has himself introduced the talk about the *ideal* speech situation.

So, on the one hand ideal norms are never fully concretized, on the other hand they do have an impact on concrete practices. This means that the relationship between the norm and the concrete is always an open question. How close the concretion is to the ideal is something that has to be evaluated through various interpretations of the ideal and the concrete. There is not only one unambiguous relation between norm and concretion. On the other hand, the relationship cannot be infinitely open to interpretation, because then the norm would lose its significance.

To return to the question of universality and critique: to relate critique to an ideal that is considered to be universally valid (in Habermas' case: the ideal speech situation) should on the one hand be considered as an open relation. In different contexts it may mean something different what a concretion of the ideal amounts to. On the other hand, if it is to have practical relevance, it cannot be unlimitedly open. How is radical openness and the quest for limitations combinable? Here my point is that this dual character of universals must be explained as an interrelation between the universal and local perspectives: universal ideals can only have a limiting significance as soon as there is a local consensus about what to count as examples of affirmations and violations. *If* the addressee of a critique acknowledges that certain acts would violate the ideal speech situation, and the critic succeeds in demonstrating that the addressee is guilty of committing the violating act, *then* the addressee has committed an act that is universally criticizable. Even though this may seem as a rather modest account of universal validity, it will in actual practices nevertheless have some significance – because in our life-world based interactions we actually share a lot of presupposed points that limit the degree of possible reinterpretation. These points certainly *can* be rejected, but this will affect other aspects of the social communities (because of the quest for systematism).

Having been caught in violating the norms of the ideal speech situation (i.e. of argumentation), one will have to revise the argumentation, or admit that one does not argue at all. The relation is open, because it can be questioned. It is limited, because it is constrained by a local horizon, which it has further consequences to question.

So on the one hand, universals are only possible in relation to a local framework. But this is not to say that the local view wins over the universal, because on the other hand, I think that a purely local view on norms is just as inadequate as a purely universal view. And here I would like to refer to Wellmer who has drawn the attention to the fact that just because norms are locally founded, this does not mean that their validity is restricted to the same local horizon (Wellmer 1991, pp. 170-7). The very mechanism of norms is to go from some (finite in number) examples (e.g. perceptions, desires, reasons given, etc. – the local foundation of norms) and then broaden the validity of these pieces of evidence beyond their local normative foundation – norms point

towards something that is not normative itself: reality. Trans-locality is just as necessary as locality. Generality and universality are two ways of understanding trans-locality, and as I have argued above (p. 75f), the generality-notion does not exhaust how trans-locality actually happens. So, if the local foundation of norms were to mean that they only had the same local validity, this would mean the impossibility of having norms at all. Even though the foundation of a norm is only local, they claim general or universal validity – under specifiable restrictions. This certainly makes the norms vulnerable – they can (on further evidence or critical scrutiny) be proven wrong. But this wrongness will have to be shown, and until this has been done the norm will be taken to be universally valid – in a fallible sense.⁷²

How is then the scope of universal ideals like the ideal speech situation different from other (non-universal) norms? One of the main differences lies in the way they are treated in the practices that they relate to – they are treated as in some sense immune towards objections, because they are taken to be *reasonable* (though not exhaustive) *definitions*.⁷³ But the “reasonableness”-characterization also entails that it is a definition whose reasonableness have had to be *demonstrated* (i.e. it is locally founded). And the proof is challenged all the time, hence has to be defended all the time – both the challenge and the defence still resting on local conditions. The strategy of the challenges typically is to point out that the definition leads to a too narrow view on argumentation. And the answer of the defence then has to be either that these limitations are reasonable (e.g. that it is reasonable not to characterize certain counterexamples as argumentative), or that the definition does not have to be interpreted in that narrow way.

In relation to critique, it is decisive that my account of universality is itself open to criticism. The problematics around universality and critique is well illuminated in I.M. Young’s “Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy”. In the paper she discusses the relationship between a deliberative democrat (who thinks that democracy can only be maintained “through critical argument that is open to the point of view of others” whereby one arrives “at policy conclusions freely acceptable by all involved” – Young 2001, p. 672) and an activist (who is suspicious about whether this is strategy leads to social justice, and therefore he tries to affect the democratic decisions in non-deliberative ways – e.g. through street marches, boycotts, sit-ins). I think that Young convincingly argues that the deliberative strategy cannot in itself secure social justice. More importantly in this connection is, however, that she reveals a common strategy of the

⁷² A similar point has been put forward by Habermas – e.g. in Habermas 1987, pp. 174-9.

⁷³ Notice that in the following, the term “reasonable” is to be understood in pragmatic argumentative terms – i.e. not in deductive logical terms (cf. Toulmin 2001). An idea can be reasonable even though there have not been made a deduction that proves its validity – e.g. if it supports or is in accordance with the general normative outlook.

deliberative democrat against the activists as being problematic: a common strategy against activists has been to claim that their stance is *unreasonable* (Young 2001, p. 675-6). Young points out that such a (normatively coloured) labelling in itself is a mere power play, and in the real world there is probably never much else to it. But in one sense, the labelling is correct: the activist is unreasonable, because he (in this abstract case in which we talk about a “pure” activist) has given up reasoning with his opponents. But as Young points out: there can be good reasons to give up reasoning – e.g. if it is likely that the opponent do not actually want to pay (have no interest in paying) attention to the reasons given (for example if this could mean that the opponent had to give up highly valued privileges). In such a case reasoning could actually be said to go against the “interests” involved in the good argument, since the apparent-reasoning can serve to justify the views that the good arguments (in a real debate) could have served to reject. The criticized view actually comes out strengthened because it (seemingly) has resisted criticism.

What is of special interest in Young’s argument is that she shows (implicitly) that a universalist-based strategy of argumentation can be used to exclude some opponents from the field of argumentation: if it can be shown that the opponents do not respect the minimal conditions that are necessary in order to have an argument going, then their views have already at the outset been argumentatively refuted – because it has been shown that their views are not argumentatively presented themselves. In the above case: since the activists do not respect the universal norms for argumentation (i.e. the reaching of consensus through the better argument) they have set themselves outside the field of democratic argumentation, hence their “arguments” *should* not be taken into account (since they are not democratic or argumentative). That activist “argumentation” is *per se* considered to be invalid.

Young’s points are explicitly turned against Habermas’ notion of the ideal speech situation and his notion of truth as defined through “einen vernünftigen Konsensus”, rather than as constituted by experience (cf. above, pp. 55 and 80).

I do not, however, think that Young shows that the approach of early Habermas is wrong at the outset. Habermas has very important thoughts on systematically distorted communication (e.g. in Habermas 1970, pp. 343-58; 1981, vol. 2), which would probably be where he would situate the discussion presented in Young’s paper. But it shows that even universally valid norms have to stand open to evaluation and criticism: Habermas has been compelled to explicate assumptions, and to revise his view on the role of the ideal speech situation. And it shows that *if* universal validity claims are taken to be conclusively justified, they can serve to block for further

argumentation.⁷⁴ In short: robust universal arguments about the possibility of argumentation can (if they are justified) not be questioned through arguments!

This is where I think the fallible account of universality is better off than a more traditional robust notion of universality. If one subscribes to the fallible notion, no universal norm is considered to be beyond the quest of justification. The parenthesis “(if they are justified)” is always relevant. The norm for the ideal speech situation has to draw on some external, already accepted, notions of what argumentation more generally means in order to maintain its reliability. It is consequently based on a relationship between normativity and reality, and is thus open to criticism (this is why Young can convincingly meet the deliberative exclusion by stating that the presupposed notion of reason is too narrow – Young 2001, p. 676). So even though universally based arguments *can* be used in actual argumentation to block critique – probably because they often draw on deeply founded intuitions – the blockade is not absolute, since the universal claims are themselves always open to further interpretations (unless the actual power-formations make this impossible – which is what the arguments in the paper of the activist make clear to be the case in the actually existing democracies). In Young’s example: the reality that is revealed through the activists actions demonstrate that there are severe tensions in the norms of the ideal speech situation.

Various kinds of activism may be fruitful in demonstrating limitations in universal claims. Artworks may have the same potentials. In subsection (IV,3,b) I will argue that these approaches are of important critical value because they accentuate what I will call the receptive aspects of critique. The reason why they can have such a role is that they are less committed to systematic unity. They are focussed on demonstrating the diversity of reality instead. In relation to the present issue: universally valid norms represent an endeavour to apprehend reality in one systematic unity. This unity may be challenged by the diversity of reality. On the one hand the critical importance of art and activism is to draw the attention to relevant points of view, of which we are not generally aware, hereby giving them a voice in the argumentation. They can do this because they often take an alternative approach to the world – an approach which perhaps normally would be labelled as crooked, but which for the same reason allow us to see things from different angles. Hence we can see new hitherto hidden aspects that, even under a less crooked approach, show to deserve attention.

On the other hand, however, I must admit that these approaches do not always respect the norms of the ideal speech situation. This is most obvious in some very violent sorts of activism,

⁷⁴ D. Owen has pointed out that one can actually occasionally find such tendencies in Habermas’ writings (Owen 1999, p. 41).

in which the main target seems to be to weaken the “enemy” as much as possible by physical attacks. As such, I will not defend these kinds of activism as criticism, but rather characterize them as a kinds of battle, in which (at least) one of the parties in the “discussion” have given up arguing. But even though these kinds of activism do not in themselves represent argumentative approaches, the views that they represent can nevertheless be *taken* argumentatively (e.g. as an argument about the relevance of views, perspectives that have not hitherto been taken into account) – but this would demand that they are taken as views that have to stand up against arguments from opposing views. They have themselves to be taken as not excluding certain views as “worth an argument”. Even though a point of view is not presented argumentatively, it may be the case that it could be, if the power-relations were less excluding in relation to it.

I stated above that in the ongoing philosophical debate, the main strategy of challenging the ideal speech situation has been to point out that it leads to a too narrow view on argumentation. Actually, it is also argued that it leads to a too *open* view on argumentation, but generally I think that this objection is founded on the misunderstanding that the ideal speech situation is supposed to give an *exhaustive* account of argumentation.⁷⁵ There is, however, one such strategy that would be a relevant challenge of it: if it was possible to show that it was so open that it would be self-refuting. Consider this: how should we (if we accept the ideal speech situation as valid) relate to a claim like “we should stop making arguments”? An immediate reaction could be to reject the view as self-refuting (since it seems to have the form of an argument itself), or at least is very hard to defend (because it is not possible to argue in favour of it). On the other hand, it seems to be a possible view to hold. And it also seems reasonable to say that it is possible to express it, without hereby pretending to make an argument. Is this then a view that should be taken serious when subscribing to the ideal speech situation? Would that not threaten to dissolve the norm? The answer certainly is yes, but this is not an objection against the view, but rather shows one of the strengths of it: it demands to be open to its own refutation. If it is not possible to refute an anti-argumentative view, then it must be because there are better reasons for not arguing, and therefore it is “reasonable” not to do so. And actually, there are lots of situations, in which argumentation is out of place – for example in various kinds of pure social talk (in which the aim with the communication is pure being-togetherness). So once again: the ideal speech situation does not express an unquestionable ideal about what we *ought* to do, generally. It only expresses what we ought to do, if we want to argue (it is a transcendental argument in the Kantian sense). And in

⁷⁵ Putnam illustrates this in Putnam 2001, where he shows that the ideal speech situation may be a necessary – but not sufficient – condition for securing justice, but where he also admits, that it was never meant to be more than that.

many situations we pretend to argue, without (according to the ideal speech situation) actually doing so! Only in such situations can the ideal speech situation be of critical potential.⁷⁶

So to sum up on the criticizability of universal claims: even though a view is taken to be of universal (definitional) validity, it still can be challenged and defended on local grounds. The definition can be shown to be unreasonable. And this also counts for the ideal speech situation. In some cases it is certainly hard to think of, what a possible refutation could consist in. Some views seem to be so essential in order to act in the world, that we would stretch the concepts very far, in order to save the view that is held to be universally valid. But sometimes there just seems to be too much that is left unexplained if the view is held on to. In such cases, reality can demand a revision of the universal claims.

In relation to Foucault's worries about the non-criticizability of universal standards (cf. above p. 74) it can be concluded that this kind of universality is still open to critique. But I will not deny that in actual discourse, universals are often *used* as a way of blocking critique. I have mentioned Young's considerations about how the activist view may be rejected by stating that they were not reasonable, because they did not respect the norms that were taken to be universally necessary in order to be reasonable. But that is not due to the universal norms themselves, but rather due to the power-play that always surrounds actual discourses. In such cases the ideal speech situation may serve as a useful tool to *discuss* (not prove!) the illegitimacy of these states of affairs.

It might be objected that not much is reached with this kind of universality: (1) being open to various concretions, (2) being related to a practices that are not per se to be counted as universally

⁷⁶ Having given this sympathetic reading of Habermas' notion of the ideal speech situation, it should be noted that I am more sceptical about his attempt to broaden the scope of this notion to a general *moral* approach (in Habermas 1983). As Habermas himself points out (Habermas 1983, pp. 108-12) this would assume that social and communicative interactions always are argumentative. I am not convinced that this is the case. I think that it is possible to discern communicative actions that involve non-criticizable validity-claims, but nevertheless cannot be reduced to instrumental or strategic actions. An example of this could be the husband that, right before they go to sleep, tells his wife for ten years that he loves her. This utterance is an example of, what one could call social talk. It is not criticizable (at least not in relation to its main function – the being-togetherness), but nevertheless a social, communicative action. It might of course be characterized as instrumental (the husband wants his wife to feel good), but this would miss the point that on a more important level it is a kind of coming to mutual understanding – without argumentative means. I will return to this point below, pp. 123ff.

good or appropriate in all cases.⁷⁷ It seems as if there is not much universality left! Can this notion of universality be of any help, if one is confronted with views that radically differ from ones own?

The first part of an answer to this worry is that these universals are not *meant* to be of a very solid kind. They are only meant as norms that seem to be of universal validity (hence are taken as such, until proven wrong), and that – when comparing with actual practices – can be used as a norm for critique. And certainly, it is possible to imagine societies in which these ideals would have a very limited scope, their critical value hence being equally limited. But as soon as a *discussion* with such a society is going to take place, we would have to demand either the opponent to commit herself to this kind of universality (in order to be able to communicate with us), or lift the burden it is to show that our approach is wrong. In that sense, foreign societies are necessarily measured in relation to *our* universal standards. So in that sense it is true when objected that the ideal speech situation might be labelled as ethnocentric. But it is not a closed ethnocentrism. Foreign societies have the possibility to show the standards to be wrong. And this can happen by showing that there is a tension between the entailed normativity of the universal norm, and the reality that it is meant to embrace.

Hereby the scene is ready for a discussion of the preconditions for my view on critique. But before moving on to the next section, I would like shortly to make a remark on the relationship between Habermas and Foucault, since I in the above may have given the impression that I consider them as being radically opposite on this notion. I do not think this is the case, and I think that the reason why it is often presented as such is that Habermas' commitment to universality is taken in a much more robust sense than is necessary: it is being overlooked that his quest for universals are to secure the possibility of revision – not to evaluate accomplishment. And when explaining this necessity, Habermas points at the fact that in order to demand revision (to criticize) you have to presuppose a notion of improvement (Habermas talks about progress – Habermas 1973b, p. 175). In any performed critique, this improvement-aspect is what is not questioned – it is taken as universally valid. This does not mean that the criticized person cannot raise objections against it – the concept of progress is just as fallible as the concept of universality on which it is founded. Foucault is on the other hand often taken to be a much more radical anti-universalist than is actually the case. I think that the above sketched notion of universality would be acceptable for Foucault too: he also speaks of freedom (Foucault 1969, p. 150; 1976, p. 107-

⁷⁷ A further downgrading could be added: (3) even though a norm, value or concept is considered to be of universal validity, it is not given in advance that in conflicts, it should always be preferred before the non-universal: the universality of a value does not say anything about the weight of it.

10; 1984c, pp. 1393+1395; 1984g), non-domination (Foucault 1977b, p. 180; 1984g) as in a weak sense *universal* (he seldom uses the word “universal”, but it is implied) reference points for his own investigations, and – under some pressure – he even admits about consensus “que c’est peut-être une idée critique à avoir en permanence” (Foucault 1984d, p. 1409). The above considerations on universality and locality are meant to present a way of showing how Foucault and Habermas does not *have* to differ on the notion.⁷⁸ Saying that critique has to be locally founded (Foucault 1977b) does not exclude that universals – in a weak sense – also are necessary for critical argumentation (Habermas 1973b).

⁷⁸ I completely agree with M. Kelly when he states that “the more Foucault’s and Habermas’s respective positions on the issue of universals are clarified, the less they differ” – Kelly 1994b, p. 389.

IV. What is Critique.

Now the field for a discussion of critique should be delineated. As should be clear from the preceding, I want to show how we can understand critique, having granted the relevance of the embeddedness-insights gained in the 20th century. I will show that the descriptivist stance – i.e. reducing critique to being a mere *alternative* description – is not a feasible way to go. I will, on the contrary, argue that descriptions themselves have critical implications. My main strategy will be to situate critique inside linguistic practices. I have argued that such practices generally can be understood as a meeting between reality and normativity. The meeting cannot happen inside a purely local horizon. In order to get a heterogeneous meeting between normativity and reality, some kind of universality has to be presupposed. Since the universal claims have to be concretized in local terms, however, we have to understand them as fallible. The explication can be questioned, and ultimately the universal ideas themselves can be shown to be unfruitful – because it shows to be impossible to give them any meaningful locally shaped articulation. This may lead to a rejection of the universal idea. Universalism does not mean that something is incorrigible – rather that it is not taken to be corrigible unless substantial evidence “demands” corrections to be made.

1. Critique in General.

Before going on, it is relevant to reflect a little further on the claim that critique is to be situated inside linguistic practices. Does critique necessarily have to be linguistic, and if yes, what is the significance of this point?

In a certain sense, I must admit that critique is not *necessarily* linguistic. I have already reflected on how critique can happen through certain kinds of activism (above p.83ff) and I think that certain artworks could do the same job. An example of an even less linguistically formed criticism would be if someone felt disgusted by the behaviour of someone else, expressing this by spitting her in the face. It would in a certain sense be quite obvious to say that this was an act of criticism. And if the act was stemming from an unarticulate feeling of disgust it would be hard to argue that the act was linguistic.

So, when I link critique with linguistic practices, I certainly restrict myself to a particular kind of critical acts. This restriction is inspired by readings of Habermas' work. Habermas' position is well-known for stating that inside linguistic practices we can discern a special kind of critique; a critique that is founded on validity-claims that at the outset have to be thought of as criticizable. I have in the preceding chapter argued that every linguistic act is a meeting between normativity and reality – a meeting that is potentially tensed and hence open to criticism. In a certain sense I thus make the link between linguistic acts and critique even stronger than Habermas: I do not admit that linguistic acts can be independent from critical contra-statements. At the very least linguistic claims have to be founded on a notion of relevance that is open to critique. Perhaps the openness is well hidden or participants are hindered in *actually* posing the critique. But there is always a possibility of the hiddenness or hindering to be overcome, leading to a criticism of the claims.

a. Limiting the Field of Critique.

Before continuing my discussion of critique I will reflect on (1) why the linguistic restriction is relevant, (2) why the linguistic restriction does not entail that the reach of the thesis is merely intra-linguistic, and (3) what the consequences of this restriction are for the subsequent analyses.

(1) One of the reasons why I consider the restriction to be relevant is connected with the situation of contemporary philosophy as sketched in chapter (II) (the discussion between Rorty and Habermas – pp. 21ff): it has been questioned whether this particular kind of critique is possible at all – given the various embeddedness-insights; if linguistic practices are genuinely contingent at the outset it has been doubted whether it can function as a basis for criticism of other kinds of contingent horizons. So I want to defend the Habermasian project by showing that the objections against it do not defeat it. Even *if* it is granted that there is no *absolute* universal starting point for critique, this does not entail that we have to give up genuine critique. The descriptivist account is a mistaken way out of the problems that stem from the embeddedness-insights.

I do however not merely restrict the analysis in this way out of exegetic reasons. Linguistically formed criticism is of central importance. It is true that we can criticize non-linguistically through activism, art, and the act of “spitting-in-the-face”, but the reach of such criticism will often depend on how well it can be transformed into a linguistic criticism as well. Even though the non-linguistic kinds of critique can disclose certain kinds of critical points that tend to be hidden inside the linguistic structures (and hence also inside the linguistically formed criticism), the

posed criticisms will only gain continuous significance if they can be subsequently articulated into *reasonable* points of criticism that are intelligible both to a critic and an addressee. The critique that stems from the non-linguistic criticisms is at the outset only a relationship between the act/object and the perceiver. Conceptualization of such criticisms entails that the act/object is situated inside a general conceptual framework. This articulation will lead to a reduced richness of the initial “message”(due to the necessary relevance-criteria in conceptualization) but it will also make it easier to *sustain* the critique despite the advancing remoteness of the initial critical happening – whereby the points achieve a persistent effect. So, linguistic criticism is important because the critique hereby gains a larger extent of continuance.

An even more important reason for the linguistic restriction is that I want to be able to separate critique from other ways of social influence. Critique is a way for agents to affect each other – it is a demonstration of problems and as such critique often urges for changes. But not every kind of social affection is critical. We can also affect each other through corporeal affections (physically forcing someone to do something against her will) and through persuasion. The physical force is easily distinguished from critique. The discussion between Rorty and Habermas on the relationship between persuasion and critique (above, pp. 21ff) shows that this distinction is more difficult to maintain. My point will be that critique has to happen through the *zwanglosen Zwang* that springs from the *Kraft des besseren Argumentes* (Habermas 1973b, p. 161) – that is: even though critique is not necessarily argumentative at the outset, it has to be sustainable through reason-giving. So, even though I acknowledge that critique can be put forward non-linguistically (e.g. through kinds of activism, artistic work, etc.) it is only inside language that the argumentative structure of the critique can be made explicit. In the non-linguistic critiques the argumentative structure is implicit (as I will argue below, pp. 186ff, descriptively based critiques are implicitly argumentative too). Consequently the critical implications in non-linguistic practices will often be quite vague. Sometimes *that* is the reason why they are more powerful. But it is also the reason why the distinction between persuasion and argumentation is more difficult to maintain in such criticisms.

(2) The restriction of my analyses to linguistically shaped critique does not, however, imply that I will only analyse critiques of linguistic practices. Language always reaches outside itself. So, even though I will only consider linguistic criticism, this does not restrict the field of critique to be only the linguistic practices themselves. I will not have to restrict my analysis of critique as how we *talk* about state of affairs. We can linguistically criticize the sweeping of the pavement, the distribution of social goods, the mourning over a loss of the national football team. But in order for such a critique to get going, it is necessary to conceptualize the criticized objects. And

for this to happen, it is necessary to adopt notions of relevance – notions that highlight certain aspects at the criticized object as relevant – at the cost of others. The criticized practices are thus attributed with norms of relevance in the critique.

Furthermore, linguistic practices are self-reflective. It is possible inside language to relate to language. So, it *is* possible to criticize language inside language. Again, this self-criticism certainly has to happen internally according to the following form, “based on certain values that are inherent in language, it is clear that certain (other) values that are inherent in language should be revised”. This entails that the *restrictions* of linguistic outlooks are not static: it is very well thinkable that certain norms for relevance can be challenged either by other norms or by reality challenging the fruitfulness of present norms. But as shown in subsection (III,1,a) a totally unlimited linguistic outlook is not possible.

Both the external and internal critique is in a certain sense paradoxical. The external critique is paradoxical because certain norms of relevance are used in order to assess some states of affairs in which these norms are not necessarily relevant. In the internal critique some norms are used in order to reject other norms – even though the rejection-relation could just as well have been reversed (since the maintained values are – due to the embeddedness-insights – only contingently valid too). This leads me to the third point.

(3) Linguistically shaped critique is itself open to critique. This springs from the fact that the linguistic grasp of reality has to presuppose (as shown above, subsection III,1,a) a notion of relevance that is not of absolute validity. This will be even more clear in the following, where I will argue that critique is a pointing out of a tension between normativity and reality. Every linguistic act is, as shown above, a meeting between normativity and reality, and hence linguistic acts are criticizable. Consequently, linguistically shaped critique has to be thought of as criticizable too.

b. What is Critique.

What is (linguistically shaped) critique? As mentioned in the introduction this is a question that is hard to answer in simple terms since critique has been at work in quite various ways in philosophy and the sciences since at least 1781. The notion of critique has since then been used in connection with critique of reason, the coming-to-itself of the spirit, morality, society, religion, art, the sciences, culture, power-relations, etc. This makes it difficult to maintain a simple account of critique, because in every of these instances critique has to some extent been different.

I will in this subsection, however, dare to articulate my account of critique in what could be called a definitional-like catchword. I will in the rest of the thesis use this account as my reference point for what to consider as critique. I will not claim the account to be an exhaustive definition of what can be considered as critique – even though I find it hard to comprehend what critique could be, if it is not in accordance with it. There are, for sure, some practices that are called critical, without being in accordance with it. An example of such practice is the “critiques” that are closely related to the artistic institutions. I.e. the reviews that are published in art magazines, newspapers, radio and television, in which someone having been acquainted with an artwork makes an assessment – i.e. a positive or negative recommendation – that can help the readers/listeners/viewers in deciding whether to look up the assessed work. Often such critiques will be critical according to my account too, but sometimes they are purely affirmative, giving the artwork only positive recommendations. Since I will claim critique to be a pointing out of a tension between normativity and reality, I will not be able to count a purely positive “critique” of an artwork as genuine critique.

In this case, I think the exclusion is well accounted for: I guess most people would agree that the term “critique” in assessments of art to some degree is a derived term – a derivation that *is* reasonable, but also in a certain sense crooked. It is (in certain respects) *peculiar* to call a purely positively shaped assessment of an artwork a “critique” – “assessment” or “evaluation” would be more in accordance with the general ideas of the meaning of these words (I will return to the reasonability of the exclusion below, p. 216).

I realize, however, that critical practices are so diverse that it would be too daring to claim to exhaust them all in a one-sentence definition. The following account should consequently be thought of as an indication of what kinds of critique I investigate, rather than as a determination of what could *possibly* be taken to be critique. My account of critique is the following,

Critique means to point out tensions between an avowed normativity and a reality. Since a lot of the following arguments will rely on the acceptance of this account, some reflections on how it can gain such a weight will be needed. Why is my account better than other accounts in current critical philosophy? My main argument for this is (as I will demonstrate in this chapter) that it is broader and therefore gives a better understanding of the various ways in which critique is being put forward. The point will be that this account is a fruitful starting point in articulating two aspects of critique: the reflective and the receptive aspects.

These are heavy claims, I admit, and in a certain sense I cannot justify them thoroughly. Whether or not my account is broader than the views that are defended by others probably depends on which aspects that are considered. And whether or not the account includes practices

that are actually not critical is very much a matter of the temperament of the classifier. It will certainly also be dependent on future developments in critical practices – practices that might be in severe tension with my account. Finally, I cannot discuss – or even think of – every single practice that might be labelled critical. Hence, the claim will – in the end – have to stand as a fallible claim that will have to show its worth in the discussions that I want to participate in. I will certainly reflect on some of the (to my mind) most obvious counter-examples, but in the end the weight of the account will depend on how well there may be answers towards ongoing criticisms of it.

Before I start to reveal what I take to be the implications of the account, I will (1) explicate the significance of it in further detail; (2) sketch out how broad I take the reach of it; (3) reflect a little on the limits of it; and (4) consider some possible examples of the account to include too much.

(1) What is done when a critique is made? An intuitive answer would be that we assess some states of affairs as being wrong; that the current state of affairs is being negated due to certain normative standards. According to this account critique is a pointing out of an insufficiency in reality in relation to normativity. But critique is actually not always a claim for revisions in reality. Often one will conclude that the proper consequence of the critique is to revise the normativity. At other times, however, it is decided that the normativity is “unrealistic” and that it consequently would be better to adjust normativity in relation to reality. This strategy is most commonly used in criticisms of epistemological issues (when the norms through which we understand reality show to be in tension with reality, it is more common to conclude that the norms are wrong or inadequate, rather than to try to change reality). But sometimes we also find it in moral, social and even religious discourses.⁷⁹

It may be argued that in such cases we should rather say that reality is taken as the normativity for certain norms, and that the (actually existing) norms are conversely the realities that are assessed in the critique. In this view it would make sense to maintain the view that critique is always to point out insufficiencies in reality in relation to normativity. This interpretation would be in accordance with my points above (pp. 44 and 49) that it makes sense to talk about norms (or aims) for normativity (e.g. internal systematism and adequacy in relation to reality). Furthermore, I would grant that actually held norms are real, and as such can serve as realities that may be in tension with other norms. My point is not that there is always a clear cut between normativity and reality. So this resort for the intuitive notion of critique makes sense to a certain

⁷⁹ In these latter fields, however, this strategy is often looked upon with suspicion, since we find it wrong to infer from “People behave badly” to “People *should* behave badly”. But sometimes actual historic changes have happened through normative adaptations to reality.

extent. In the following, I will nevertheless claim that it can be fruitful to maintain that critique can point to a revision of normativity because of certain aspects in reality. My reason for this is that the intuitive view tends to hide a certain aspect of critique that will be of importance in the thesis. The point is that in some cases of criticism reality functions rather as that which challenges the consistency of an avowed normativity (this is what I in subsection (III,1,b) termed the fallibility-aspect of reality). Reality is sometimes that which “breaks out” of the normative inclusion. And I want to emphasize that critique both can be an attempt to make the approach to reality more consistent (i.e. in accordance with how it *should* be) and a way of showing certain ideas of consistency not to be adequate (to point out that there is something in reality that cannot in a reasonable way be included in the system that results from the avowed normativity). This is what I in section (IV,3) will analyse as the reflective and the receptive aspects of critique.

Furthermore, I think that R. Geuss has (in Geuss 2002) convincingly argued that critique not necessarily entails that something should be rejected. Sometimes critique is merely a way of *problematizing* something. This point of view is possible as soon as we realize that the relation between normativity and reality is always problematic (as developed in chapter (III) of this thesis). If this is so, then it will be reasonable to say that critique sometimes merely points at this problematic relationship, and that – since there is no alternative that is better in an absolute sense – the aim of the critic is mainly to show that the discussed relationship is not absolutely (or naturally) justified. So, critique does not necessarily demand change, and there is not only one possible solution of the critique (to revise reality). Critique is more neutrally a pointing out of a problem – with no determination of what to do about it.

(2) I have in subsections (III,1,a & b) revealed how I understand two of the elements (normativity and reality) in my account of critique. It should be clear from this that I understand both notions rather broadly. It should be further stressed that what in some instances of critique functions as normativity may in other instances count as reality – and vice versa. Normativity becomes a reality as soon as it is held by somebody, and reality also can serve as the norm for normativity.

I would even grant that in actual criticism it is not always certain which aspects in the tension to count as normativity and which aspects to count as reality. This is especially clear when the critique is a pointing out of a tension between two aspects that have either a mainly normative or a mainly realistic character. This is illustrated in the following example,

- A: Free speech is essential for a good society
- B: In order to maintain a good society, it is necessary to silence instigations to violence.

Is this an example of critique? As it stands (in abstraction from any context) I find it reasonable to say that it is not. It is merely a statement of two norms for how a good society should be organized. Clearly there is a tension between them, since statement A claims that free speech *in general* should be the norm for a good society, whereas statement B claims that certain free-speech expressions should be avoided. But this is only a problem of critical relevance if at least one of the norms is actually held by the addressee. If this is the case, the statements are a good starting point for critique. Either the critic will point out that the addressee should also maintain the other statement and that there is consequently a tension between the *actual* norm of the addressee and the norm that she *should* maintain – in this case certainly the success of the critique depends on whether the critic succeeds in convincing the addressee that she should maintain that latter norm too. Or the critic will point out that the addressee actually do maintain both norms (perhaps implicitly), and since this is in tension with the normativity of the norms (lack of consistency) the addressee should let one of the norms be either the norm that demands revision of the other, or let one of the norms be a reality that shows that the other norm (as a norm) is unrealistic and should be revised. In concrete critique it will most often be obvious which strategy the critic is aiming at, but if this direction seems unattractive to the addressee, she might also choose one of the other strategies. My point is that in this case it is at the outset not certain what is understood as normativity or reality, but in order to establish the statements as a critique, it will be necessary that both disputants agree that there *is* a tension between a normativity and a reality.

In addition to normativity and reality there is a third aspect that is significant in my account: the notion of tension. I will elaborate on this notion in section (2), so I will for now only point out why it is reasonable to state that a demonstration of such tensions entails a problematization. It is connected with the point in section (III,1) that even though normativity and reality are distinct notions, they cannot be understood in absolute separation from each other. On the one hand, normativity points essentially outside itself towards reality. Normativity is meant to be about something (directedness) and arising out of certain affections or perceptions (incitement), and this directedness and incitement is what I call reality. On the other hand, reality is to be handled in such a way that it is framed according to certain norms. Hence, it will be a problem if it is possible to show that there is a tension between normativity and reality – i.e. that either normativity does not fit correctly or adequately to reality or reality is not in accordance with normativity (how things should be).

(3) I will now turn to the third preliminary reflection on the account: are there some kinds of critique that are not covered by it? As mentioned above there is a problem in relation to the artworld institution of critiques of artworks that are purely positive in their assessments. Some

would perhaps object that I furthermore rule out one of the most important notions of critique in the history of philosophy – i.e. the Kantian which is described as

die Bestimmung sowohl der Quellen, als des Umfanges und der Grenzen [des Vernunftvermögens] (Kant 1781/7, Axii – a similar point is made in Bxxii-xxiii).

Critique is in this case described as a positive determination of the limits and sources – not as a problematization. This side of the Kantian notion of critique is emphasized by Geuss (in Geuss 2002, pp. 275), and it leads to a notion of critique that is affirming rather than problematizing. Critique is in this view understood as “die Suche nach dem wahren Wissen” (Geuss 2002, p. 275) – that is: a path *towards* a certain view rather than a problematization.⁸⁰ But taking a closer look on Kant’s statements about the positive and negative aspects of critique (Kant 1781/7, Bxxiv-xxx) it becomes clear that he understands critique further as an investigation into certain problems in the dogmatic metaphysics of the rationalist and empiricist philosophies. The three Critiques are understood as critiques because they problematize the notions of knowledge, morality and judgement that were prevalent in the 18th century. So, it is true that the Critiques determine the limits and sources of the faculty of reason. But the Critiques are not mere determination. They furthermore show this determination to be of problematizing relevance for prevailing philosophy – which then again (according to Kant’s notion of the positive aspect of critique) can lead to progress in the sciences, morals, aesthetics, nature-teleology and metaphysics.⁸¹

(4) I will now turn to the question whether the account includes practices that we would normally not call critique. Can we have a pointing out of a tension between normativity and reality that is not critical. In order to make sense of that idea, it would be necessary that the tension was no problem (an indifference attitude) or even of positive value (an appreciation attitude). But when could this be the case?

Since normativity and reality are so closely interwoven as described in the previous section, I only see two possible situations in which the addressee could be indifferent to such tensions: either the addressee does not accept the point made (does not acknowledge that there is a tension) or she does not actually ascribe to the involved normativity. In the former case it would be

⁸⁰ My notion of critique does not exclude the possibility of critique *actually* leading towards a certain view. My point is merely that in order to understand the difference between mere investigation and critique, it is necessary to stress that in critique this would have to happen through a move *away* from another view.

⁸¹ It would call for a rather extensive digression to show how the Critiques point out tensions between normativity and reality – partly because there are many ways of explicating this (since they are rather complex books). To take an example, however, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* can be understood as pointing out a tension between how knowledge can be established (i.e. through the two main sources of knowledge – this is the normativity), and how knowledge is actually gained in the rationalist and empiricist traditions of philosophy.

reasonable to say that the critique has failed – the critic *tried* to point out a tension, but did not succeed. The latter case would certainly not amount to critique, and that is the reason why I have had to qualify the tension as being between reality and an *avowed* normativity. In order for the tension to be a problem, it is necessary that the addressee either (perhaps implicitly) subscribes to the normativity involved already, or that she is forced to subscribe to it, whereby the tension becomes a problem that has to be solved.

Could tension between normativity and reality be of positive value? Against this point I will object that even though it may be a positive thing that there is *shown* to be a tension between a normativity and a reality – namely if either the prevailing normativity or reality is negatively judged – this is only so because one then hopes that the negativity of the tension will lead to a revision of either the normativity or reality. If the tension had been something positive itself, there would not be hope for such revisions.

Notice, that I am not saying that tension is always the *worst* thing. It might very well be possible that the addressee recognizes the critique made, but does not subsequently seek to dissolve the tension. Sometimes we may grant a critique, but since the alternative seems to demand giving up certain highly valued norms, we decide to live with the tension. As argued in the previous chapter, it is not possible to arrive at a non-tensed situation, which is why we have to assess the severity of various tensions. My point is merely that tensions *do* have a negative implication that need to be counterbalanced by other gains if they are to be held on to. So, on the one hand, critique forces us to realize a problem, but it does not force us to do something about it. Critique is a *zwanglosen Zwang*.

c. Situating the Approach in the Present Landscape of Critique.

I hope by now to have convinced the reader that my account is a convincing reference point for a discussion of critique. I have reflected a little on the reach and limits of it, trying to show it to be in accordance with certain common notions of critique. To do this, I had to demonstrate that it is not too limited in relation to certain notions of critique. But I realize that my account is not a *mere* description of how we actually talk about the critical practices. The account is meant to have critical gains – I intent to show certain notions of critique to be problematic. In order to show this, I will now explicate which implications I draw from it – in the light of the embeddedness-insights (and their consequences – as revealed in the preceding chapters). In order to do this, I will relate to a framework that has been developed by Antti Kauppinen in a discussion with Honneth on the landscape of critical theory.

The framework is meant to reveal how critical theories can be situated in relation to each other.⁸² The starting point for Kauppinen’s framework is the question, “where do we find the standards for criticizing” (Kauppinen 2002, p. 480). The following framework is revealed on pp. 480-5). The possible approaches to this question is divided into two main groups: (1) external and (2) internal approaches. External approaches criticize through standards that are not necessarily (at the outset) avowed by the addressee. Internal approaches criticize through standards that the addressee subscribes to. The external approaches are further divided into (a) a weak-ethnocentric approach and (b) a strong-universalist approach. The weak-ethnocentric approach (a) is characterized by assessing the addressee through certain external standards that have no special authority. Rorty’s ethnocentrism is a well-known example of this approach: we assess the others through *our own* standards (which are external in relation to the addressee), but these standards have no special authority apart from our avowal (which according to Rorty is the reason why we *have* to criticize through them). The strong-universal approach (b) seeks to establish the critique by referring to certain standards that are valid across time and place – so even though the addressee does not subscribe to them, she actually *should*. Kauppinen divides the internal approach into (c) a simple and (d) a reconstructive approach. The simple approach (c) is characterized by pointing out contradictions between *explicitly* avowed norms and actual practices, and can be further divided into *exposing* critique (i.e. critique that exposes contradiction of which the addressee was already aware) and *enlightening* critique (i.e. critique that dissolves self-deceptions of the addressee). In the reconstructive approach (d) critique happens through an investigation into standards that are *implicitly* avowed by the addressee. Reconstructive critique can be further divided into *strong* reconstructive critique (seeks to show the implied standards to be of *universal* validity) and *weak* reconstructive critique (the implied standards are just *actually* valid in the investigated practice). The following table gives a survey of the framework,

⁸² Notice, that Kauppinen mainly focusses on criticism that relate to “social arrangement or policy” (Kauppinen 2002, p. 479) – i.e. social criticism. I think, however, that it is useful in relation to critique in general.

Critique	(1) External	(a) Weak-ethnocentric		
		(b) Strong-universalist	=> Normative scepticism	
	(2) Internal	(c) Simple		Exposing
				Enlightening
		(d) Reconstructive		(d _i) Weak
				(d _{ii}) Strong

According to Kauppinen, normative scepticism is a view that is sometimes taken as a consequence of the problems of establishing external-universalist standards. He places Nietzsche and Foucault in this category, and repeats Habermas' diagnosis that it is difficult to think of critique in total separation of normativity. Since Foucault is going to be an important figure in my investigations of critique, it is necessary to reflect a little on this.

As should be clear from the preceding section, I agree that critique without normativity does not make sense. But it is wrong to attribute this view to Foucault. The mistake stems from a common⁸³ misreading of Foucault's self-affiliation with what he calls a *positivisme heureux* (e.g. in Foucault 1969, pp. 164-5; 1971a, p. 72) together with his generally descriptive approach in the early works. But the point with these aspects of his work is not that he claims his writings to be neutral – i.e. independent of normativity. It is not a positivism in the sense of a Comptean or logical positivism. It is rather an indication of the surface-character of the archaeological and genealogical analyses – that they cannot reveal any deep hidden structures. This is stated most clearly in the following quote,

il ne s'agissait pas d'analyser le pouvoir au niveau de l'intention ou de la décision, de chercher à la prendre du côté intérieur, de poser la question, je crois labyrinthique, qui consiste à demander: qui donc a le pouvoir? qu'est-ce qu'il a dans la tête? qu'est-ce qu'il cherche, celui qui a le pouvoir? Mais d'étudier le pouvoir au contraire [...] là où il est en relation directe et immédiate avec ce qu'on peut appeler, très provisoirement, son objet, sa cible, son champ d'application, là, autrement dit, où il s'implante et produit ses effets réels (Foucault 1977b, p. 179).

That is: the positivist and descriptivist character of Foucault's work indicate that Foucault refrains from answering questions about what is *behind* the apparent power-formations. This is not to say that the positivist and descriptivist research reveals the power-formations as they are *independently* of such underlying mechanisms. No-one has stressed more repeatedly than Foucault that knowledge, power, subjectivity and freedom are intimately interwoven, shaping each other into dispositives that in a certain sense are contingent. Foucault wants to

⁸³ It is also found in Habermas 1985, pp. 325-36.

dégagera de la contingence qui nous a fait être ce que nous sommes la possibilité de ne plus être, faire ou penser ce que nous sommes, faisons ou pensons (Foucault 1984c, p. 1393)

That is, to *reveal* contingencies, but not to get past contingencies in general. To get to an unlimited (i.e. non-contingent) stance is impossible.⁸⁴ So, it is true that Foucault is sceptical towards norms – but only in the sense that he rejects their *universal* validity.

To return to Kauppinen's framework: where should Foucault be situated? The external strong-universalist (b) approach is most clearly unsuitable. Foucault is suspicious of standards that *should* be universally endorsed. He would also be sceptical of the internal strong reconstructive (d_{ii}) approach, since this approach also has to account for certain universal standards. There are elements in his writings that point towards the external weak-ethnocentric (a) approach (his ideas about critique having become local – e.g. in Foucault 1977b, p. 163), the internal simple (c) approach (the investigations taking place on a purely positive level; nothing is hidden) and the internal weak reconstructive (d_i) approach (even though the investigations operate on a positive level, Foucault still wants the genealogical investigations to reveal certain historical structures that have been forgotten, but which nevertheless influence how we think and act – e.g. Foucault 1984c, p. 1393). None of the categories actually exhaust Foucault's view.

This primarily reveals that it is not always easy to put philosophers into categories! Honneth has suggested a *tripartition* at the initial level in order to account for Foucault's critical theory. Honneth distinguishes between constructive (equals to some extent Kauppinen's "external"), reconstructive (equals to some extent Kauppinen's "internal") and *genealogic* approaches. – and places Foucault in the latter category (Honneth 2000a, pp. 731-3). To invent a new category especially for the Foucaultian approach of course solves the above problem. But at the same time, it threatens to make it inconceivable in what sense Foucault partakes in a critical project that in decisive ways *equals* the critical project of the traditional critical theory.⁸⁵

Honneth's argument for supplementing the constructive and the reconstructive approaches with a genealogic is that he wants to take the following approach into account,

[H]ier haben wir es nicht mit der ideologiekritischen Konfrontation von Idee und Wirklichkeit zu tun, sondern mit der Bloßstellung der Gesellschaft als einem sozialen Geschehen, das längst bar jeder normativen Rechtfertigung durch glaubwürdige Ideale ist. [...] [E]ine gesellschaftliche Ordnung in der Weise zu kritisieren, dass von ihren bestimmenden Idealen und Normen historisch nachgewiesen wird, bis zu welchem Grade sie bereits zur Legitimierung einer disziplinierenden oder repressiven Praxis herangezogen werden (Honneth 2000a, pp. 732-3).

⁸⁴ Actually, just as Habermas criticizes Foucault for having an unhappy quest for neutrality, Foucault similarly turns this point of non-contingency against Habermas (in Foucault 1984g, pp. 1545-6).

⁸⁵ It should be noted that Honneth himself does actually *not* make this mistake. In the concluding paragraphs of the paper, he demonstrates how all three approaches partake in the same critical program (Honneth 2000a, pp. 736-7).

So, according to Honneth, the genealogical approach to critique is unique in the sense that it does not investigate how there is a tension between ideas (i.e. standards or normativity) and reality, but rather to reveal how the ideas are products of historical events, hereby demonstrating their role in disciplining and repressive practices. If this was an adequate account of Foucault's notion of critique, Honneth would be right in introducing this notion as a third distinct critical approach, because the constructive and reconstructive approaches (just as the distinction between external and internal) presupposes the possibility of showing a tension between norms and the practices they shape – whereas Foucault (in this interpretation) turns down this distinction at the outset.

I find it is a good description of the Foucaultian *genealogy*, and Foucault several times stresses the intimate relationship between critique and genealogy (e.g. in Foucault 1971a, pp. 62-72; 1977b, pp. 163-8; 1984c, p. 1393; 1990, pp. 47-53). But he never *conflates* critique with genealogy. It is clear that the Foucaultian critique cannot be thought in separation from the genealogical investigations, but as he stresses in Foucault 1971a, whereas genealogy merely demonstrates how power-formations *actually* have come to existence, critique analyses how these formations are limiting (“elle essaie de repérer, de cerner ces principes d’ordonnement, d’exclusion, de rareté du discours” – Foucault 1971a, p. 71). Critique does not merely mean to *reveal* how power-formations actually came into existence. In order for an investigation to become critical, it is furthermore necessary to reveal how this is limiting (mechanisms of coercion – Foucault 1990, p. 48). Critique means to show that these formations only have been possible by suppressing certain other aspects. And the task of critique is formulated at the edge in the following quote,

[C]’est par la réapparition de ces savoirs locaux des gens, de ces savoirs disqualifiés que s’est faite la critique (Foucault 1977b, p. 164).

I think that this shows that Honneth is wrong when he says that the Foucaultian notion of critique happens independently of a notion of tension: Foucaultian critique happens through a demonstration of how certain aspects of reality cannot be accounted for by the norms that constitute the prevailing formations of knowledge and power. In this light, I find it reasonable to discuss Foucault's critical theory inside Kauppinen's framework.⁸⁶

Actually, I do not think we should consider it crucial for Kauppinen's framework if certain views can be placed inside more than one of his categories. The framework can still be of use. This is so because it is possible for example both to have an external and internal approach to

⁸⁶ The discussion of Foucault as a critical theorist will continue below, subsection (IV,3,b) – esp. paragraphs (1+2).

critique.⁸⁷ It is for example reasonable to say that even though critique has to be based upon the standards of the critic (and hence be external in relation to the addressee) it is *also* necessary that the standards are made intelligible and reasonable for the addressee (that they are related or articulated according to the standards of the addressee – and that the critique is consequently also internal). The divisions are not exclusive, but still the divisions can be used to situate a certain view in the landscape of critical theory.

Due to the embeddedness-insights that I mentioned in chapter (II), the reflections on critique in this thesis will be situated in the schism between the external, weak-ethnocentric (a), the internal, weak-reconstructive (d_i) and internal strong-reconstructive (d_{ii}) approaches. On the one hand it is undeniable that when we criticize we cannot (due to our embeddedness in local and contingent factors) presuppose that the values on which the critique rests are accepted by the addressee. But if this was to mean that the values have no significance at all for the addressee, then critique would be impossible, because the addressee would not come to realize that the tension was to be taken serious (the tension would merely be a problem for the critic, not for the addressee). Hence, the critique also has to be internally oriented. The addressee has to be convinced that the tension is a tension between reality and a normativity that she actually avows. Certainly, simple internal critique is an important approach in general discussions, but I take it that simple internal critique is not actually a philosophical problem (this is not to say that it is always easy to succeed with a simple internal critique – since the addressee can always object to the interpretation of the relation between reality and the avowed normativity). In any case, in order to reveal the general centrality of critique inside philosophy, it will be necessary to show how critique reaches further than the simple internal critique. Hence, the critique that reveals *implicit* tensions (i.e. the reconstructive) will be more central to the reflections in this thesis.⁸⁸

My subscription to both the weak (d_i) and strong (d_{ii}) approach to internal reconstructive critique, is due to my notion of universality (cf. section (III,2)). On the one hand, I take it that we cannot have linguistic practices without presupposing certain norms to be universally valid – when we communicate we have to presuppose that what we articulate is understood by the addressee in the same way as it is meant (that there is a *Verständigung*) and this implies that we

⁸⁷ This certainly presupposes that one does not take the distinction between the external and internal to be exclusive. That is, if the distinction is not understood in the dualism between subject-object that emerged from the Enlightenment. As will be clear by now (cf. above, section III,1) I do not consider them to be exclusive. This is also a point that is thoroughly reflected by Derrida – e.g. in Derrida 1967, ch. 6; 1968.

⁸⁸ The examples that I use to demonstrate my points will often be of simple critique, however. This is because the points will be easier to demonstrate when the tension is explicit.

share certain norms. Besides the speaker has to presuppose that what is said is considered relevant by the addressee. On the other hand, this universality always has to be explicated and justified through a relation to an actual, concrete reality (of objective, social and subjective facts). Due to the embeddedness-insights this transition from the universal to the concrete is open to various interpretations, and new formations of reality may show universal norms to be inadequate. Hence, the universal norms are fallible. So, on the one hand, I accept that we *can* distinguish between reconstructive critique that is either weak or universal. But on the other hand, I claim that what is in one situation considered to be of universal value or relevance, at other times can be considered as a mere contingent factor – in a situation in which other claims are considered to be universal. This is the (c)-strategy taken on the relationship between embeddedness and universality (cf. above, p. 30): given that we want to participate in certain practices or talk about certain issues, it is possible to demonstrate certain reference points to have universal relevance (since they are constituent or defining for that practice to be possible at all). But if someone does not want to participate in this practice, it cannot be presupposed that she accepts these points as relevant. A critique is therefore most effective if it can be demonstrated that it is based upon practices that it is very difficult not to participate in (such as communicative, social or relations to the self). But in order to articulate such practices, it will most often be necessary to relate quite abstractly to them – whereby the critique becomes avoidable through re-interpretations of what it means to participate in such practices.

Actually, I take it to be one of the important developments inside critical theory since Habermas⁸⁹ and Foucault that critique has to be both internally and externally oriented.⁹⁰ In

⁸⁹ One should also mention Gadamer's hermeneutics in this connection, since he was one of the first to analyse the relations between the external and internal as primordially a *Horizontverschmelzung* (Gadamer 1960, p. 311). Unfortunately, he never applied these analyses positively to a critical theory, but their influence on Habermas (accentuated in the so-called Gadamer/Habermas-debate) is not to be underestimated. Gadamer formulated his objections against the early Habermasian critical theory in Gadamer 1967; 1971.

⁹⁰ I have already criticized Kauppinen for placing Foucault in the external approach. Habermas is (together with Honneth) placed in the internal strong reconstructive approach. I find this more appropriate due to the clear universalist strain in Habermas' writings. I am not convinced, however, that Habermas would actually take the extracted universal standards to be sufficiently robust to allow the critic to avoid the externalist stance. This is clear in Habermas 1988d, pp. 179+182-4 in which he stresses that the universal norms that he proposes, does not lead to independence of the life-world constellations. It is also clear in Habermas 1991c, pp.163-4 in which he stresses that his account of universal norms is thought in abstract terms exactly to *prevent* that they can *determine* what is the right action in the prevailing context. So, in actual critique, Habermas would also grant that the externalist stance is relevant. Honneth – on the other hand – actually confirms Kauppinen's interpretation of his own view (Honneth 2002, pp 513-4) – something that forces him to come up with standards that are more robust than the Habermasian.

communicative practices (which according to Habermas presuppose a common life-world) or (more broadly) in assessments of power-relations⁹¹ (Foucault) there is no clear cut between the others and ourselves. These formations consist in a *meeting* between speakers or agents on the one hand, and addressee(s) on the other. And this meeting cannot be understood in abstraction from one of these groups. Criticism has consequently to take both sides into account.

d. Implications of the Account.

I have already discussed the relationship between normativity and reality in linguistic practices (section III,1). In relation to critique, it is important to consider in what way it is reasonable and significant to claim that there can be a tension between a normativity and reality. In section (2) of this chapter I will elucidate and show the reasonableness of this claim about critique.

As explained in section (III,1) I understand normativity as a way of coming to grips with reality, and reality is understood as what normativity is incited by and points towards. This reveals two directions in linguistic practices generally – and consequently also in critical practices: on the one hand there is the reflective, creative, spontaneous (in the Kantian sense) direction. On the other hand, there is the passive, incited, affected, receptive direction. I will in the following talk about the former as the *reflective* aspect (etymologically, re-*fect* ≈ to bend back – to do something, transform something). I will talk about the latter as the *receptive* aspect. In section (3) I will claim and demonstrate that an important reason for contemporary disagreements in critical philosophy stems from a difference in focus on these aspects. I will claim that certain strains in the contemporary debate focus on how critique has to happen through reflective, creative and intentional acts, other strains want to “let reality come through”, disclose reality, contemplate reality in its diversity. One could say that the latter strain is moved by the insight that the problem is our normative acquirement of reality; it is an attempt to problematize the relevance-claims that are shaping these normativities; an attempt to demonstrate that there are certain problems that we cannot solve through activity, because as long as we continue to reflect actively we do not even become aware of them – because they are concealed by the relevance-claims that shape our activities.

⁹¹ Foucaultian “power-relations” are not to be equalled with the Habermasian notion of instrumental or strategic relations – something that has often been overlooked in the Habermas-inspired objections to the Foucaultian analyses. The Foucaultian power-relations are more generally to be understood as *social* relations between *subjects* under certain *objective* conditions (on this tripartition, see Foucault 1984c, pp. 1395).

Finally, I will in section (4) discuss how we can think of the notion of improvement in critique. On the one hand, it should be clear that to understand critique in abstraction from some notion of improvement is impossible. It is implied in the very idea of critique that there is a problem – and if this problem was not existing, it would *ceteris paribus* be “better”. This is not to say that we ever have a *ceteris paribus*-situation, hence it is not certain that the critic actually claims that the addressee should move towards a certain end. It is not even certain that the critic positively can articulate how the problem could be solved. Sometimes the primary aim with the critique is not even that the investigated situation *should* or *could* be revised to a better state of affairs – the aim might very well merely be to show a certain constellation not to be a *necessary* state of affairs.⁹²

It has, however, become more difficult to sustain improvement-claims because of the embeddedness-insights. It is no longer possible to maintain one robust norm that can be thought of as a universal norm for evaluation of improvements. Since the notion of improvement is itself depending on norms, it is vulnerable to the embeddedness-insights that have evolved. As a consequence of this, the notion of improvement has generally either been (a) particularized (i.e. it is accepted that we can only talk about improvement in a rather specific sense – in relation to quite specific contexts – Foucault represents this approach) or it has (b) been formulated in increasingly abstract terms (i.e. in terms that are open to rather various interpretations – that can apply to different contexts because they are themselves indeterminate at the outset – Habermas represents this approach). Both strategies point towards a decomposition of the notion of improvement: an absolute particularity-approach (a) will make the improvement-notion impossible, because improvement presupposes that it is possible to apply the norm of improvement on at least two different situations – namely the present situation and the situation that is pointed towards. An absolute (b) abstract notion of improvement would also dissolve it, because it would have to be so open to various interpretations that it could be used to argue both for and against claims of improvement. But since critique implies a notion of improvement, the dissolution of that notion would also mean a dissolution of critique. Hence, it must be articulated in what sense improvement-claims are possible even in the light of our embedded situation. In section (III,2) I have indicated how I see the relationship between the universal and

⁹² But even in this case a notion of improvement would be implied: in order to show the criticized view to be problematic, it would be necessary to show a tension in it, implying that it would be an improvement for this view *if* the tension could have been solved – even though the critic perhaps agrees that this can *actually* only be done at the cost of certain (worse) side-effects.

particular/local in light of the present philosophical situation. In section (4) of this chapter, I will apply this view on the notion of improvement.

2. Tension as a Reference-point for Critique.

In this section I will articulate in further detail the reasonableness and significance of the claim that critique means to point out a tension between normativity and reality. In order to do explicate this, I will show what it (a) means for a normativity to be in tension with reality, (b) what it means for reality to be in tension with normativity. Hereby I want to demonstrate that even though reality and normativity cannot be understood in abstraction from each other (which is why it is better to talk about the demonstrated object of critique as a “tension” rather than “contradiction”) the relationship between them is always potentially problematic. I will demonstrate this in subsection (c) in which I will discuss in what sense it is reasonable to claim that tensions between normativity and reality are problematic. Furthermore, I will in that subsection accentuate that – in opposition to Habermas – an account of critique cannot straight away be transcribed into a moral codex. It is true that there is a norm in the account – in the sense that it indicates what we have to do in order for *actually* succeeding in making genuine critique. But it is not a norm in the sense that we *ought* to make genuine critique.

a. Normativity in Critique.

In subsection (III,1,a) I discussed the role of normativity in linguistic practices. Since critique is also a linguistic practice, normativity is also at work in critique: the formulation of critique is itself embedded in a relationship between normativity and reality. But now I furthermore claim (in subsection IV,1,b) that critique means to point out a tension between an avowed normativity and reality. Critique means to point out that there is a discrepancy between how the state of affairs are and the normativity according to which it is measured. The further qualification that the normativity must actually be *avowed* is necessary because it is not a critique to point out a tension between a reality and a normativity that no one subscribes to.

In subsection (III,1,a) I accentuated that even though we have to distinguish between normativity and reality, it is important not to overlook that our understanding of the one, to some extent determines our understanding of the other. In this subsection I will discuss what it means

from the side of normativity *not* to be in accordance with reality. Normativity is on the one hand a way to come to grips with various aspects of reality (e.g. the natural, social, psychological, moral, legal, political, artistic and religious aspects). But at the same time, it makes sense to say that normativity is also a source of our misapprehension of reality. This can become noticeable if reality in some sense offers resistance in relation to the normativity. But it is important to stress that this awareness can only be achieved from a normative outlook. When discussing how normativity can be wrong or inadequate, we cannot relate to a “pure” or “neutral” understanding of reality as it is in itself (metaphysical realism). We can merely come to realize that from a certain perspective – which we assess generally to be of substantial validity – the criticized normativity seems inappropriate. In order to articulate that normativity is inadequate, it is not necessary to subscribe to a metaphysical notion of reality. It is merely necessary to claim that every normativity has some kind of reality that it accounts for.

In subsection (III,1,a) I pointed out that reality is a measure for normativity – normativity is only philosophically relevant if it (at least potentially) is *about* something in the world. But reality is not the only standard for normativity – or at least, one could say that we through normativity relate to reality in a very special way: through normativity we seek to apprehend reality as a coherent and systematically unbroken entity. So normativity can be assessed in relation to (at least) two aspects: how well it accounts for reality, and how consistent and systematic this is done. These aspects do not necessarily point in the same direction. In order for the systematism to succeed, it is necessary to focus on certain aspects of reality at the cost of others. Reality is so multitudinous and open to various perspectives and interests that it is not possible to come to grips with every single aspect of it at once. The norms determine the perspective through which reality is approached: if we understand a particular reality in relation to its moral implications we have to apply norms of goodness; if we try to come to grips with its mechanistic aspects, we have to apply norms of mass, placement, movement, power; if we try to gain the sympathy of a woman, we understand reality in relation to norms of love, affection, charm, etc. So, norms indicate a perspective on reality. The normative approach to reality connects to the incitement- and directedness aspects of reality.

In the consecutive subsections I will elaborate on why this can lead to a tension with reality nevertheless. In this subsection I will draw the attention to the implications of an understanding of normativity as a focus. It should be clear by now that I find it reasonable to claim that we approach reality through perspectives or outlooks – i.e. through various kinds of normativity that are shaped by norms of relevance. But, and this is important, the perspectives are not *absolutely* separated. This is one of the implications of the directedness towards reality. This could be argued

in the following way: the normative outlooks are directed towards reality. It is true that reality cannot be separated from the normative outlook through which it is approached, and reality therefore varies if the normative outlook is changed. But as I will demonstrate in the succeeding subsection (esp. paragraph (1)) the variation is not infinitely open. Normativity is not only directed towards *a* reality – it is directed towards *the* reality (in a non-metaphysical sense). It is a characteristic of normativity that the reality towards which it is directed is not something that is invented or constructed internally. The object of the directedness is, as it were, *external* in relation to normativity. It should consequently also be accessible through other normative outlooks. Not necessarily through *all* other outlooks, since it may be that the reality that is accessible through one outlook may be put in the shade, when approached from another outlook.⁹³ Various normative outlooks are therefore not absolutely separated – they are affiliated in pointing towards a reality that in certain respects is the same. Various normative outlooks can therefore be assessed through a discussion of how well and adequate they relate to reality. Hence, it is very well possible that insights about a particular reality from one normative outlook may show to be relevant for how this reality is situated inside another normative outlook. To give an example: even though an opera singer understands her voice rather differently than a natural scientist – a difference that sometimes even makes it difficult for them to understand each other – it may very well be that (perhaps through an intervention of a mediator) an exchange of insights about how the reality is understood from one perspective may prove fruitful for how it is understood from the other. On the one hand the scientist's understanding of the sound as stemming from the vocal chord may reveal certain methods for the singer in taking better care of this part of the body.⁹⁴ On the other hand, the techniques of the singer to gain audible impact through certain adjustments of the oral cavity, can make the scientist realize that audible impact not only is a matter of power (since one opera singer can penetrate a wall of sound stemming from a symphony orchestra).

So, reality is on the one hand what hinders the possibility of an absolute relativism in relation to normative outlooks. Reality is what makes it possible for normative outlooks to be either wrong or inadequate (reality as fallibleness). This is also the reason why normativity can be said to be in *tension* with reality. Normativity is developed in order to come to grips with reality (in a broad sense) – but there are two aspects in this coming to grips. On the one hand there is the aspect of embracing reality *adequately* (in relation to the diverse character of reality). On the other hand there is the aspect of apprehending reality in a *systematic* way. Sometimes the quest for

⁹³ If it is being shown that a particular aspect of reality is not accessible from within another normative outlook, this may certainly serve as a starting point for mutual discussion and critique.

⁹⁴ For simplicity, I take it that it is a rather untrained singer. In real life, certainly, most opera singers know this already.

normative systematicity may be in conflict with the reality that it is directed towards – because the relevance-claims on which it is founded shows to exclude aspects that turn out to be relevant. Sometimes the quest for adequacy in relation to the diverse character of reality cannot be subsumed under the systematic unity that is the aim of a normative outlook. One could say that it is a conflict between the quest for internal systematism and external adequacy in normative outlooks. In such cases of conflict normativity is in tension – not with itself, because then it would merely be a consistency-problem, but with that of which it has been incited and towards which it is directed.

b. Reality in Critique.

In the closing of section (III,1 – pp. 70f) I promised to go further into detail on the significance of taking a stance in favour of Putnam in his discussion with Rorty on how to understand reality. I will now take a first step to fulfil that promise. In this subsection I will elaborate on the role of reality in relation to critique. On the one hand, I will substantiate my notion of realism by demonstrating that (1) linguistic practices not only point towards *a* reality (that may be infinitely open to variations) but that there is also a claim of relations to *the* reality (the world) – and in what sense this does not lead to metaphysical realism. On the other hand, I will (2) further develop the fallibility-aspect of reality, since this is a decisive aspect in relation to critique.

§1. A Reality vs. *The* Reality.

In subsection (III,1,b) I argued that linguistic practices always relate to *a* reality – namely the reality that constitutes the incitement, directedness and fallibility of the normative outlook. In that sense reality is a hold against absolute relativism already: having adhered to a certain outlook, reality limits what it is possible reasonably to say and think about the world. But this is not enough for a genuine critical theory, because if this was all there were to say about reality, there would still be room for absolute relativism *between* various outlooks. Ultimately critique would thus only be possible as self-critique, because one could always avoid a critique posed by others by stating that one does not share the critic's notion of reality. It is therefore necessary to be able to articulate in what sense various notions of reality can be shared between disputants who do not share normative outlooks.

Once again, the following argument should not be conceived as an ontological argument. Whether or not there actually exists worlds that are wholly separate from each other, is not my present concern. My present concern is rather: what notion of reality is necessary in order to have

the linguistic (and among these: the critical) practices that we actually have. In that sense one could say that it is a transcendental concern – in the Kantian sense.

The first step in my argument will (once again) be based on an intuition. I take it that most philosophers would agree that when we talk about something in the world, we presuppose that we are (at least ultimately) talking about only *one* world. Even when Habermas talks about three different kinds of world (cf. above, paragraphs III,1,b,2+4), this should not be understood as three worlds that are *separated* from each other (this is rather evident since they are extracted from a unified practice – i.e. the communicative practice of “sich mit einem Hörer über etwas zu verständigen”). Even if we speak of these worlds (objective, social, subjective, religious, artistic, etc.) as different it is still implied that they merely point towards different aspects of reality – aspects that may mutually affect one another. The various worlds are at most different in the sense that we can actually *articulate* the differences and identities between them. This means that it is possible to comprehend them and their relations. So, if we think of various worlds, we think of the various worlds as interrelated.

The intuition that we in some sense *share* reality can be further justified by trying to articulate what the opposite would amount to. The opposite would be an idea of parallel worlds that are separate with no relations or interaction between them. Already at the immediate level, this is a strange thought. This is of course not in itself an argument for its falsity, but it *is* an argument for only accepting it, if we are for some reasons driven towards it.⁹⁵ I do not, however, think that the stance presented in this thesis by any means drives us towards such a view. The point that reality may mean something different inside various outlooks does not entail that the notions of reality are *entirely* different. The notions of reality certainly differ between varying normative outlooks, but the quality of being incited by, directed towards, and hence fallible in relation to reality is shared by all normative outlooks. This means that even though normative outlooks are mutually incompatible (in a logical sense: the theories that are developed inside varying outlooks are not compatible, because they may entail logical contradictions) and incommensurable (in the sense that they do not necessarily cover the same aspects of reality) this does not mean that they are incomparable.⁹⁶ And this is so, because normative outlooks answer for their accounts of reality: even though we approach reality through varying normative outlooks (the approaches are

⁹⁵ There have been times in which certain physicists have seen themselves driven towards such a thought, in order to solve some of the paradoxes that quantum mechanics raised. Unfortunately, I do not know about the assessment of these theories in present-day nuclear physics. This will, though, not be decisive in the following, since the physicist theories operate at an ontological level, whereas my argument will operate on a transcendental level.

⁹⁶ For this distinction, see Bernstein 1983, pp. 82-92.

incommensurable) it is nevertheless possible to articulate the *relationship* between the varying approaches (they are comparable), because they have a common ground in being incited by, directed towards and fallible in relation to reality – in a consistent and systematic way.

The question is of course how this is possible if the notion of reality itself changes between various outlooks? If the notions of reality were absolutely different within different varying outlooks, the relation to reality would not be a possible point for comparison between various outlooks. How is it for example possible to compare the outlook of the opera-singer with the outlook of the natural scientist (to continue the example above, p. 110)? In this case the gap between the outlooks is certainly so big that it would take several chapters to articulate the relation adequately. But I will, however, claim that when we put forward claims about reality, we imply that they are relevant claims about a reality that we share with the addressee, and even though disputants may sometimes reach the conclusion that they talk about different aspects of reality, they still presuppose that it is possible to be able to articulate what the relation between these aspects are (in order to conclude that one is speaking about aspects of realities as separate, it is necessary that it has been established what (at least some of) the differences are). I.e. why they reach different conclusions (the natural scientist is not able to account for the artistic expressions of the opera-singer, and the opera singer is not able to account for the atomic basis for the sounds being produced), even though they both claim to say something about reality (the atoms that are investigated by the natural scientist are the same as which the opera singer uses to express certain artistically defined objects or emotions). Or in other words: even though differences in normative outlooks may lead to differences in accounts of reality, this does not entail that the differences are absolute – that there is no relationship between the outlooks or the fields of the applicability of the outlooks. It *is* possible to compare what is at the outset incompatible and incommensurable.

Furthermore, even *if* one accepted the idea of parallel (absolutely separate) realities as a possible idea within a linguistic conception of reality, it would at best be irrelevant for critical theory: what happens inside a reality that is wholly different from the reality that is accessible to a critic, given her normative outlook, can certainly never be a genuine object of critique – since it cannot be an object to her at all. It is, as it were, not something that it is possible to communicate about – since one of the disputants have no access to it. Absolutely foreign realities are therefore not an issue for critical theory. What *is* happening in a critique is that someone points out a problem between an avowed normativity and a reality of which the critic has access. The addressee can certainly object that the critic is operating with a too narrow notion of reality (that the critique presupposes certain abstractions that the addressee does not accept), but she

cannot object that the critique stems from a lack of access to a reality that is wholly independent of the reality of which the critic has access. This is so because problems in a reality of which one has access can certainly not be explained away by a foreign reality of which it is claimed that there is no relation with the discussed reality. So, just as the critic has to presuppose a shared reality, so does the addressee, in answering the critique, have to refer to a reality that is shared. In other words: *if* she wants to defend a certain view by referring to an inaccessible reality, she still has to articulate in what sense this reality is relevant in relation to the reality that *is* accessible to the critic – but this is not possible because if there is no relation between the realities under discussion, the approach to the one reality will not be affected by the approach to the other reality. A critique of a practice inside one reality (that is accessible to the critic) can hence not be defended by circumstances in a reality that is absolutely independent of the former.

This all comes down to the point, that in linguistic critique it is necessary to presuppose to be talking about a reality that in certain respects is the same for the disputants – even though we might discuss which aspects of reality we *should* discuss. Reality therefore has to be shared (even though, as noted above, pp. 58ff, this does not mean that reality is exhausted by this sharing). And the notion of reality is itself a possible object of critique – even from within varying normative outlooks. The reality of linguistic practices cannot be merely private but have to be shared to some extent. Defenders of certain views are not merely committed to *a* reality, they are committed to *the* reality.

Sometimes communication fails and the disputants seem to talk past each other. This may happen if they cannot reach mutual understanding about *which* aspects of reality they are talking about. This situation certainly is a challenge for a critic, because the addressee may hereby continuously slip between the fingers of the critic. In that sense the reality-relativization is a problem for critique. But the point with the above is that the problem is not absolute. It may, certainly, in some situations be difficult to reach a common starting point from which a discussion of more substantial issues can develop. But my point is that since every point of view is committed to quests for consistency and adequacy, *both* disputants can be challenged if it is not possible for them to account for these norms. And the quest for adequacy in relation to reality is a quest for a correspondence with a reality that in certain respects is accessible to both disputants.

The question is whether this leaves us with metaphysical realism? It does not have to. It is one thing to say that disputants have to share a notion of reality in order to be able to communicate; it is quite another thing to claim that this reality is something that really exists, independently of the ongoing dispute. It is one thing to claim that linguistic claims point towards something that is not itself a part of the linguistic practice; it is another thing to claim that this alterity has some

fixed existence that is not affected by the pointing. The above only leads to metaphysical realism if it is meant to say something about some entity that exists *independently* of our practices. The above is, though, merely an articulation of what are the necessary conditions for certain practices. The articulated notion of *the* reality is a transcendental notion – not a metaphysical one.

§2. Reality and Fallibility.

In the preceding paragraph I have emphasized that the notion of reality in linguistic practices has to be presupposed as *shared* between the disputants. In this paragraph, I will argue that reality at the same time is an important source for this sharing never to be absolutely stable. Reality is not *reducible* to how we understand it. It is decisive for an understanding of linguistic practices that they not only relate to reality as incitement and directedness, but that reality furthermore entails that linguistic practices can always be wrong. In order for reality to be the aim of normativity, it is necessary to be able to distinguish between whether a normativity is fruitful or sterile (in a broad sense). This is the fallibility-aspect of reality, and this aspect of reality is important in relation to critique. The fallibility-aspect can appear in (at least) two ways: on the one hand, it can become evident that the normativity is *wrong* – i.e. that there are certain aspects of reality that shows the norms to settle distinctions that are inappropriate. For example, if we have a norm for dogs that says that “dogs have no more than four legs”, then this norm could be proven wrong if we came upon an animal that in all respects seemed to be a dog, except that it had *five* legs. Certainly, we *can* choose to stick to the original norm if we take it to be crucial in our understanding of dogs; and if the five-legged dog does not fit into some other category of animals, we would say that we have come upon a new species. But if we furthermore knew that the five-legged dog was born by a normal dog-mother, as an outcome of a normal dog-mating, we would probably rather choose to revise the norm by trying to locate the sources for this exception, whereby it is possible to formulate it something like “dogs do not have more than four legs, *unless ...*” or more vaguely “dogs do *normally* not have more than four legs”.

The fallibility-aspect of reality is on the other hand apparent when normativity is shown to be *inadequate*. This certainly is closely connected with the previously mentioned aspect: a normativity that is shown to be wrong is also inadequate, because there are certain aspects of reality that it cannot account for. But normativity can be inadequate in a more subtle way – namely if the underlying relevance-claims are questioned. In this case, there seems to be no (serious) problems at the immediate level. By and large, there seems to be a good and stable relationship between a normativity and reality. Nevertheless, this relation may be problematic because it rests on an unlucky notion of relevance. Elaborating on the dog-example above: the concept of a dog is defined through certain norms that indicate what are relevant characteristics

of an object for it to be identified as a dog – e.g. “dogs have at most four legs”. And generally this norm seems to be correct (we do not experience near-by dogs with five legs). But one day someone notices that the animals that we understand as dogs, can be further divided into two groups. The animals seem almost identical, except that the one group is slightly more bandy-legged on the two front-legs: in the one group the angle between the feet is between 0-10° and in the other group the angle is between 10-20°. At the outset this is not in itself a reason for revising the initial normativity, since this difference is not taken to be relevant, and hence should not be determining for the traditional notion of the species. Then some researcher discovers that there is never mating between the two groups. It may still not be necessary to revise the normativity – we can explain this circumstance away by appealing to certain norms of beauty among dogs. But further research shows that even though it is possible to have offspring between the two groups through insemination, it turns out that the offspring is not itself fertile. This observation would probably convince most people that it could be relevant to further divide our concept of dogs into dog_1 and dog_2 – due to another norm: the biological norm that the ability to interbreed and to produce fertile offspring is a necessary condition for belonging to the same species.

In this case, the initial norm for dogs, that they have at most four legs, has been proven inadequate. It is not actually wrong (because every dog only has four legs), but the underlying norm for relevance – that in relation to legs, it is the quantity (and not the angle) that is relevant – has been proven too narrow. There are some important aspects of reality that were hidden, because the relevance-norm focussed on other aspects.

In order to question the relevance-norms it is certainly not enough merely to point out that they do not embrace *everything* in reality. Adequacy is not a robust norm for assessments of outlooks. The very reason for establishing norms of relevance is to sort out some aspects of reality in order to establish a focus on some other aspects. It therefore needs to be shown that the points of inadequacy *should* have been accounted for. The fallibility-aspect of reality is thus not independent of normativity either. Reality only shows normativity to be faulty if it demonstrates a *relevant* inadequacy. What is important at this point, however, is that the aims towards adequacy does not necessarily point in the same direction as the aims towards systematicity. And this is the reason why every normative outlook is fallible.

Normativity is thus fallible in (at least) two ways: on the one hand, it can be shown to be wrong, because newly discovered aspects of reality seem to contradict it. On the other hand, it can be shown inadequate by questioning its relevance-claims: is the normativity that leads to the characterization of the present animal as a dog the most relevant? Would it not be more relevant

to take the angle between the front-legs into consideration – at least as a supplement to the quantity-norm? In both cases the focus of the normativity has been shown to be too narrow (we should not only focus on the leg-quantity). In the former case, the norm itself was shown to be too narrow, in the latter case this is not the case: the norm is actually correct (at least as it is known for the moment), but it has been demonstrated that it is not the most relevant or adequate characterization.

So, even though normativity fundamentally relates to reality, reality is not exhausted by the normative approach – the normative account of reality is a reality that is thought of in terms of relevance, consistency (systematism), generality, simplicity. Reality is however not exhausted by the systematic aspects – reality is also characterized by non-significance (mere being), disorder (perhaps even chaos), concreteness, plurality. Reality is also what *upsets* the systematism of normativity. Even though reality certainly has qualities that are relevant, it cannot be reduced to these relevant qualities (cf. above, p. 47f).

A possible objection against this view could be that there is no necessary relationship between reality and fallibility: that on the one hand we can have reality without fallibility; and on the other hand we can have fallibility without reality. I agree that it is possible to maintain both a notion of reality that does not include a notion of fallibility, and a notion of fallibility that does not presuppose reality. An example of the former would be an epistemology that understood reality purely as a product of our doing (simple pragmatism). An example of the latter would be a fallibility that connected to failure of internal systematic completeness.

As should be clear from above, however, I subscribe to a more substantial notion of both realism and fallibilism. Simple pragmatism and pure coherentism are, at best, reductionist as to the character of linguistic practices. Linguistic practices point beyond themselves, and it is in relation to this pointing outside that they can be shown to be either *wrong* or *inadequate*. It is true that we can fail in relation to the systematic coherence of our practices, but if they are not committed to something external this fallibility is only accidental. It *is* possible to have internal systematic unity on an *abstract* level⁹⁷. Fallibility is therefore in a coherentist view accidental rather than essential. Realism is necessary in order to secure the fallibilist point that any view is fallible in the sense that it is not only inconsistent but also wrong or inadequate.⁹⁸ So, the

⁹⁷ There would be no problem in (but then again: no reason of...) adhering to the following view if there were no commitment towards some external relations: $(x) Fx \rightarrow Gx$, $Fx \vdash Gx$; key: $F = x$ is a swan; $G = x$ is white.

⁹⁸ A similar point has been made in Bernstein 1991, p. 336; Wellmer 1989, pp. 328+333-42; Lafont 1993, pp. 503-4; 1994, pp. 1020-3; 1995, pp. 122. Notice, however, that Lafont talks about fallibility as part of the *normativity* of truth-claims (the *Überschuß* as a norm for truth). But I take it that this is to be understood in the same sense as I talk about

substantial notion of fallibilism presupposes realism. Furthermore, I take it that a notion of reality without substantial fallibilism would be very hard to distinguish from naive idealism: if fallibility – understood as the possibility of something external demonstrating the faultiness of an approach – were not granted, it would be difficult to account for the sense in which the approach is *directed* at and *incited* by something at all. If the account is always already in accordance with what it is about, it would not make sense to distinguish between the approach and the aboutness – and consequently it would not make sense to talk about an incitement or direction.

So, one *can* argue against both substantial fallibilism and realism (in the sense that I have articulated in this subsection), but one cannot have the one without the other. And I hope to have demonstrated by now that it is at least not *unreasonable* to adhere to the articulated versions of both.

I will now return to the discussion between Putnam and Rorty that I left behind in subsection (III,1,c), and explain what the significance is of a discussion between a pragmatic realism and a pragmatism that rejects the general relevance of linguistic practices being incited by and directed towards reality.

The first point in relation to which the difference is decisive is in understanding Rorty's notion of ethnocentrism. Rorty defines the ethnocentrist stance (to which he subscribes) thus,

I use the notion of ethnocentrism as a link between antirepresentationalism and political liberalism. I argue that an antirepresentationalist view of inquiry leaves one without a skyhook with which to escape from the ethnocentrism produced by acculturation, but that the liberal culture of recent times has found a strategy for avoiding the disadvantage of ethnocentrism. This is to be open to encounters with other actual and possible cultures, and to make this openness central to its self-image. This culture is an *ethnos* which prides itself on its suspicion of ethnocentrism... (Rorty 1991, p. 2 – emphasis by Rorty).

It is an important aspect of Rorty's notion of ethnocentrism that it is not necessarily a *closed* ethnocentrism. On the contrary, he defines the Western liberal (social democratic) societies as superior to other societies *because* of their openness towards other cultures.⁹⁹ The point with the ethnocentric characterization is that we *are* ethnocentrically embedded, and *that it is a good thing to be aware of it*. Later in the same text, Rorty claims that,

If one reinterprets objectivity as intersubjectivity [...] then one will drop the question of how to get in touch with "mind-independent and language-independent reality." One will replace it with questions like "What

reality as the aim of normativity. Habermas subscribes to fallibilism too (cf. Habermas 1986, pp. 350-3; Habermas 2003, pp. 27-9) and links it to his notion of different worlds (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, p. 82) – as I will indicate below (pp. 141ff) Habermas' account of fallibilism is not unproblematic, though.

⁹⁹ The actual openness of liberal societies is certainly disputable. It is not decisive for my current point, though, so I will not go further into it. Rorty accentuates this aspect of his liberalism in Rorty 1986; 1990.

are the limits of our community? [...]” These are political questions rather than metaphysical or epistemological questions (Rorty 1991, p. 13).

The reason why Rorty claims that we should drop the notion of objectivity and reinterpret it as a kind of intersubjectivity is the insight that any notion of objectivity is dependent on normative outlooks that are shaped by the intersubjectively shaped life-worlds in which we live. This is a quite Habermasian thought. But (cf. above, paragraph III,1,b,2) Habermas does not suggest to *drop* the notion of objectivity altogether – and I think rightly so. The idea of dropping the notion of objectivity would suggest that objectivity could be *reduced* to be a product of intersubjectivity. And even though I agree that any notion of objectivity is shaped by intersubjective outlooks, it does not follow from this that objectivity is reducible to intersubjectivity. It does not follow from the idea that reality is not “mind-independent and language-independent” that reality should be understood as absolutely *determined* by mind and language. It is still possible to think of reality as a *meeting* between mind/language and something else. And as I have argued: the very notion of linguistic practices presupposes an external relation – the incitement, directedness and fallibility of normativity.

Actually, Rorty’s ethnocentrism-point refutes the idea that intersubjective outlooks exhausts linguistic practices, because the notion of being able to realize insufficiencies or embeddedness of our own outlooks, presupposes that it is possible to evaluate the outlooks in relation to something. This “something” is not approachable from a neutral outlook, but it has to be approachable from *another* outlook – i.e. it is necessary that it is possible to relate to something that is shared across different outlooks. This shared phenomenon does not *have to* be understood in objective terms, but it does demonstrate that if the ethnocentric point is to be maintained it has to be granted, that the intersubjective outlooks cannot account for the full story – at the very least a substitution of objectivity with intersubjectivity would demand that intersubjectivity is understood in realistic terms (i.e. the otherness of the others is not an unproblematic sharing-relationship). And even if this is granted, I think it remains to be articulated in what sense this kind of otherness (i.e. other people) emerges into objective reality (things).

In the quote, Rorty suggests that we replace the questions of reality with questions about limits, and later on the same page he claims that these limits become apparent when asking “with what communities should you identify” and “what should I do with my aloneness” (Rorty 1991, p. 13). He stresses that “these are political questions rather than metaphysical or epistemological questions” (Rorty 1991, p. 13).

I agree that it is an important aspect of reality that it is limiting – that is what I articulate as the fallibility-aspect: reality is what shows certain approaches to be adverse. But reality is also what we are incited by and directed towards – reality is only a limit *because* it is what we are incited

by and directed towards! The limit-aspect of reality entails a *potentiality* aspect, and to think of reality merely as limitations is consequently too narrow.

Even *if* it was granted that reality is merely to be understood as limitation, it would not make his view convincing. For example the idea that metaphysical and epistemological questions can be reduced to political questions is puzzling. It is connected with the idea that objectivity should be understood as intersubjectivity, and his explication of which questions that are decisive in that connection shows furthermore that subjectivity is decisive.¹⁰⁰ Once again, even though I agree that Rorty makes an important point by stressing that epistemological and metaphysical questions can be illuminated by analysing the political questions of which they are part, I find it puzzling that Rorty does not see that the reverse is also the case: epistemological and metaphysical questions also shape what we can think of as relevant political questions. Rorty is certainly right that the lack of attention to how political questions (in broad: how we want to live together in cultures and between cultures) have shaped our approach to epistemological and metaphysical questions (broadly: how can we understand the world, what is the physical world like, etc.). But the influence is mutual. To take an example: whether we understand the world as a product of an omnipotent and loving God, as the gradual coming to itself of the absolute Spirit, or as a product of determinate mechanisms is decisive for how we understand political problems. Therefore it would be wrong to try to understand prevailing political movements in abstraction of such questions.

Rorty's own points about ethnocentrism would furthermore be strengthened with a more subtle notion of limitation. Rorty wants to use the ethnocentrism-insights to demonstrate why some cultures are superior in relation to others (e.g. in Rorty 1986; 1989, ch. 9; 1990). If the limitations were merely matters of political relevance, it would be difficult to claim that the best society would be the society that was open towards its own limitations. Rather, one should say that the best society was the one that was least limiting. Rorty could meet that objection by stating that the least limiting society is the one that is open towards its own limitations. This is, however, not necessarily so. It is very well possible to think of societies that are rather self-constraining even though they are open towards the limitations. Actually, a persistent objection against the Western democratic industrialized societies has been that we are quite aware of a lot of our societal limitations (limitations like unemployment, subjective loneliness, exploitation of poor countries, etc. – limitations that may be said to stem from the extreme efficiency that characterizes these societies) but that when it comes to it, we are not willing to do anything about them.

¹⁰⁰ Actually one could object that it is a rather subjectively coloured notion of intersubjectivity he seems to be operating with: an intersubjective community consisting of individuals that have decided to connect – individually.

If the awareness of limitations is to be a sustainable ideal, it has to be claimed that limitations are unavoidable. If limitations are unavoidable, it follows that the non-limiting society is not possible. Then it is never an option that the prevailing society is non-limiting, and then the best we can do is to be aware of the limitations. If non-limitation *was* an option it would be absurd to request that the complete (i.e. unlimited) society should be aware of its limitations. In order to substantiate the claim that non-limitation is not possible, it is necessary with a substantial notion of fallibilism – which again presupposes a substantial notion of reality. Consequently, there *is* something significant to say about the point that normativity relates to some kind of reality (contrary to what I have quoted him for above, p. 70f): it is a fundament for claiming that awareness of own limitations is a measure of the superiority of a society.

To my knowledge, Rorty has not reflected explicitly on these objections. In (Rorty 1991, pp. 13-4) he writes as if it *is* possible to have a society without inner tensions (apparently he holds that this is what is described in Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984*), but that it would be frightening. His claim seems to be that these societies are frightening because the lack of inner tension leads to monolithic societies – i.e. societies that are not aware of the strengths of other societies. But he fails to explain in what sense there could be anything for the non-tensed society to learn from societies that have such tensions. Would it not be more accurate to say that the societies in the mentioned novels actually are imbued with heavy tensions – they have just been very successful in hiding them. I think so. We cannot account for why a perfect society should be aware of limitations – since there are none.

So, I find it reasonable to join Putnam – against Rorty – and assert that there are significant consequences to draw from the fact that language and knowledge relate to something real. But at the same time, Rorty's reluctance as to Putnam's understanding of reality carries with it a justified reservation. Reality cannot only be understood as that which *constrains* normativity. Reality is not only significant as a hold against relativism. Since reality is also what forces us to revise normativity, reality may be said to have the role as a *relativizing* factor too. Reality is what sometimes forces us to revise a normativity that seemed to be unshakable. Furthermore, reality is the reason why any normativity should always be thought of as potentially revisable.

To my knowledge, Putnam has never affiliated himself explicitly with the project of critical theory (even though he is quite sympathetic towards Habermas' account – cf. Putnam 2001). This is understandable in the light of his understanding of pragmatic realism as mainly a hold against relativism. Neither has Rorty affiliated himself with the critical project. He has on the contrary disputed the very possibility of that project as an argumentative undertaking – cf. above, pp. 21f. This is understandable in the light of his general rejection of the significance of reality: if there

is no hold at all against relativism (if there is nothing relevant to say about *what* it is one is discussing) it is difficult to see how a real argument can take place. In order to have critical theory as a decisive project, it is necessary to realize that our practices are a result of a joining of heterogenous elements – that any practices navigates within *tensions*.

c. Critique and Tension.

Tension can be a universal reference-point for critique because there is necessarily a tension between normativity and reality: on the one hand normativity is incited by and directed towards something external – reality. On the other hand the normatively shaped approach towards reality is thought in terms of relevance and consistency – this is necessary in order to obtain the systematism and consistency. I.e.: normatively shaped approaches towards reality happen through a focus on certain aspects at the cost of others. Normatively shaped approaches do not account for reality in its entirety (whatever that would mean...). And this is the reason why it is always fallible – a fallibility that can show in (at least) two different ways: the account can be proven wrong and/or inadequate.

I hope to have convinced the reader by now that it is always possible to point out tensions in any presented view. This is not to say that it is always appropriate to do so, and it is certainly not to say that every view can be criticized at once: since every view carries tensions in it, it follows (tautologically) that every *alternative* view that is presented critically will do so too. It is therefore not possible to point out tensions (i.e. criticize) without accepting certain (other) tensions – in most cases it will, however, be implied that the accepted tensions are less severe than the criticized. To criticize involves taking certain (criticizable) views (i.e. the foundation of the critique) to bear less severe tensions than other views (i.e. the object of critique). Hence, it might be that there is a general consensus that the tensions beneath a prevailing common view are thought to be preferable in relation to the alternatives that it has been possible to come upon – which is why we generally do not criticize that view. Tensions are – as part of reality – themselves only to be approached through a normative relevance-outlook.

The question remains though: is it fair to claim that it will always have critical implications to point out tensions? First part of answering that question will be that there is not only *one* sense in which the pointing out of tensions have critical implications. The point is an embedded reference-point – not a universal starting-point – for critique (on this distinction, see above pp. 30ff). In different situations and contexts, the critical implications of tensions will be different. Tensions between reality and rules, reality and concepts, reality and sentences, reality and values,

reality and moral claims, reality and rights, reality and laws, etc. have different consequences when realized. Conceptual tensions (for example) imply problems in our understanding of the world; moral tensions imply problems in certain practices in the world; so do legal tensions, but these problems relate to certain politically adopted norms as well, whereas moral tensions might relate purely to personally or religiously avowed norms; etc.. Rules, concepts, sentences, values, moral claims, rights and laws relate differently to reality, and for this reason the consequences of pointing out problems in this relation will come out different.

The reason why it makes sense, nevertheless, to say that it has always critical implications to point out tensions between normativity and reality is that it indicates a *failure*. If it is possible to point out a tension between a normativity and the reality that it is directed towards then it has been shown that the directedness has not succeeded – either because reality is not as it should be, or because the norm is shown not to be correct, realistic, right, fruitful, etc. That is: we think we achieve (e.g.) knowledge about reality – but we actually do not (at least not adequately); we express certain inner feelings – but actually they are not understood by the addressees, or they are contradicted by other indications of how we feel; we proclaim certain norms for social behaviour – but actually these norms are contradicted by our actual behaviour; we prescribe certain moral rules – but actually they are not possible to live up to; etc.

Critique means to point out a failing relationship between normativity and reality. But this is not to say that critique points out a *moral* problem. Critique does not necessarily mean to point out something that *should* (in a moral sense) be fixed. That is at the most the case if the critique relates to moral questions. Critique rather points out a problem or a failure in achieving something: on the one hand, the normativity is directed towards some reality, but on the other hand this has (to a certain extent) not succeeded. In saying that reality is the aim of normativity, it is not implied a moral obligation towards representing reality adequately. It is rather a norm for success (certainly in a rather broad sense) – not a norm for being good.¹⁰¹ Critique in this sense, only points out a discrepancy between something aimed at, and what is actually achieved.

In that sense, critique has – cf. Kauppinen’s framework above, pp. 100ff – to be understood in internal terms: it is only because the addressee already aims at something and makes certain presuppositions that the critique can be established. Every view is criticizable since it implicitly

¹⁰¹ That is why I am sceptical towards Habermas’ turning a *critical* project into a *moral* project (e.g. in Habermas 1983; 1991a – cf. above p. 87, footnote 76): even though it may be granted that Habermas has pointed out certain necessary conditions for communicative actions to *succeed*, it does not follow that we – in a moral sense – *should* respect these preconditions. That only follows if it can be shown that (non-egocentric) goodness only can happen through communicative actions (i.e. conceptually shaped social actions). And this has not convincingly been shown.

is directed towards some reality and this directedness is always problematic. Consequently, every view is open to reconstructive criticism. Having articulated this point through a relation between the normative relevance-claims and the directedness/fallibility-aspects of reality, it may in a certain sense be said that the reconstructive critique has been established as a strong critique (position (d_{ii}) in Kauppinen's framework) – founded on *universally* prevailing problematics. But since these notions are in various situations indefinably open to various interpretations they can only serve as weak universal reference-points – not as strong universal starting-points – for critique. They can serve as notions from which the critique can start (by questioning the presupposed relation between these notions), not as notions from which the critique can get to its end (the answers towards which the critique aims). So, even though there is necessarily a tension between normativity and reality (and in this sense the critique can be strong (d_{ii})), any explication of this tension can itself be disputed and dissolved (and in this sense the critique can only be weak (d_i)).

* * *

Summing up, it has been shown in what way it makes sense to say that there is always potentially a tension at play between normativity and reality. That is due to the special character of the meeting between normativity and reality that is characterized by an aim towards both systematicity and adequacy. Even though such tensions are unavoidable, it has nevertheless critical implications if they are pointed out, because it demonstrates a *failure*: something has been sought accounted for, but the critique has shown this accounting to be flawed.

Would it make sense to think of a critique that does not consist in such tension-pointing? I have already reflected on that question above (pp. 94ff): it would lead to a heavy burden of proof to claim that this could not be the case. What I have argued is mainly that it makes sense to characterize *this* practice as critique. Hereby I have furthermore demonstrated that critique always potentially is at play. It is consequently not a question whether or not critique is possible. It is not only possible, it is *unavoidable*.

This does certainly not solve all the questions that the defensive situation of critical theory is a product of, because an obvious objection towards my view could be, “Point granted! But how *substantial* can critique then be? Does the point made, not threaten to empty the notion of critique – since any advanced critique may be avoided by other points of criticism?” I will certainly have to agree that the notion of critique that I defend is more humble than the view that was initially defended by early critical theory (as defended in for example Horkheimer 1937; 1967, 5th lecture; Horkheimer/Adorno 1944). Since there is no robust universal norm that can function as the

starting point for critique, it is less certain how to assess critical practices, and it is certainly not defensible to state that the critic unequivocally is *progressive*, as opposed to the regressive addressee – since the critique might very well be directed against an attempt to establish a progressively oriented criticism. But it *does* show that conservatism and neutralism is not defensible: conservatism (as the view that the present state of affairs is to be defended at all cost) is not defensible since it is always possible to show deficiencies in that state of affairs. Neutralism (as the point that the defended description actually just describes the state of affairs as they actually are – without “ideological” colouring) is not defensible because – as demonstrated – every view is shaped by a normative outlook.

I think thus that the sketched view can be used to support a kind of moderate relativism as opposed to two extremes that both would make critique impossible: (a) absolute staticism and (b) absolute relativism.¹⁰² (a) On the one hand, absolute staticism is not possible, because it is always possible to show a prevailing state of affairs to be problematic, it can therefore always be demonstrated that in certain respects it should be revised. No view can justify its own absolute and persistent relevance. In order to maintain a certain norm of relevance as prevailing, it is therefore necessary to remain open towards challenging opposing views, and engage in arguments with them. It *is*, certainly, very often possible to defend a view against criticism and revision – it is not always obvious that revision would be *good* or *better* than standstill. But there is always a *possibility* of a better alternative turning up. (b) On the other hand, absolute relativism is certainly not defensible either. The normative side of the schism presupposes that a norm of relevance is held on to, and this norm cannot be questioned at the same time as the critique is put forward. The reality-side of the schism determines that certain accounts of the world are unfruitful (the directedness will fail or at least show to be awkward).

So, every critique happens in a dialectic or schism between a *necessity* and *impossibility* of holding on to fixed views. In order to explain why both absolute relativism and staticism is impossible, I will now turn to another aspect of critique that springs from its foundation in normativity and reality: I will turn to the reflective and receptive aspects of critique. Critique is, on the one hand, a reflective or spontaneous activity performed by human agents, but on the other hand – due to the reality-aspect – this spontaneous activity is both incited by and directed towards something that critique has to answer for. That is what I will call the receptivity-aspect of critique,

¹⁰² I choose the term “moderate relativism” rather than “moderate staticism” because I find it a bit awkward to think of a staticism (which is a digital term – either something is static or not) that is moderate (which is a gradual characterization).

and receptivity is not only important when evaluating critiques that have already been developed – it is also important to be aware of how it incites critique.

3. Reflectivity and Receptivity in Critique.

Taking a pragmatist stance, it is tempting to focus on the intentional, creative, spontaneous and reflective aspects of critique – i.e. the doing-aspects (etymologically, *pragma* (Greek): civil business, deed act – from *prassein* (Greek): to do, act, perform).¹⁰³ It is natural for pragmatists to focus on what we can and have to do about the prevailing states of affairs. Critique is an argumentative practice that *reflects* upon the relationship between normativity and reality.

The doing-aspect of linguistic practices – among these, critique – is what I have articulated as normativity. But in the light of the embeddedness-insights it has become gradually clear that it is not possible to find a persistent normative Archimedean point that can serve as the starting point for critique. The focus on the doing-aspect of critique has made it seem as if critique vacillates between various contingent directions (depending on the contingent starting-point from which it is being articulated), without any general fruitfulness.

Due to the close relationship between normativity and reality, reality cannot on the immediate level serve as such an Archimedean point either: varying normative outlooks will also alter how we approach reality. Our doings (among these: our criticism of the states of affairs) alter reality, and our normative outlook furthermore alters how we approach it. There is consequently not *one* stable reality that can serve as a robust starting point for critique.

We are thus left with a relationship between normativity and reality that seems to be indefinably open to variation. But indefinably is not the same as infinitely (cf. Kant 1781/7, B536-43). We cannot in every situation choose to do everything. Reality implies (among other things) that we are restricted. The incitement-, directedness- and fallibility aspects of reality indicate that when doing something, we have to (are forced to) be receptive of how fruitful the doing is – in relation to what was sought achieved with it. The notion of doing implies an object of the doing.

If it is granted that normativity is (at least part of) the doing-aspect of linguistic practices, the establishment of focus through relevance-claims, then reality, as the counter-part of this focussing practice, appears as being reduced, rarefied, limited. In that sense, the normative approach to

¹⁰³ Cf. R.K. Barnhart (ed.) *The Barnhart dictionary of etymology*. New York: The HW Wilson Company, 1988 (entry word “pragmatic”).

reality is tensed: on the one hand being incited by and directed towards some reality, and on the other hand this directedness being flawed because of the reduction. An important part of critique is consequently to be *receptive* towards such tensions.

In this section, I will go into these two aspects of critique – reflectivity and receptivity. I will argue that some of the dividing lines in the contemporary debate around critique stem from a different emphasis on these aspects. Whereas some critical theorists emphasize the reflective character of critique, others emphasize the receptive character. I will argue that the view of Habermas (and views affiliated with- and inspired by it) represents a strong account for how it is possible to say something significant about the reflective aspect of critique. Furthermore, I will argue that the view of Foucault represents a strong account for the receptive aspects of critique.

Inside critical theory, the Foucault/Habermas debate is a commonly discussed issue. Habermas has on various occasions criticized Foucault's view (Habermas 1980a (esp. pp. 462-4); 1985, lecture IX-XI). Unfortunately Foucault only occasionally related to Habermas point of view, and usually only in two or three sentences.

Subsequent discussions on this debate have mainly concentrated on whether or not Habermas' critique is well-founded and fair (as for example collected in Kelly 1994a; Ashenden/Owen 1999; see also Dreyfus/Rabinow 1986; Hoy 1981; 1994; McCarthy 1994; Schmidt 1996) – probably because Habermas' critique is more elaborate than Foucault's. Assessments of Foucault's view on Habermas are less common. I will argue, however, that it is possible to point out a symmetric lack of sensitivity in the writings of the two: just as Habermas' rejection of Foucault's view stems from a lack of sensitivity towards the importance of critical receptivity that is demonstrated in Foucault's writings, Foucault demonstrates in some of his critiques of Habermas a lack of sensitivity towards the importance of the reflective aspect of critique that is pointed out in Habermas' writings.

Before going into that discussion, it is necessary to emphasize a conceptual point. I talk about a relation between reflectivity and receptivity. It is tempting to equate this pair of concepts with activity and passivity. I agree that it is reasonable to say that reflectivity is most active in character, whereas receptivity is more passive. But I do not think the distinctions should be confused, because the overlap is not complete. Especially the conflation of receptivity and passivity is unlucky – for (at least) two reasons: (1) for one, it makes sense to be actively receptive. As will become clear below, this is in a certain sense what the writings of Foucault urges us to become: in our passive receptivity we have accepted certain patterns of reception – shaped by the normative outlook – that a more active reception would be able to demonstrate as limited. (2) For another, Kant demonstrated in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* that in a certain sense,

receptivity cannot be thought of in abstraction from a synthetic activity – the holding together of the perceived manifold (in space and time – Kant 1781/7, B33-73; also in B104). Without committing myself to his entire explication of our epistemic situation,¹⁰⁴ I think that this part of his thought is still convincing.

Reflectivity should not be conflated with activity either. Even though Habermas' notion of reflectivity is different from mine,¹⁰⁵ his general approach demonstrates how reflectivity (in the sense explicated above) sometimes is passive: sometimes the normative focus (Habermas: "der symbolische Reproduktion der Lebenswelt") becomes automatic and habitual. In that case it makes sense to characterize reflectivity as passive.¹⁰⁶

In the following subsections, I will investigate how reflectivity and receptivity are at play in critique. I will do this through the works of Habermas and Foucault. In subsection (a) I will demonstrate how Habermas has given a strong account of how it is possible to establish reflective critique in the post-metaphysical situation. I will argue that the strategy taken is strong because he reveals some necessary preconditions for certain practices that it would have severe consequences to refuse to participate in. Whereas I will argue that Habermas' focus on the reflective aspect of critique is rather successful, I will on the other hand show that the lack of attention in Habermas' approach as to the receptive aspects of critique leaves a certain blindness as to the value of other kinds of critique – e.g. the critique that is carried through by Foucault. In subsection (b) I will argue that Foucault represents an approach to critique that focusses on the receptive aspect. I will argue that Foucault does not try to criticize in abstraction from normativity, but rather that – due to the emphasis on reception – he has to stress that no normativity at the outset can be taken to be *universally* valid (in an absolute sense). This also shapes his objections against Habermas, and I will – drawing on the above reflections on universality (section III,2) – argue that (at least in these objections) his focus on receptivity to an unnecessary extent radicalizes his objection towards universality.

¹⁰⁴ Actually, I *would* be willing to subscribe to very extensive parts of it – but for now it would lead too far astray to explicate *how far* I would go.

¹⁰⁵ Generally, Habermas' notion of reflectivity is very close to his notion of critique (see for example Habermas 1967a, pp. 303-5; 1968, p. 363; 1981, vol. 1, pp. 38-40; vol. 2, p. 221). More on this in subsection (a).

¹⁰⁶ In Habermas' view reflectivity is what *breaks out of* this passive reproduction – cf. Habermas 1981, vol. 2, p. 221.

a. Reflectivity in Critique.

The reflective aspect of critique is probably the most obvious aspect of critique: critique as a practice is a kind of doing. Critique in abstraction from some kind of intentionality, creativity, spontaneity, etc. is difficult to comprehend. And since philosophy also has a marked reflective character, it is natural that philosophers often focus on this aspect when explicating a critical theory.

Habermas is an example of this. As early as in “Arbeit und Interaktion” (1967) he demonstrates how the Kantian notion of the transcendental apperception determines a notion of the human subject as a (self-) reflective subject (Habermas 1967b, p. 12), Through Fichte and further on to early Hegel this notion is, according to Habermas, transformed into a notion of reflectivity that is fundamentally shaped by family, language and work – i.e. it is socially shaped. He criticizes late-Hegel for leaving out the social orientation in his explication of the reflective character of Spirit – whereby he (Hegel) reverts to a philosophy of the subject (Habermas 1967b, pp. 36-44).¹⁰⁷ The relationship between reflection and critique is not articulated in this text, but in the subsequent book,

Denn der Zirkel, in den sich Erkenntnistheorie unvermeidlich verstrickt, gemahnt daran, daß die Erkenntniskritik nicht der Spontaneität eines Ursprungs mächtig ist, sondern als Reflexion auf ein Vorgängiges angewiesen bleibt, auf das sie sich richtet, indem sie zugleich selber daraus hervorgegangen ist (Habermas 1968, p. 16).

and even later in the following quote,

Der [communicative] Akteur ist jetzt nicht nur mit drei Weltkonzepten [i.e. the objective, social and subjective] ausgestattet, er kann sie auch reflexiv verwenden [...] dabei wird vorausgesetzt, daß die kommunikativ Handelnden zu *gegenseitiger Kritik fähig* sind (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, p. 173 – italics by Habermas).

So, critique is seen as a reflection on antecedents (not on origins) – a being able to reflect on the lifeworld. I.e.: Habermas understands critique as a becoming aware of in what sense the present is shaped by the past. But it is also – and this is where he thinks the merely *interpretive* approaches go wrong – a transcending of this relationship,

Gadamer's Vorurteil für das Recht der durch Tradition ausgewiesenen Vorurteile bestreitet die Kraft der Reflexion, die sich doch darin bewährt, daß sie den Anspruch von Traditionen auch abweisen kann [...]

¹⁰⁷ This reading of Hegel's development has been repeated several times in Habermas' writings – e.g. in Habermas 1968, pp. 14-35; 1985, pp. 26-64; 1999, pp. 186-229. The reading has been rather influential in critical theory – Honneth's reading of Hegel, as it is presented in Honneth 1992, pp. 11-105, is an example of a reading that is very close to Habermas'.

Reflexion arbeitet sich an der Faktizität der überlieferten Normen nicht spurlos ab. Sie ist zur Nachträglichkeit verurteilt, aber im Rückblick entfaltet sie rückwirkende Kraft (Habermas 1967a, p. 305).

In Habermas' view, this is what German Idealism has taught us. But Habermas stresses that it is important that the notions of reflection and (consequently) critique are not primarily thought as purely subjectively based, since this entails a too sharp distinction between self and otherness, and this would entail that the otherness is seen in relation to what we can achieve from it – i.e. an instrumental relation becomes unavoidable (see also Habermas 1985, pp. 39-40). This is the reason why he criticizes the development in late-Hegel's writings. In *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981) and *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* (1985) Habermas undertakes to explicate why the philosophy of the mind/subject-paradigm fails.

The main problem with the philosophy of the mind/subject-paradigm is that an atomized account of agents makes it difficult to explain in what sense agents may be said to be committed to each other. This would on the one hand make it impossible to have social communities. On the other hand – more generally – it would make it hard to account for how argumentation is possible (cf. Rorty's objections against critical arguments – above, pp. 21ff). Finally – and this is the cornerstone of Habermas' thought from (at least¹⁰⁸) the 1980's and onwards – it would (even more generally) make communication impossible.

The third point is the starting point in late-Habermas' writings. One can understand his work thus: given that we actually *do* have communication, which preconditions do then have to be presupposed? This leads Habermas to contemplations of what we take to be rational communicative actions. And he argues that we have to think of communicative actions as *verständigungsorientiert* rather than *erfolgsorientiert* – i.e. communicative actions are not exhausted by instrumental descriptions. We do not *only* communicate in order to achieve something (at least in an egocentric sense – cf. Habermas 1981, vol. 1, pp. 150-1), rather the primary aim is to reach a mutual understanding. This claim is qualified in several ways. In Habermas 1988b, pp. 66-7 he states the following reasons: (a) in communicative actions the distinction between the illocutionary means and ends is not as clear as in instrumental actions – the *telos* of language and its *medium* affect one another; (b) secondly, the speaker cannot reach her end causally, because the posed validity-claims are open to both rational certification and denial; (c) thirdly, in communicative actions the participators do not merely consider each other as counter-actors, but rather as co-actors in a socially shared lifeworld.

¹⁰⁸ The “(at least)” parenthesis is necessary because it would make sense to argue that the communicative points can be found in his writings as early as 1967 (e.g. in Habermas 1967a; 1971; 1973b; 1976 – this development is well documented in Habermas 1984a) – though not as pronounced as from Habermas 1981 and onwards.

To Reach mutual understanding is not only the aim of communicative actions – it is also a necessary precondition for communication to happen,

Wir verstehen einen Sprechakt nur, wenn wir wissen, was ihn akzeptabel macht [...] Die Bedeutung der kommunikativen Akte kann er nur verstehen, weil diese in den Kontext verständigungsorientierten *Handelns* eingebettet sind (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, p. 168 – italics by Habermas).

Habermas' notion of lifeworld is – among other things – an articulation of what it means to be embedded in a context of communicative actions with well-known significance (Habermas 1981, vol. 107; 1985, pp. 348-9). The lifeworld is both a horizon and resource for communicative actions. That means that on the one hand it is the *horizon* that we are inextricably embedded in, because a radical transcendence of it would lead to incomprehensibility. But on the other hand, it is a *resource* in the sense that it is the starting point for reflective analysis with a certain emancipatory power. The reason why the communicative part of the lifeworld can have this dual character is that it is characterized by the advancing of *validity-claims* (cf. above, pp. 21ff and 54ff). The validity-claims are determined by their fundamentally criticizable character (see also Habermas 1985, pp. 375-6). Validity-claims are characterized by an openness to both certification and denial (at least at the linguistic level: the *utterance* as such is open to both a yes and no-attitude, but in real life there may certainly be non-linguistic parameters that prevent both attitudes from being possible). But since the critique will have to happen *through* (other aspects of) the lifeworld, critique can only happen in relation to certain limited areas of the lifeworld,

Deren befreiende Kraft richtet sich gegen *einzelne* Illusionen (Habermas 1985, p. 350 – emphasis by Habermas).

The lifeworld cannot *abolish* itself.

As the term indicates, the lifeworld is the world we live in. Instead of a subject/world relationship, Habermas therefore speaks of an actor/world relationship – the world is not merely something we observe, it is something we participate in. According to Habermas, the lifeworld is the primary concept of the world.¹⁰⁹ The idea of a (thing-like) metaphysical *ansich* world as the primary underlying world that is more real than the lifeworld is a misunderstanding that springs from the general subject-object oriented Western thinking. The problem with this idea is that it is a “*Verkürzung und Verzerrung eines in der kommunikative Alltagspraxis immer schon wirksamen, aber selektiv ausgeschöpften Potentials*” (Habermas 1985, p. 362 – emphasis by Habermas). Habermas acknowledges (and it would certainly be odd not to) the importance of the subject-object relation, but the one-sided focus on this relation in Western thought has led to the

¹⁰⁹ “Die Lebenswelt bildet in der Handlungssituation einen nicht-hintergehbaren Horizont; sie ist eine Totalität ohne Rückseite” (Habermas 1981, vol. 2, p. 225).

misrecognition of how this relation is only *one* side of a more complex relation that should also include (at least) the social aspect. The importance of the social aspect becomes more obvious if we understand the world in relation to a living activity – rather than as mere being. Therefore, what is needed is that

das Paradigma der Erkenntnis von Gegenständen durch das Paradigma der Verständigung zwischen sprach- und handlungsfähigen Subjekten abgelöst werden muß (Habermas 1985, p. 345 – see also pp. 360-8).

To replace the epistemological paradigm with a Verständigungs-paradigm does not mean that the understanding of things becomes unimportant. But it *does* mean that the understanding of things (objectivity), expression of inner states (subjectivity), and regulation of interaction between subjects (the social) should not be understood in abstraction from each other, because in a Verständigung-relation all these three aspects are of mutually defining importance. In the context of traditional Western philosophy that means (according to Habermas) that the importance of the social part of this relationship should be more clearly accentuated. In relation to the communicative part of the lifeworld, this means that language (as a socially shared entity) should not be seen merely as a *means* to establish a relationship between a subject and an object. Language is an integral part of what objectivity and subjectivity could mean in the first place (just as – certainly – objectivity and subjectivity are integral parts of language).¹¹⁰

In the lifeworld, rationality is of high importance, because it is what constitutes continuity. Habermas distinguishes in the lifeworld between three fields of continuity that are all established through a symbolic reproduction,

Unter dem funktionalen *Aspekt der Verständigung* dient kommunikatives Handeln der Tradition und der Erneuerung kulturellen Wissens; unter dem Aspekt der *Handlungskoordination* dient es der sozialen Integration und der Herstellung von Solidarität; unter dem *Aspekt der Sozialisation* schließlich dient kommunikatives Handeln der Ausbildung von personalen Identitäten. Die symbolischen Strukturen der Lebenswelt reproduzieren sich auf dem Wege der Kontinuierung von gültigem Wissen, der Stabilisierung von Gruppensolidarität und der Heranbildung zurechnungsfähiger Akteure. [...] Diesen Vorgängen der *kulturellen Reproduktion*, der *sozialen Integration* und der *Sozialisation* entsprechen die *strukturellen Komponente* der Lebenswelt Kultur, Gesellschaft und Person (Habermas 1981, vol. 2, pp. 208-9 – emphasis by Habermas).

In this quote, several points are important: first of all, (1) it is noticeable that all three fields are thought of in terms of preservation (Tradition, Integration, Identitäten) and innovation (Erneuerung, Herstellung von, Ausbildung von). (2) Furthermore, it is important that these lifeworld-fields (culture, society and personality) are understood as outcomes of *spontaneous* acts

¹¹⁰ In this sense, Habermas is on a par with Taylor in his rejection of the designative tradition in Western linguistic philosophy (as articulated in Taylor 1980; 1985c; 1991). The Foucaultian idea of a substantial relationship between words and things (Foucault 1969, pp. 65-6) is also cognate with it.

(something established, created): establishment of continuity (Kontinuierung), stabilization and edification (Heranbildung). It is true that this spontaneity is not articulated as pure *production*, but as a symbolic *re*-production (i.e. a production that is a re-establishment of something) – this would point more in direction of a responsive (i.e. receptive) approach, rather than a spontaneous (reflective) approach. But, as is clear from the quote, what is re-produced is the established unity/wholeness of the lifeworld itself. The lifeworld “needs” this repeated producing partly because of its dual character (preservation and innovation), partly because of the need to incorporate particular occurring events (Habermas 1981, vol. 2, p. 207). The latter reason, certainly *does* reveal a certain awareness of the importance of receptivity in the lifeworld. But it is not very accentuated.

(3) Another important point in the quote is that the symbolic reproduction as a whole – i.e. *both* the preservative *and* the innovative aspects of the fields – are thought of in terms of continuation, stabilization and edification. And since the innovative aspects come about through critical reflection, this shows that Habermas thinks of critical reflection in terms of continuation, stabilization and edification (later in the text, the cultural part of the reproduction is further explicated as *Kohärenz* and *Rationalität* – Habermas 1981, vol. 2, p. 212). Since critique actually emerges from the lifeworld (which has both a preserving and an innovative character) the critique does not *break* with the lifeworld, but merely carries out some of the potentials of it.

In order to understand this claim, several points has to be stressed. (i) First point is that continuity is not equivalent with stagnation. To say that something is continuous is consequently not to indicate preservation. On the contrary, continuity does not make sense without a certain change – because then there would not be a relationship to characterize as such. “Continuity” merely indicates that there is a close relationship between the earlier and later stage. (ii) This interpretation is confirmed later on, when Habermas talks about “die *reflexive Brechung* der Symbolischen Reproduktion der Lebenswelt”. It is clear from this that continuity, stability and *Bildung* are not understood in purely static terms. On the other hand, it is significant that he uses the word “*Brechung*” as opposed to the more radical “*Abbrechung*”: the reflection only affects/excites/refracts the symbolic reproduction – it does not actually *break* with it. (iii) Third point is the point that I have already mentioned above: the lifeworld is not itself only conservative in character, and a *continuation* of innovative approaches may therefore very well be innovative itself. This is especially clear when looking at his description of the communicatively advanced validity-claims,

Sie [i.e. the speakers who advance validity-claims] nehmen nicht mehr *geradehin* auf etwas in der objektiven, sozialen oder subjektiven Welt Bezug, sondern relativieren ihre Äußerungen und der Möglichkeit, daß deren Geltung von anderen Akteuren bestritten wird. [...] Der Begriff des kommunikativen

Handelns setzt Sprache als Medium einer Art von Verständigungsprozessen voraus, in deren Verlauf die Teilnehmer, indem sie sich auf eine Welt beziehen, gegenseitig Geltungsansprüche erheben, die akzeptiert und bestritten werden können (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, p. 148 – emphasis by Habermas).

The advancing of validity-claims entails that it is made vulnerable to criticism, because the speech-act is being related to a world that the co-participants also have access to. But this leads to the (4) fourth important point in relation to the above quote (it can be characterized as the Hegelian heritage of Habermas): the *understanding* of advanced validity-claims is a presupposition for *reflecting* upon them. I.e.: in order both to confirm and criticize validity-claims, it is necessary to know what it actually *means* to confirm and criticize them. In that sense, neither confirmation nor critique can be independent of the lifeworld of reflection. Since reflection and critique have to be based on the act of reaching mutual understanding (i.e. communicative Verständigung), it is obvious that it can only succeed if it is intelligible from the stance that is reflected upon and criticized. Elsewhere Habermas formulates this in the following way: the shared rationality of the speakers determines “das Niveau, auf dem Störungen auftreten können” (Habermas 1981, vol. 2, p. 221). I.e., rationality determines what possibly can be counted as a disturbance, because rationality determines what is counted as relevant in the prevailing situation. To take an example, one *can*, certainly, answer a claim like “There are intelligent life-creatures on Mars” with statements like “But Marilyn Monroe was a beautiful woman”, but even though the former speaker probably *would* be somewhat disturbed by such answer, it would nevertheless not actually count as a relevant disturbance of his initial claim – because it does not answer the level of disturbance that is implied by the rationality of the former statement. Generally the objection would probably appear as unintelligible (as an irrelevant response in the context), because it is not clear what the latter speaker actually means (i.e. how the latter statement *responds* to the former).

As should be clear by now, Habermas’ notion of lifeworld is very close to my notion of normativity: (a) the thorough embeddedness of the lifeworld in practical outlooks; (b) the lifeworld is thought of in terms of coherence (consistency), stability, rationality; (c) it is thought of as holding together the manifold; (d) this holding together is thought of in spontaneous terms; (e) the dual character of the lifeworld as preservation and innovation (I have articulated this in terms of the past-present-future dimensions of norms); (f) it articulates what is taken to be relevant (it should be noted, however, that Habermas does not reflect very much on the relevance-aspect of the lifeworld); and finally, (g) Habermas talks about (at least) three different worlds that are universally at play in the lifeworld (this resemblance should come as no surprise, since my reflections on this subject are decidedly inspired by Habermas’ writings).

The most important differences between Habermas' notion of lifeworld, and my account of normativity concern the notion of (a) innovation and (b) the relation to otherness: (a) first of all, I want to stress that even though innovation has to be thinkable in terms of continuity, stability and edification (that is, as it were, a precondition for *understanding* it) it is not reasonable to think of every kind of innovation in these terms. Even though we cannot in normative/lifeworld-terms *articulate* or *understand* what radical breaks would mean, they may nevertheless have an important function as a regulative idea: it is always *possible* that we may be necessitated to break with the present outlook. This leads straight to my second objection against Habermas' notion of lifeworld: (b) to my mind, his notion of world is too colonized by the spontaneous aspects. My notion of normativity can be said to be so too, but that is only because (as a purely *analytic* move) I have separated it from what it is at the outset in insoluble connection with: reality. It is a point of mine, that normativity cannot actually be understood in abstraction from reality. To my knowledge, Habermas has not made the same point in relation to the lifeworld. This is the critique that I have already carried out above, paragraphs (III,1,b,2+3): it is too simple mainly to think of the world – or better: reality – only in terms of incitement and directedness. The fallibility-aspect of reality can sometimes mean a genuine break with the prevailing outlook. Maybe it will not appear as such when it happens, because it will be possible to explain how we came to the wrong approach, but from the preceding outlook it *would* appear as a break. So, even though we cannot think of (for example) the transition from traditional mechanics to quantum mechanics as a radical break (because we can – or at least trained physicists can – account for the sources of the insufficiencies of the old view, and hereby can understand the new view as a more subtle approach to the *same* object) we can nevertheless understand that from the old outlook, the transition *would* (or at least *could*) appear as a radical¹¹¹ break, since the resulting view is not intelligible through the former outlook. In the succeeding subsection, I will through a reading of Foucault show in what sense this is not merely a play with words. Habermas' focus on continuity has certain drawbacks.

The strength of Habermas' account of critique is that he demonstrates it as a part of a practice (the communicative) which he demonstrates only to make sense for actors that are already in a lifeworld (a normativity) that to a certain extent is shared. A critic can therefore in a discussion expect the addressee to have committed herself to *some* normativity (at least, as long as the

¹¹¹ Radical, in the sense that the new insights could not have been explained in the prevailing language. Not radical in the sense that the succeeding linguistic frame could not be *developed* through the old language (in interaction with the new awareness of reality).

addressee accepts to discuss/argue with the critic): namely, the normativity that is necessary in order for the communication to be possible. It is true that it *is* possible to resign from the communicative community, but this may have unpleasant consequences (e.g. one may be judged to be unreasonable, unreliable (to leave the communicative coordination of actions means to leave an important kind of “Heranbildung zurechnungsfähiger Akteuren”) and not worthy of discussing with later on).

Generally the strength of Habermas’ approach is that he reveals certain general frames that it has severe consequences to break with – even though it may be *possible* to do it.¹¹² However, with the embeddedness-insights in mind this universality is only possible at the expense of the substantiability of the articulated consequences: even though it is always relevant to discuss in what way the norms of language, linguistic acts, *Verständigung*, objectivity, subjectivity, sociality, etc. are at play, these notions are not substantial enough to *determine* the reasonability or outcome of a certain critique. They can neither serve as robust starting-points nor ends for a critique, but only as reference-points – i.e. points we can refer to in order to locate disagreements.

That is the strength of Habermas’ approach. But before turning to Foucault’s approach, I will – in order to motivate this turn – summarize and further substantiate my claim that there is a certain blindness or loss in the way Habermas approaches critique – namely in relation to the receptive aspects. In order to do this, I will draw attention to the points in which this is most obvious. I will discuss the tendency that can be found in his emphasis on the *spontaneous* aspects of the phenomena that he investigates: (1) the focus on sociality; (2) the validity-*claims* that are posed in communicative *actions*; (3) Habermas’ account of the ideal speech situation; (4) his discussion of the relationship between the *process*-, *procedure*-, *product*-aspects of argumentation; (5) his *reflective* understanding of critique, (6) the relationship between the (life)world and reality. As will be clear, they are closely related. I only delineate them in separate points in order to emphasize their plurality, whereby it becomes clear that the tendency has thorough consequences for his approach.

§1. Reductive Effects of the Focus on Sociality.

In my interpretation of Habermas’ general account, I have emphasized that he generally recognizes the *equiprimordiality* of objectivity, sociality and subjectivity. But still, Habermas writes against a tradition in which the social-aspect needs most emphasis, since it has been

¹¹² In this sense, I am on par with Putnam in his assessment of Habermas’ discourse ethics (Putnam 2001, pp. 304-6). I am not sure, however, whether this actually is an *objection* against Habermas. I do not think that Habermas would claim that his analysis of discourse ethics presents the *sufficient* conditions for injustices not to take place.

neglected. This was one of the main points with (for example) *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*: the development of Western philosophy from late Hegel to Foucault and Luhmann shows (according to Habermas) a deficiency in this regard. Habermas is therefore forced to emphasize this aspect in his writings (since it is the significant contribution to this tradition). But this emphasis also shapes his notion of critique. This is clear in his discussions of philosophers like Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault. Habermas argues that given their general approaches, it is not possible for them to be genuinely critical – at least if they were to be consequent in relation to their methodological outlooks. With the example of Foucault, I will in the succeeding subsection demonstrate that it is very well possible to maintain a genuine critique from a post-structuralist approach. The reason why Habermas does not see this is, I will argue, that he generally understands critique as something that happens between acting agents – that is: socially. In Habermas’ understanding, critique presupposes (at least) two agents that act and react upon actions – paradigmatically through reflection.

I will argue that this is only *one* (important, though) aspect of critique among others. It is true that there has to be an acting agent involved in critique: there has to be someone involved that avow a certain normativity and experience/approach (in a broad sense) a certain reality – in order for a tension between normativity and reality to be possible. I also agree that this constellation of normativity and reality cannot be thought of in abstraction from a social embeddedness. In that sense, sociality cannot be abstracted from critique. But this is not to say, that in the concrete criticizing situations, the critique necessarily stems from another acting agent (the inter-subject). It might very well stem from a new experience of objective or subjective *Tatsachen*, that suddenly makes the addressee realize that her prevailing view is in severe tension with the states of affairs.

Furthermore, what is often characterized as world-disclosing critique, demonstrates a way in which critique can be at play between two agents, without understanding the social relationship as an action/reaction-relationship. World-disclosing critique presents a form of critique that does not claim to give a unified, well-ordered account of the world. The world-disclosing critique is more experimental in its approach – “Lets try to describe things in *this* way, and see what happens...” – it does not present a new well-formed opinion, but merely reveals insufficiencies in the already prevailing views. It demonstrates that there are aspects of reality that are not taken into account in the prevailing views. It does not, necessarily, give a new account of how the raised problem should be solved. It is not even for certain that the problem *could* be solved – without raising even more serious problems. There is thus not a direct action/reaction-relationship between the critic and addressee in the case of world-disclosing critique, since there is not a fully spelled out alternative world-view to react upon. The disclosing critique is certainly an act, but

the reaction of the addressee does not necessarily address the view of the critic, because the critic does not claim to have solved the problem.

In sum, even though I agree with Habermas against Rorty that argumentative discussions cannot be reduced to mere redescription, I think that Rorty – together with philosophers like Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault – demonstrate that critique cannot be *exhausted* by the kind of argumentative relationships that Habermas considers.

§2. The Starting Point: Communicative actions, *Verständigung*, Validity-claims.

The second source to this general one-sidedness of Habermas is his (pragmatic) starting point: in taking communicative *actions*, *Verständigung* and the claiming of validity-claims as the starting point for analysis, and extracting his understanding of the world from this, Habermas (once again) has an important point: that the world cannot be understood in *abstraction* from our doings. In relation to the truth-question: truth cannot be understood in abstraction from a certain potentially achieved consensus between all participants. But in order to emphasize this, Habermas is sometimes led (in his opposition to the correspondence-theory of truth) to the claim that the truth of propositions is not to be determined by their correspondence with facts, but rather by whether or not they deserve an affirmation by the reflecting agents (Habermas 1973b, pp.132-7). This is again an exaggeration – something that he (as discussed above, p. 60ff) has acknowledged in relation to the objective world, but not for the social and subjective worlds. The emphasis of the importance of the relationship between claiming and accepting/rejecting the claims – at the cost of the receptivity towards the states of affairs – is once again an emphasis of the reflective (spontaneous) aspects at the cost of the receptive aspects: it is the reason-giving and -evaluation that is highlighted at the cost of the receptiveness towards reality. This is not to say that Habermas has *no* room for receptivity (since receptivity can very well be the basis for the claiming and accepting/rejecting claims), but it *does* show that Habermas' *focus* turns towards the reflective aspects.

§3. The Ideal Speech situation.

I have already discussed this issue earlier in this thesis, and will therefore only mention that Habermas' early explication of what a reasonable consensus about validity-claims means is formulated in terms of four norms for permission to participation – without a commitment to be in *accordance* with reality. In 1981 he acknowledges that the early explication of the ideal speech situation was inadequate – even though he (rightly, I think) persist to the general intuition: that the expressed relation of symmetry must be maintained as one (among other) critical ideal in argumentation (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, p. 47). In 1999 he – as mentioned above, pp. 59ff –

acknowledges that at least two realistic intuitions should be taken into account too. As mentioned, I see this as a step in the right direction, but Habermas' realism unfortunately is restricted mainly to *objective* reality.

§4. Process, Procedure, Product.

In the introduction to *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Habermas discusses whether to analyse argumentative speech-actions as *process*, *procedure* or *product* (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, pp. 47-71). In this instance, Habermas is quite clear that all three aspects should be taken into account in order to understand this practice,

Auf keiner einzelnen dieser analytischen Ebenen kann jedoch die der argumentativen Rede innewohnende Idee selbst zureichend entfaltet werden (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, p. 49).

The succeeding discussion of W. Klein's view is to demonstrate the problems that arise if only the process-aspect is taken into account. He also characterizes his own early reflections on the ideal speech situation as process-reflections (Habermas 1981, vol. 1, p. 47). The ideal speech situation is meant to describe the necessary formal conditions for the argumentative practice to be possible at all. According to Habermas' understanding of Toulmin's view, Toulmin's analysis of the argumentative structure represents a subtle (but problematic, though) account of what is achieved when an argument has been established – i.e. the *product*-aspect. But Habermas is dissatisfied with the final result of Toulmin's analyses, because he only understands the separation into different fields of argumentation (such as the contexts of court, medicine, science, politics, art-criticism, the business-world, sports, etc.) as *institutionally* different – without being able to account for an internal logics of argumentation that could say something significant about the relationship between these field.¹¹³ In order to do this, Habermas asserts, it is necessary to find a certain *procedure* that unites them (p. 65). And this is what Habermas wants to investigate in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*. So, whereas early Habermas focusses on process, later Habermas focusses on procedure. The *procedural* aspect is constituted by the rules for a certain “*speziell geregelte Form der Interaktion*” (p. 48), and constitutes how “*einem rational motivierten Einverständnis zu beenden*” (p. 49).

All three aspects emphasize the spontaneous rather than receptive aspects. This is most obvious in relation to the process- and procedure aspects. The product-aspect is more receptively in emphasis, since it is about the results of the processes and procedures. But still, at least in Toulmin and Habermas' understanding, this result is mainly understood through its “being-produced”-character: which are the producing elements that, taken together, produce an argument

¹¹³ I will not go into detail with this discussion between Habermas and Toulmin, since it would lead off my present track.

(data, warrants, backing, qualifier, conditions of rebuttal, claim/conclusion, etc. – see Toulmin 1958, ch. 3). And production is genuinely a spontaneous phenomenon.

So, even though Habermas acknowledges that all three aspects should be taken into account in order to have adequate analyses of argumentative practices, Habermas mainly focusses on the most spontaneous aspects (process and procedure), and the trichotomy itself actually underexposes the receptive aspects. Even *if* all three aspects were covered, the argumentative practice would not be adequately analysed. The argumentative practice, being a linguistic practice, has (cf. section III,1 above) both a normative and a reality aspect. The normative aspect regulates the spontaneous/reflective aspects of the practice, while the reality aspect indicates the relevant receptiveness-aspects of the practice. After having described the process of argumentation, the procedures that lead to sound arguments, and the product that results from these processes and procedures, there still is need for analyses of, why it can be relevant to argue at all (incitement), what argumentation possibly can be about (and which fields of reality that perhaps are *not* suitable for argumentation – directedness), and in what sense the argumentation can fail to answer the incitement/directedness (perhaps even: in what sense argumentative approaches *always*, to some extent, distorts its subject, and hereby fail to give good answers – fallibility).

In the less methodologically oriented parts of his oeuvre (e.g. in his political writings), Habermas implicitly gives some possible answers to these questions. But they should be an integral part of the methodological analyses as well – these analyses are not complete without such considerations.

§5. Critique as Reflection.

As stated above (p. 129f), there is a close relationship between critique and reflection in Habermas' thought. That is, critique is understood as a present reflection on antecedents, whereby the past/present relationship can be transcended. As indicated, I think that a reflection-approach to critique tends to be too narrow. The problem is that even though it certainly is an important aspect of critique that it re-turns something (perhaps in a new shape), critique should also be aware of how we actually *perceive* what is later re-turned. As Foucault demonstrates, sometimes it is the very reflectivity that is actually criticizable, because the more eager we are to reflectively return something as a unified whole (do something with what is perceived), the more we have to force certain relevance-claims upon the perceived reality. In that situation, it can be fruitful to be open towards the critique that can stem from the plurality of the perceived reality – as opposed to the simplicity that stems from the relevance-claims. And even though it is not possible to comprehend reality in a purely non-reflective manner, it can sometimes be helpful at least to turn

the reflectiveness down, whereby it becomes possible for new aspects of reality to become visible as relevant.

§6. Lifeworld and Reality.

As mentioned above (p. 134ff) one could say (pushing the point to the edge) that Habermas' notion of world (i.e. the life-world) is close to my notion of normativity, the main differences being the notion of innovation and (in this context more importantly:) the relation to reality. It is certainly precarious to have a concept of world that has a problematic relationship to reality! It is of course not that paradoxically in Habermas' thought. As delineated, Habermas *does* account for the directedness aspect of reality. My main disagreement with this part of Habermas' concept of world, lies in his understanding of the fallibility-aspect. In 2003 Habermas declared that even though he accepts fallibilism in relation to knowledge, he still wants to defend a strong notion of rationality (Habermas 2003, p. 27) – i.e. he wants to defend a notion of rationality that is not fallible to the same extent as knowledge. Due to the close relationship between normativity and reality that I sketched out above (section III,1), I will at least have to be *open* towards the possibility of rationality being shown fallible.¹¹⁴ When I grant some of Habermas' analyses of communicative actions to be of universal value, this is on the one hand to be understood in a fallible sense (cf. my notion of universality), and on the other hand it is only because they are understood in rather open or non-substantial terms.

The reason why I think this view on rationality is necessary is that a rationality that is understood in abstraction from any relation to reality is empty. Rationality has therefore to be understood as only one side of the relationship between normativity and reality – a relationship that is always potentially tensed (a thought-provoking elucidation of how the notion of rationality has turned abstract in western thought is described in Toulmin 2001). And it is never in advance determinate, which of the sides should be revised, if tensions are to be eliminated.

I agree with Habermas that for certain parts of rationality it is almost impossible to understand what it would mean to reject them. For example, what would it mean to understand anything in abstraction from a notion of a subject. Is this aspect of rationality not infallible?¹¹⁵ As a start, I will concede that the notion is such a fundamental part of our rationality, that it is inconceivable what a rejection of it would mean.

¹¹⁴ But this does not rule out that I can maintain that certain parts of rationality is very unlikely to be rejected. This can just not be justified *conclusively*.

¹¹⁵ Kant's notion of the transcendental subject, is, to my mind, one of the most convincing arguments for the necessity of that idea (Kant 1781/7, B131-65).

I will nevertheless maintain that it makes sense to call it fallible in at least two ways. (a) On the one hand, even though it is inconceivable to think of a rationality *without* a notion of a subject, it has to be further substantiated in order for this notion to be of rational use. Is it a *thinking, understanding* or *acting* subject, is it merely a *being* subject, is it a *doubting* subject, a *bodily* subject, a *social* subject, etc. Throughout the history of ideas, various aspects of the subject have been accentuated; and even *if* it makes sense to say that they all in a certain sense represent a common subject-idea, this would mainly make sense in a historical-analytical sense: in the concrete situations the prevailing rationality was substantially shaped by the concrete notions, and in that sense the ongoing history has proven various subject-ideas to be unavoidable and others to be wrong (according to the prevailing normative outlook).¹¹⁶ Furthermore, (b) even though it is inconceivable for us what a rationality without any notion of a subject would mean, this does not mean that we should think of this aspect of rationality as infallible. The argument for this is related to my argument above (p. 135) that radical breaks – in a certain sense – *are* possible in lifeworlds: what from a certain normative outlook may seem as a inconceivable break may in a future outlook be quite conceivable, since the future normative outlook will broaden or change the outlook in such a way that it can account for the right and wrong aspects of the previous (our) outlooks.

The significance of the latter argument, should be understood with caution: the relevance of such possible future breaks is, as it were, very limited. I am not saying that we could or should generally lead our lives in such a way that we always take such future breaks into account. As argued in the above section on universality (III,2) I do not think this is possible, since that would actually make normativity as such impossible (we can only doubt normativity inside a normative outlook). The relevance of the argument is mainly as a regulative critical tool: it demonstrates that even what we take to be most immune towards revision and critique, *could* actually show to be fallible. There is, consequently, not even in this field a once-and-for-all shelter against critique. As such, it warns against cocksureness. As I.M. Young has demonstrated (cf. above, pp. 84ff) the very turn to rationality has often – as it now appears: unjustifiably – been used as an immunization against critique.

In relation to the present topic of Habermas' blindness towards receptivity: the rejection of the fallibility of rationality demonstrates, once again, that Habermas gives too much credit to the value of normativity (i.e. the *rules* or *procedures* that shape our approach to the world) at the cost of reality (i.e. that what the approach is incited by and directed towards). Pushing it to the edge:

¹¹⁶ In a discussion of this passage, Professor S.E. Toulmin drew my attention to the fact that in classical French language there is actually no term for "self" at all.

in Habermas' view it is the reception that is fallible – not the reflection of it. Since Habermas generally is trying to reveal universally valid structures, this is probably the reason why he, when accounting for the lifeworld, mainly focusses on the reflective aspects.

* * *

Habermas' declaration of the accept of fallibility of knowledge but not rationality, is made in a context in which he articulates his main disagreement with Popper. His further claim is that Popper – due to a weaker notion of rationality – is forced to consider rationality to be a product of mere choice. That is, Popper implies (according to Habermas) that the prevailing rationality in a certain sense is *incidental* (it is the same objection that Habermas raises against Toulmin in the above mentioned critique of his institutionalism – cf. Habermas 1981, vol. 1, pp. 59ff).

Habermas is generally rather uneasy about views that are open towards relativizations of rationality that are not themselves rationally founded. This is very explicit in *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* – for example in his critique of Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault. He thus articulates Heidegger's role in the history of philosophy in the following terms. After Hegel there has been a split in philosophy, the one strain trusted the reflective power of reason,

die anderen beschworen die mytho-poetische Kraft einer Kunst, die den Mittelpunkt des regenerierten öffentlichen Lebens bilden sollte [...] erst Heidegger hat dieses konkrete Befürfnis ontologisierend und fundamentalisierend zu einem Sein, das sich dem Seienden entzieht, verflüchtigt. [...] Aus Heideggers Spätphilosophie ergibt sich als weitere Konsequenz, daß sich die Kritik der Moderne von wissenschaftlichen Analysen unabhängig macht (Habermas 1985, pp. 166-7).

This quote actually sketches the succeeding critique of both Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault. On the one hand, they (according to Habermas) give up the reflective approach to the important problems. On the other hand, they hereby get to a position in which critique cannot be undertaken from a scientific (read: rational) basis. The problem is that they operate with a notion of something (e.g. being, *différance*, trace, power) that is beneath or beyond (or at least *pointing* beyond – in Derrida's case) the lifeworld. Habermas is uneasy about the following aspect of their views,

Die Phänomene entziehen sich dem direkten Zugriff, weil sie sich in ihren ontischen Erscheinungen gerade nicht zeigen als das, was sie von sich aus sind (Habermas 1985, p. 172).

I.e.: the idea that there is a relevant distinction to be made (or difference to be found) between the world as it appears and the world as it is by itself. This view is most explicitly represented by

Heidegger and Derrida¹¹⁷, but also Foucault's ideas of deficit (Foucault 1969, p. 156) and rarefaction (Foucault 1971a, p. 67) can be said to presuppose such a notion.¹¹⁸

The problem is that if it is granted that rationality generates such ontological differences, then (according to Habermas) the argumentative reason-based critique will, justifiably, be overruled by an *irrational* critique. Then substantial critique would (according to Habermas) be merely incidental, and it would become difficult to account for in what sense the results of critique could be any better than the objects of critique.

I think this analysis is wrong. Even though it might be a justified reading of Heidegger's approach (at least in a particular reading of him¹¹⁹), I think that both Derrida and Foucault demonstrate that this is not a necessary consequence of this approach: even though rationality may be challenged from something a-rational, this does not mean that the consequences taken of this challenge should (or could) be ir-rational – other parts of rationality may hand in the guidelines for what to do about the challenge. An a-rational challenge to rationality is not something that demands rationality to be abolished. Since rationality at the outset is directed towards something a-rational, this a-rational something certainly can challenge rationality, but the response to this challenge may very well be rational itself – even though the norms for this *revising* rationality cannot, certainly, be the same as the norms that found the criticized rationality.

The point is that the giving up of certain aspects of our normatively based rationality does not lead us to mere contingency, because the “giving-up” may be reasonably called for. If the normativity/reality relationship shows to be tensed in a sense that is unfruitful, it may be quite reasonable to revise the relationship. This can be done by changing reality, but sometimes this option is either not possible or not desirable, and in these cases normativity should be changed. But such changes will not be merely contingent, since the result of the change is supposed to be a relationship with reality that – in certain specified respects – is less tensed. It is not ir-rational

¹¹⁷ “Der ontologische Differenz” is a crucial idea in Heidegger's thought (e.g. in Heidegger 1929b; 1957). “Différance” is a key-concept in Derrida's thought (e.g. in Derrida 1968). Despite of the similarity in terms, and Derrida's explicit indebtedness to Heidegger's philosophy, the two terms should not be conflated, however.

¹¹⁸ As mentioned above (pp. 101ff), Foucault at the same time, however, often stressed that the deficit and the rarefied are not actually “hidden” – they are also appearing, but we are just often not aware of it. Foucault only talks about differences between various *interpretive* approaches – cf. Foucault 1969, p. 158.

¹¹⁹ I think that R.J. Bernstein has demonstrated convincingly that such a reading of Heidegger 1954 is possible – cf. Bernstein 1991, pp. 79-141. It is a rather common reading of Heidegger within critical theories. I am not convinced, however, that it is the *best* reading.

to listen to the a-rational; on the contrary, it is the very aim of rationality to listen to and reflect the a-rational (a similar point is made in Toulmin 2001, p. 164).

Before I turn to a demonstration of this with the example of Foucault, it should be noted (in order to stress that the point made in this subsection merely accentuates a *tendency* in Habermas' writings) that Habermas, in the 5th section of chapter 11 in *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* makes the following remark in contemplations of whether the theory of communicative actions is a kind of idealism,

Auf der reflexive Ebene reproduziert sich nämlich im Gegenüber von Proponenten und Opponenten jene Grundform der intersubjektiven Beziehung, die die Selbstbeziehung des Sprechers immer schon durch die performative Beziehung zu einem Adressaten vermittelt. Das gespannte Ineinander von Idealem und Realem zeigt sich auch und besonders deutlich im Diskurs selber (Habermas 1985, p. 376).

This quote demonstrates that one cannot simply accuse Habermas for subscribing to naive idealism. Habermas operates with a tensed relationship between the ideal (or normative) and the real too. In his outlook, this relationship is constituted by the relationship between the speaker and listener. It would therefore not be reasonable to say that Habermas could not have any concept of critique at all. My point is rather that his account of the tension is too limited. In understanding the reality-part of the relationship in terms of "proponent" and "opponent", he accentuates the reflective approach to problems, since both sides of them are understood in such terms.

In the following subsection I will describe an alternative approach to critique, where the otherness of linguistic practices are not understood mainly in reflective terms. Even though I agree that the reflective approach is important in relation to critique, it *should* be supplemented by another approach. The reflective attitude should be supplemented by the receptive attitude. This approach is well presented by Michel Foucault.

b. Receptivity in Critique.

In 1993 a "Schwerpunkt" in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* was dedicated to the relationship between world-disclosure and critique (in Kompridis 1993). This exemplifies a growing awareness in recent years of the close relationship between these two approaches. The world-disclosing approach is often exemplified by Heidegger's philosophy. In the introduction, Kompridis distinguishes between the approach in early-Heidegger's view, in which the aim is "der Bewußtwerdung bisher unthematisierter, nicht wahrgenommener Dimensionen unseres ontologischen Vorverständnisses." and late-Heidegger in which the aim is "einen Prozeß der sinnstiftenden Neuerungen" (Kompridis, p. 487).

Whether or not it is possible to make such a sharp distinction between early- and late Heidegger, is not crucial in the present context – I am, however, not convinced by it: I do not think that it is possible to make a waterproof distinction between “consciousness-raising” and “sense-instigating” world-disclosure. The disclosure would always have to happen inside a world that is already formed by normative outlooks (and in that sense, one could characterize the disclosure as a becoming aware of new aspects that in a certain sense were there already). And at the same time, a disclosure will always instigate new meaning, since the new aspects of reality, due to their underexposure, were not taken into account in the old patterns of meaning.

To return to the main track: the notion of world-disclosure presupposes that it is possible to talk about a world that is closed – or in more plain words: toned down, underexposed, put in the shade. In relation to the outlook presented in this thesis, one could say that world-disclosure is important because something is put in the shade, because something else is illuminated, due to the focussing norms of relevance that are entailed by normativity. There is obviously room for the notion of world-disclosure in the frame of this thesis. What needs to be considered is the relationship between world-disclosure and *critique*. I will subscribe to the view that it is possible to talk about a strain in philosophy of the latter half of the 20th century that could be called world-disclosing critique. It equals the notion of critique that I have described in the previous subsection in the way that it demonstrates a tension between an avowed normativity and reality, but it differs from it by accentuating the receptive aspects of critique – rather than the reflective aspects.

Habermas is generally rather sceptical towards a turn towards the world-disclosing aspects of language, at least if it happens at the cost of the *Verständigungs*-oriented aspect,

In dem Maße wie die poetische, welterschließende Funktion der Sprache Vorrang und strukturbildende Kraft gewinnt, entwindet sich die Sprache nämlich den strukturellen Beschränkungen und kommunikativen Funktionen des Alltags [...] die einen verständigungsorientierten Sprachgebrauch ermöglichen – und damit eine über die intersubjektive Anerkennung kritisierbarer Geltungsansprüche laufende Koordinierung von Handlungsplänen (Habermas 1985, p. 240).

The quote is directed against Derrida’s poetically oriented world-disclosure, and not against world-disclosure in general. What Habermas mainly is sceptical about is a world-disclosure that is not under some kind of *Bewährungszwang* (Habermas 1985, p. 234) – i.e. a use of language independently of criticizable validity-claims. The probation-constraint has to come from the linguistic relation to the world (what is shared – cf. above, pp. 58ff and 65ff). Habermas is consequently rather suspicious about approaches that seek to introduce separate discourses – that is fields of discourse that are separated from all other discourses. In Heidegger’s reflections on “das wesentliche Denken” (as opposed to “das exakte Denken” – cf. Heidegger 1943, pp. 308-12)

and in both Heidegger and Derrida's turn towards poetry and literature, Habermas finds examples of such approaches.

I agree with Habermas that world-disclosure in that sense is problematic – it could at least be of only limited value in relation to critique. I do not, however, agree that this is the best interpretation of neither Heidegger nor Derrida's approaches. It is true that Heidegger accentuates a difference between his own thought and what he characterizes as a purely logical and calculating thought, but still it is supposed to disclose the truth of Being (Sein), and even though Being differs from beings (seiende), with which the calculating thought is engaged, it is certainly not absolutely separated from it. The essential thought (Heidegger's approach) is consequently not absolutely separated from the calculating.

As to Heidegger and Derrida's turn to literature, I think that Habermas' analysis is even less convincing. The reason for the misreading is to be found in Habermas' misconception of art (cf. above, p. 67f): Habermas conflates poetry and literature with *mere* fiction, and therefore he can claim that they do not relate to a world that can be shared. It is true (as he claims – Habermas 1985, p. 224) that in poetry and literature, rhetoric gets a higher priority at the cost of traditional everyday logic. But (1) this is not to say that there is *no* logic at all in poetry and literature, and it is certainly not to say that there is no shared world that can serve as a reference-point for posing validity-claims about it. The artwork itself is such a reference-point, and even though it is true that the validity of claims about the artworks are open to a higher degree of variation than more traditional everyday claims, this does not mean that the variation is unlimited. Furthermore, (2) it would be wrong to think of art as absolutely separated from traditional everyday logics.¹²⁰ If that was the case, the artworks would not be able to reach an audience.¹²¹ Finally, (3) the philosophical turn to art is not itself purely artistic. Philosophical claims that draw on artistic works are not only – and often: not at all – assessed according to artistic standards: they also have to be measured as to certain philosophical standards. When assessing the philosophy of Heidegger and Derrida it is certainly significant that they get their points through a turn towards artworks, but their own writings are – at least in philosophical journals and books – not measured as to whether they use the right metres and rhymes.¹²² They are rather assessed as to whether they succeed in saying something essential about the world. In that sense, artistically inspired philosophical works are not *separated* from traditional philosophical discourses – they rather *alter* these discourses by

¹²⁰ This point has also been defended by Wellmer in Wellmer 1985b.

¹²¹ The ideal of an absolute separation from everyday practices *has* played a role in some avant-garde currents (e.g. in the mid-20th century), but generally it has been left behind as unrealistic and undesirable by most artists today.

¹²² None of Heidegger's and most of Derrida's writings do not even resemble the literature/poetry that they admire.

taking in new material from other fields of discourse that are not bound by the same kinds of prejudices as traditional philosophy.¹²³

In his rash refusal of the world-disclosing approach, Habermas fails to see the critical relevance that can be gained by turning towards fields of communication that are not at the outset shaped by the ideals that constitute the argumentative practices. As Foucault has noted, sometimes the very norms for (everyday) rationality and reasonability is what needs critical investigation. The following quote is explicitly turned against Habermas,

I think that the central issue of philosophy and critical thought since the eighteenth century has always been, still is, and will, I hope, remain the question: *What* is this Reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers? [...] In addition, if it is extremely dangerous to say that Reason is the enemy that should be eliminated, it is just as dangerous to say that any critical questioning of this rationality risks sending us into irrationality (Foucault 1982a, p. 249 – emphasis by Foucault).¹²⁴

The point with this is that one should be cautious with too quickly to reject approaches that do not immediately seem to correspond with what is generally taken to be good processes of reasonable argumentation. And that it sometimes is relevant to question whether the prevailing processes of such argumentation actually produce fruitful and reasonable views (what are the gains and losses in approaching the world with the presently prevailing normative outlook) – in the light of the present states of affairs. It can be irrational *not* to ask such questions. The obvious objection towards such a claim of course is: *how* is it possible to question the rationality that founds the very process of questioning? This is the concern that shapes the writings of – among others – Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault. By the example of Foucault, I will argue that this cannot happen in abstraction from rationality, but that it nevertheless can be necessary to go from a rationality that claims to produce true claims, to a more experimentally oriented notion of rationality that merely claims to present alternative ways of normative shapings, whereby the plurality and diversity of reality comes to the fore. Hereby our receptivity is broadened, and this makes it possible to assess tensions between normativity and reality that were hitherto hidden. In that sense world-disclosure is an important way of making problematizing critique.

¹²³ When philosophers turn to art, they often only turn to rather limited fields of the general artistic area: most artworks do not appear as relevant to the philosopher, because they break with some of the remaining philosophical norms that he brings with him. Philosophers that are rather notorious for their narrowness in artistic outlook are (e.g.) Kant, Heidegger and Adorno. This demonstrates that even though they turn to artworks, in order to disclose new aspects of the world, they do not actually *break* with their philosophical background: the turn to artworks is instigated by some particular philosophical aims.

¹²⁴ The quote is presented in English, since the most original known version of it is in English. A French translation of it is printed in Foucault 2001, vol. II, pp. 1089-1104.

I choose Foucault as the example through which the relationship between world-disclosure and critique is revealed, out of several reasons: (1) he has several times reflected on the critical implications of his writings; (2) he has explicitly accentuated that his approach was critical at the outset; (3) he has reflected on the relationship between his own approach and traditional critical theory; (4) he has accentuated the intimate relationship between critique and reality-intuitions; (5) he has rejected any notion of universality and introduced a notion of locally based critique. In relation to Heidegger and Derrida, Foucault is generally a more dualist (or perhaps better: pluralist) oriented philosopher. Whereas Heidegger and Derrida generally accentuate the unity (or at least unifying *source*) of certain apparently separate entities, Foucault generally accentuate the plurality of what seems to be unitary. I sympathize with both approaches, but in this subsection, where I want to discuss how the receptive aspects of reality break with the unifying normative approach, Foucault's approach demonstrates my point best.

In many respects the intuition that lies behind the world-disclosing philosophers resemble the intuition that lies behind Rorty's talk about critique as redescription (cf. above pp. 19ff). This is no coincidence since Rorty is explicitly influenced by these philosophers. The founding intuition is that the world is open to multiple descriptions.¹²⁵ To articulate this in the language of this thesis: since the linguistically shaped approaches happen through norms of relevance that focus on certain aspects, whereby others are put in the shade, these approaches are always challengeable, because it is possible to approach the same reality through other norms of relevance. In order for that intuition not to emerge into radical relativism, it is important that it is possible to say something about certain limits to the multiplicity. In order for the intuition not to be empty or without implications, it is important to be able to say something about in what sense the possibility of redescription is actualized. I have already demonstrated how a pragmatic notion of reality articulates a hold against radical relativism. In this subsection I will demonstrate that a pragmatic notion of reality also entails that reality can be a relativizing factor.

In order for these dual implications of reality to be possible, it is necessary to emphasize that the notion of reality cannot be understood in abstraction from the notion of receptivity. Receptivity means, in this connection, the sensibility towards how well our doings function-in or interact-with that towards which they are directed (and from which they are incited). In relation to the normative relativity, reality can be understood as a certain *resistance* towards the normative

¹²⁵ Putnam also subscribes to this intuition. He is not, though, nearly as impressed by the German and French "world-disclosers" as Rorty. Examples of his rejection of Derrida and Foucault's writings can be found in Putnam 1981, pp. ix+115-6+150-73; 1987b, pp. 19-20.

grasp, and it is these resistance-aspects of reality that both hinder relativization (because certain relativizations show to be unfruitful) and are relativizing themselves (because the reductions upon which a normative outlook rests, turn out to be unfruitful).

This subsection will contemplate the role of description and redescription. I will draw on the analyses in section (III,1) on linguistic practices and section (IV,2) in which I demonstrated in what sense there is always a tension between the normative and realist aspects of linguistic practices. My argument will therefore be that description and redescription in a certain sense always have critical implications. So, I agree with Rorty that (re)description and critique cannot easily be separated, but that is not because critique is *just* redescription (a reductive move), but rather because the notion of (re)description must be extended to also having critical implications. To claim that something is “only a mere description” (the claim of neutrality) can actually very often be a rhetoric way of (further) hiding the aspects of reality that were already hidden. The addressee of such claims is persuaded to focus on the objects of description, whereby the field of critical contemplation is restricted to be merely an evaluation of whether or not the state of affairs actually correspond with the description. The truth¹²⁶ of the description is hereby made the prime subject of assessment, and – if the description *is* true – the speaker will hereby succeed in not having the *adequacy* of the description assessed. In that sense, the neutrality-claim is actually an effort to rarefy the receptivity of the addressee.

In the following subsection, I will show how Foucault demonstrates an approach to critique that is describing at the outset, whereby the receptivity of the addressee is being sharpened. I will demonstrate that Foucault’s affiliation with what he calls felicitous positivism does not necessarily entail a specific notion of reality or a claim of neutrality, but that it rather articulates the point that critique cannot reveal anything that is not somehow reachable or approachable to everyone. Critique is not meant to reveal a certain, underlying and hidden truth. Rather it is meant to make us aware of certain aspects or factors of which we are not normally aware,¹²⁷ but which we would all be able to perceive if they were perceived through an alternative normative outlook.

In 1980 Habermas claimed that Foucault belonged to a Young Conservative strain in the prevailing culture, that was one of the main threats towards the critical project of modernity (Habermas 1980a, pp. 462-3). In 1985 Habermas published a more detailed analysis of the

¹²⁶ Or truthfulness, rightness, etc...

¹²⁷ The apparent contradiction between my use of hiddenness and Foucault’s rejection of the same is only apparent, since I do not mean to claim that the hiddenness is absolute. A notion of some aspects of reality being absolutely hidden would be empty!

possible critical gains of Foucault's works, and this analysis also led to a repudiation (Habermas 1985, sects. IX-XI).

These repudiations came to be rather influential. They came to be a starting point for what has often been called the Foucault-Habermas debate. Actually, there was not much of a debate between the two, since Foucault died before he was able to give a qualified response.¹²⁸ Since then, there has been a dividing line inside critical theory between those who reject the critical gains of Foucault's work (or at least take him to be inconsistent on the issue – examples of this view can be found in Honneth 1986a; Fraser 1985; McCarthy 1990; 1994; Taylor 1984a; 1985d) and those who think that Foucault actually presents a notion of critique that may attribute to a more subtle notion than the traditional Habermasian (examples of this view are articulated in Hoy 1981; 1994; Smart 1986; Connolly 1985; Honneth 2000a; Geuss 2002; Tully 1999; Butler 2002; Owen 1999; 2002). So, discussing Foucault in a thesis on critical theory is not uncontroversial. I will therefore start out with an articulation of how I understand his importance as a critical philosopher.

A distinction should be made: we should distinguish between the question of the actual critical significance of Foucault's work, and the question of Foucault's account of what critique means. To the first question I guess that no one would deny that the writings of Foucault have critical significance. How to think of and act inside institutions of (e.g.) psychiatry, general health-care, humanistic sciences, prison and sexuality cannot be the same as they were before Foucault published *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (1961), *Naissance de la clinique* (1963), *Les Mots et les Choses* (1966), *Surveiller et Punir* (1975) and *Histoire de la sexualité 1-3* (1976/1984). A problematization of Foucault's contributions on the field would rather have to focus on, in what sense he in his methodological reflections gives an adequate account of *how* the mentioned works can have this significance – i.e. whether the Foucault that presents archaeological and genealogical analyses is in accordance with the Foucault that reflects on these analyses.

I will therefore start out by (1) giving an account of Foucault's methodological reflections on critical investigations; (2) evaluate these reflections in relation to the notion presented in this thesis, and contemplate often posed criticisms from other philosophers; and (3) reflect on how Foucault can contribute to the problematics raised in this thesis.

¹²⁸ In a certain sense, however, "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?" (Foucault 1984c) may be said to be such a response, since it was meant to be Foucault's contribution to a conference with the relationship between the two as the main theme. The conference was never realized, though, and the paper was only published posthumously.

§1. Foucault and Critical Methodology.

Foucault was generally sceptical towards committing himself to methodological reflections. He was convinced that philosophical investigations should adapt to the objects of investigation and that reflections on how to investigate have the tendency of narrowing the possible approaches to the objects. In that sense, methodological reflections led in the direction that Foucault tried to get free from.

Nevertheless, less skilled philosophers had difficulties in understanding what was happening in his historical works. A typical strategy to take, if one has problems with coming to grips with something is to try to put a *label* on it – naming it. Foucault was often affiliated with structuralism, hermeneutics, Marxism, conservatism, nihilism, anarchism, idealism, constructivism, etc. Sometimes he expresses amusement of the plurality of these labels (e.g. in Foucault 1984e, p. 1410), but at other times he expressed a rather explicit frustration of the labelling,

In France, certain half-witted ‘commentators’ persist in labelling me a ‘structuralist’. I have been unable to get it into their tiny minds that I have used none of the methods, concepts, or key terms that characterize structural analysis [...]It is only too easy to avoid the trouble of analysing such work by giving it an admittedly impressive-sounding, but inaccurate, label. (Foucault 1970, pp. xiv).

This frustration forces him to articulate his project in methodological terms himself. This is for example done in *L’archéologie du savoir* (1969), *L’ordre du discours* (1971), *La volonté de savoir* (1976), “Cours du 7 et 17 janvier 1976” (1976), “Qu’est-ce que la Critique?” (1978), “Qu’est-ce que les Lumières?” (1984) and in a number of interviews.

These methodological reflections do not constitute a firm unity. It is commonly accepted to distinguish between at least two or three stages in methodology in his work: the archaeological (1961-69), the genealogical (1970-early 80’s) and the ethically oriented period (1983-4). Some would differentiate even further, and some would even distinguish between the methodology of each of his main works. Foucault was never afraid of admitting earlier mistakes and revising his methodology accordingly. As early as 1969 he accompanied his methodological reflections with the following statement,

c’est [...] essayer de définir cet espace blanc d’où je parle, et qui prend forme lentement dans un discours que je sens si précaire, si incertain encore. [...] Ne me demandez pas qui je suis et ne me dites pas de rester le même : c’est une morale d’état-civil; elle régit nos papiers. Qu’elle nous laisse libres quand il s’agit d’écrire (Foucault 1969, p. 27-8).

In Foucault’s view, it is important to be methodologically open-minded if one wants to “ouvrir des souterrains” (Foucault 1969, p. 28). In order to reveal new aspects of reality, it is necessary to be willing to revise the methodology of research. The methodology should therefore only

slowly take shape through the investigation of a particular field – i.e. the methodology should be a product of a “listening” to its object, rather than a product of a pre-created reflection. To describe Foucault’s point of view adequately would consequently demand to give a detailed account of each of his major works.

That is not what I am going to do in the following. I will not primarily focus on the differences between Foucault’s work, but rather demonstrate how these differences are products of the mentioned aspect of his work: the quest of being open towards the diversity of the investigated fields – and how this approach is understood as a critical approach. I will hereby show that there is a critical strain (or one should perhaps better speak of a critical *êthos*, in order to use Foucault’s own vocabulary – Foucault 1984, pp. 1381-97) that goes through the main body of his oeuvre, despite of the differences in detail. I will in the following argue that there are a number of intuitions that Foucault maintains across the various methodological modifications, and that the modifications can be understood as a broadening of the approach: whereas early Foucault mainly focusses on how discursive formations are forming and formed, the later Foucault broadens this approach by substituting the notion of discourse with a notion of power that is broader, whereby he can analyse linguistic *as well as* non-linguistic practices (see for example Foucault 1977c, pp. 300-1). In the last years of his life, Foucault came to realize that the subjectivity-aspect was not as contingent as he had suggested in the early phase (e.g. in Foucault 1966, pp. 355-98).

At the very outset, Foucault’s notion of critique should be understood in terms of “demonstration of limitation” and “problematization”. This means on the one hand that critique is understood as a demonstration of limitations in the way we think about and act in the world. On the other hand, since *every* approach to the world entails limitations, the demonstration does not in itself call for a rejection of the investigated field of discourse¹²⁹ or practice – because the abolishment of limitations will just lead to a new frame (or *dispositif*¹³⁰) of limitations. There is no direct link between limitation and a quest for rejection. Therefore the abolishment of the demonstrated limitations would have to depend on an evaluation of how problematic they are – in relation to the gains and the possible alternatives. In an early formulation,

¹²⁹ Notice that Habermas and Foucault use the term “discourse” in rather different ways: whereas it in Habermas’ thought signifies the reflection on everyday communicative practices, in Foucault’s thought it signifies the communicative practices themselves.

¹³⁰ The Foucaultian notion of *dispositif* is often translated into apparatus or installation. I will in the thesis use an Anglofication of the French concept, since it is used in a broader sense than the traditional translations indicate.

Mais analyser une formation discursive, c'est chercher la loi de cette pauvreté, c'est en prendre la mesure et en déterminer la forme spécifique. C'est donc, en un sens, penser la 'valeur' des énoncés. Valeur qui n'est pas définie par leur vérité, qui n'est pas jaugée par la présence d'un contenu secret; mais qui caractérise leur place, leur capacité de circulation et d'échange, leur possibilité de transformation... (Foucault 1969, p. 158).

The problematization that can spring from (e.g.) analyses of discursive formations happens through an articulation of the norms that they are a product of. It is an *evaluation* of these norms – and there is no bi-polar norms of truth that can determine whether or not this evaluation should lead to rejection. A much broader outlook will have to be made in order for such determination to take place.

Even though Foucault in *L'archéologie du savoir* (1969) does not want to affiliate himself too closely with critique (which he then takes to be an assessment of legitimacy or rights – cf. p. 251; see also his reflections on ideology, pp. 240-3) the notion of limitation is rather marked. In the book he wants to characterize the archaeological approach. The aim of this approach is to analyse what Foucault calls "l'archive". The analysis of the archives is presented in the following way,

L'analyse de l'archive comporte donc une région privilégiée: à la fois proche de nous, mais différente de notre actualité, c'est la bordure du temps qui entoure notre présent, qui le surplombe et qui l'indique dans son altérité; c'est ce qui, hors de nous, nous délimite. La description de l'archive déploie ses possibilités (et la maîtrise de ses possibilités) à partir des discours qui viennent de cesser justement d'être les nôtres... (Foucault 1969, p. 172).

So, archaeology means to investigate the limitations that shape our present outlooks, limitations that are not merely negative, because they constitute certain possibilities (they save us from "une multitude amorphe" (p. 170)). The analysis of limitations is consequently not only made in order to problematize.

The analyses of limitations are made through an investigation into the ruptures, discontinuities, cuttings, exclusions and rarefactions that, according to Foucault, always constitute the frames of discourse (cf. Foucault 1969, pp. 9-10+155-7). This claim he justifies by the following intuition,

Elle repose sur le principe que *tout* n'est jamais dit [...] les énoncés (aussi nombreux qu'ils soient) son toujours en déficit [...] On étudie les énoncés à la limite qui les sépare de ce qui n'est pas dit (Foucault 1969, p. 156).

Every linguistic statement is always in a deficit. The reason why this is so is that they establish continuity in the manifold – and continuity is only possible at the cost of diversity (Foucault 1969, pp. 31+37-8+209). This rarefaction is brought about through – among other things – norms of relevance (Foucault 1969, p. 77). Foucault wants to articulate at what cost the discursive formations are gained (Foucault 1983, pp. 1261-2).

As said above, the investigations of limitations are not primarily aiming at dissolving them. The reason why it is nevertheless fruitful to investigate them is that it makes it possible to assess

them – and to consider what would happen *if* they were dissolved and replaced by others (Foucault 1969, pp. 37-43). Foucault’s point is that even though limitations are necessary, it is not possible to argue that any *specific* limitations is necessary.¹³¹ Often we are, however, not even aware of the linguistic limitations that found certain practices. The linguistic limitations are merely tools¹³² for the establishment of certain focusses that have other external pragmatic aims – tools that disappear in their usage because they establish a focus on other aspects. The aim of the archaeological analysis is to make-aware,

Le langage, dans l’instance de son apparition et de son mode d’être, c’est l’énoncé (Foucault 1969, p. 148).

The archaeological investigation demands a change of focus (“une certaine conversion du regard et de l’attitude” – Foucault 1969, p. 145), namely to approach discourses as events with their own conditions and terms of usability (e.g. Foucault 1969, pp. 40-1+146-8+169). Through the demonstration of the limits that found discourses, the archaeological investigation raises the question,

comment se fait-il que tel énoncé soit apparu et nul autre à sa place? (Foucault 1969, p. 39).

The task is to “s’affranchir” (p. 31) and “se rendre libre” (p. 41) from specific limitations – by becoming aware of them, whereby they can be evaluated.

The notion of freedom and liberation is an important aspect of Foucault’s oeuvre. All his main works can be understood as a description of how the notion of freedom has taken different shapes through history (e.g. in Foucault 1963, ch. 3; 1975a, pp. 268-9; 1976, pp. 107-9¹³³; 1984a, ch. 1,4+3; 1984b, p. 62).¹³⁴ Also in his methodological reflections, the notion is often emphasized

¹³¹ This is not the same as claiming that – in a metaphysical ontological sense – no limitations *are* necessary. It is merely a characterization of the argumentative (or in Foucault’s language: discursive) practices: every argument about the limitations that found argumentative practices, would be either circular or at least founded on other limitations that could themselves have been questioned (Foucault 1969, p. 93+101).

¹³² To talk about the limitations as “tools” is slightly misleading, since it indicates that it is possible to think of the limitations in abstraction from what they are limiting. As indicated above (p. 53) this would be an unhappy understanding of them. I merely use the term “tools” because of a lack of better expressions.

¹³³ More generally, this book discusses the hypothesis of repression of sexuality – i.e. the hypothesis that we are *not* free to act out our sexual instincts.

¹³⁴ The theme is not explicit in Foucault 1966, but it would not be hard to demonstrate that the relationship between language and the genesis of the notion of man that Foucault demonstrates as a product of a particular notion of work (that implies life, will, the living word (parole) and reflections on subjectivity, being human, finality) equals a genesis of a certain notion of freedom too. In Foucault 1968, pp. 691-2, Foucault himself actually outlines this interpretation.

(e.g. in Foucault 1968, pp. 691-2+694+5; 1977b, p. 167; 1990, p. 38; 1982b, pp. 1054-60; 1984c, pp. 1392-97; 1984e, pp. 1416-7; 1984g, the whole text).

This focus on freedom could lead one to think that freedom in Foucault's outlook is seen as a universally defining aspect of humanity. That would be wrong, though. The reason why freedom is in focus is that the notion is always problematic. One should therefore rather say that, according to Foucault, the reason why freedom is in focus is that freedom is what *prevents* every definition of humanity to be of universal validity – because it is always possible to understand the prevailing understanding of humanity in the light of “it could have been otherwise”. But it is important to note that this is not to say that the prevailing definitions are purely *accidental*. Foucault was not a radical constructivist. This is never articulated more clearly than in the following quote,

Mais pour qu'il ne s'agisse pas simplement de l'affirmation ou du rêve vide de la liberté, il me semble que cette attitude historico-critique doit être aussi une attitude expérimentale. Je veux dire que ce travail fait aux limites de nous-mêmes doit d'un côté ouvrir un domaine d'enquêtes historiques et de l'autre se mettre à l'épreuve de la réalité et de l'actualité, à la fois pour saisir les points où le changement est possible et souhaitable et pour déterminer la forme précise à donner à ce changement (Foucault 1984c, p. 1393).

The notion of freedom in abstraction from a “test” (i.e. relation or directedness) with reality would – at most – lead to an empty dream. The reflection of limits in abstraction from a reality that determines what is actually *possible* and *desirable*, is possible – but rather unfruitful. This statement articulates one of the prevailing reference-points in Foucault's work: the relationship between a plural and diverse reality, and the possible and necessary, normatively founded, rarefaction that always could have been framed differently.

In his early writings, Foucault often relates more negatively towards reality and articulates a close relationship to what one could call linguistic constructivism. There are several examples of this in *L'archéologie du savoir*. But Foucault stresses (as I have done above too – subsection III,1,b) that any linguistic act points towards something else (*l'autre, les choses, Le niveau 'préconceptuel', le prédiscursif* – Foucault 1969, pp. 21+65-7+82+100-1). This otherness is on the one hand what language is incited by and directed towards. On the other hand, language also (to some extent) creates or shapes this otherness (Foucault 1969, pp. 237-8). To reconcile these two contradicting claims, it is important to understand it in the pragmatic frame that I have sketched out: normativity and reality cannot be understood in separation from each other, reality is to some extent a product of a normatively based cut-out (therefore the pre-discursive is discursive too – see for example Foucault 1983, pp. 1261-2); neither can they be reduced to one another (expressions without a relation to something else would be empty, and reality is not exhausted by linguistic systematism). It should therefore be avoided to talk about the “things in themselves”. But,

Toutefois élider le moment de ‘choses mêmes’, ce n’est pas se reporter nécessairement à l’analyse linguistique de la signification. [...] D]’une analyse comme celle que j’entreprends, les *mots* sont aussi délibérément absents que les *choses* elles-mêmes [...] J]e voudrais montrer que le discours n’est pas une mince surface de contact, ou d’affrontement, entre une réalité et une langue [...] Ces règles définissent non point l’existence muette d’une réalité, non point l’usage canonique d’un vocabulaire, mais le régime des objets. ‘Les mots et les choses’, c’est le titre – sérieux – d’un problème (Foucault 1969, pp. 65-6 – emphasis by Foucault).

There are a number of negative statements about the relevance of reality and “things” in the quote. It is clear that there are certain approaches to reality to which Foucault does not subscribe. On the other hand it is rather significant that he states that the title “Words and things” points at an important problem. So, words and things must be understood in their togetherness – a togetherness that is not merely a “slender meeting” (i.e. a meeting between two aspects that exist independently) but nevertheless cannot be understood as a pure unity either. A togetherness that is both problematic and indispensable. The quote rejects a “pure” notion of reality, but at the same time it acknowledges that *objects* are indispensable parts of language – i.e. the linguistic freedom has to be bound to certain notions of things in a broad sense. Abstract freedom is empty. It makes only sense to talk about freedom in relation to something unfree. But at the same time the relationship between freedom and reality is a problem: *how* the constellation of “words and things” is framed is open (freedom) for variation, to a certain extent (reality). But both the “openness” and the “to a certain extent” are products of a freedom/reality constellation themselves, and are therefore not absolutely determinate either.

So Foucault is a philosopher who commits himself to certain realistic intuitions. It is therefore rather surprising that he sometimes has been accused of defending a mere constructivism (cf. below, pp. 179ff). Even a rather meek realist thinker like Putnam has difficulties in seeing in what sense Foucault is not a mere constructivist thinker. Why is this so? I think that one of the reasons is that the role or significance of reality in the thought of Foucault is different from how it is conceived of in the thought of Putnam and his associates. In the thought of Putnam (but also Habermas – cf. above, pp. 58f) reality (or the world) is seen as a hold against relativizations. Reality is what *restricts* normative relativity because reality is what demonstrates a normative outlook as either true/good/fruitful or false/bad/unfruitful. In Foucault’s thought, on the other hand, it is normativity that is seen as the stable part of the relation and reality is seen as that what “upsets” the stability by demonstrating normativity to be reductive. Whereas Putnam and Habermas focus on how reality stabilizes a normative outlook (if the outlook is to be relativized, it is necessary that the relativization suits reality at least equally well as the preceding outlook) Foucault focusses on how reality itself sometimes functions as a “call” for relativization (because the present outlook is demonstrated to be severely problematic). Whereas Putnam and Habermas

focus on how reality reduces the scope of normative relativizations, Foucault focusses on how reality always has the potential of extending or exploding the prevailing outlooks.

It is therefore not surprising that Putnam accuses Foucault of relativism in a degree that resembles mere constructivism – because Foucault accentuates a consequence of pragmatic realism that is rather downgraded in Putnam’s own approach: if reality only can be understood inside a normative outlook that is based on certain criteria of relevance (that various outlooks consequently catches various aspects of reality) then the “fit” between normativity and reality will always only be partial, and the prevailing normative outlook can always be relativized because of inadequacy in relation to the diversity of reality. And this is not only because we sometimes utter wrong claims (inside the prevailing outlook), but because the relevance-claims on which the outlook rests have been proven problematic (cf. the discussion of wrongness and inadequateness – above, subsection IV,2,b). Reality is not only something that, as it were, serves as a stable basis for normativity. What Putnam misses in his critique of the Foucaultian relativism, is the point that reality is not only a *hold* against a critique that is out of control (absolute relativizing critique), but that reality also can be said to *instigate* critique (something of which Rorty is much more aware than Putnam – cf. the discussion above, p. 121).

An investigation into the relationship between freedom and reality calls (in the Foucaultian approach) for relativizations and thus threatens to lead into a chaotic dialectics of absolute indeterminacy. In order to avoid that, it is necessary in such investigations to hold on to certain aspects of the relationship, aspects that are not (presently) disputed. Hereby a reference-point is gained from where to articulate the investigation. At the same time, however, the investigation loses its universal validity – it becomes local: the analysis is only valid insofar as we accept a certain outlook as unquestioned – even though it *could* have been questioned. The locality-point was made already in 1969 (Foucault 1969, pp. 17-8+42-3+206) but it was further accentuated in two lectures that Foucault held in 1976 (published in Foucault 1977b). In these lectures, Foucault accentuated that both archaeological, genealogical and critical investigations have to be locally oriented,

Donc, si vous voulez, premier point, premier caractère de ce qui s’est passé depuis une quinzaine d’années: caractère local de la critique [...] En deux mots: on pourrait peut-être dire que l’archéologie, ce serait la méthode propre à l’analyse des discours locaux, et la généalogie, la tactique qui fait jouer à partir des discours locaux ainsi décrites les savoirs désassujettis qui s’en dégagent (Foucault 1977b, pp. 163+167).

Until now, I have not dealt with the notion of critique in Foucault’s writings. That is because the notion of critique is not very accentuated in Foucault’s methodological reflections until 1970. And when it is mentioned, it is mostly done with distance: Foucault demonstrates various ways

in which notions of critique have been based on historical formations that could very well be coming to an end (e.g. in Foucault 1966, ch. 4,1+7,5). To say that it *could* have been otherwise is not to say that it *should* have been otherwise. In the early writings the aim is rather descriptive. The above quote, however, raises the question of the relationship between, on the one hand, the archaeological and genealogical analyses of the local foundations of discourse and power, and, on the other hand, the point that critique is locally founded. The archaeological and genealogical analyses reveal how the local outlooks are *actually* established. In that sense, one could say that the archaeological and genealogical analyses investigate the positive, creative aspects of limitations: which discursive formations and power-dispositives are *constituted by refraining* from certain questions. Since critique has to take such established outlooks as its starting point, the critique becomes locally founded itself. The relationship between critique and archaeology/genealogy is therefore very close. This is articulated in *L'ordre du discours* (1970),

Ainsi doivent alterner, prendre appui les unes sur les autres et se compléter les descriptions critique et les descriptions généalogiques. La part critique de l'analyse s'attache aux systèmes d'enveloppement du discours; elle essaie de repérer, de cerner ces principes d'ordonnement, d'exclusion, de rareté du discours. [...] La part généalogique de l'analyse s'attache en revanche aux séries de la formation effective du discours: elle essaie de le saisir dans son pouvoir d'affirmation, et j'entends par là non pas un pouvoir qui s'opposerait à celui de nier, mais le pouvoir de constituer des domaines d'objets, à propos desquels on pourra affirmer ou nier des propositions vraies ou fausses (Foucault 1970, pp. 71).

Critique and genealogy presuppose and complement each other: genealogy investigates the power-formations that are actually constituted (the affirming aspects of power) through the exclusions and rarefactions that critique investigates (the excluding aspects of power). An analysis of the one aspect of power does not make sense in abstraction of the other. The limiting aspects of power are the foundation for the creative and affirming aspects, and the limitations get their legitimacy from their creative qualities (“un savoir se définit par des possibilités d'utilisation et d'appropriation offertes par le discours” – Foucault 1969, p. 238).

A later formulation of the relationship between critique and archaeology/genealogy is found in “Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?” (1984),

... critique [...] est généalogique dans sa finalité et archéologique dans sa méthode (Foucault 1984c, p. 1393).

In this quote it is very clear that critique, archaeological and genealogical approaches cannot be separated. Critique is archaeological in its method because a critique of various formations cannot happen non-discursively. Critique has to happen as a discursive (i.e. linguistic) contemplation of the actually existing (not necessarily linguistic) formations. To say that critique is genealogical in its aim is rather cryptic. The claim is substantiated thus: Critique

ne déduira pas de la forme de ce que nous sommes ce qu'il nous est impossible de faire ou de connaître; mais elle dégagera de la contingence qui nous a fait être ce que nous sommes la possibilité de ne plus être, faire ou penser ce que nous sommes, faisons ou pensons (Foucault 1984c, p. 1393).

Critique is genealogical in its aim in the sense that it does not reveal impossibilities and necessities, but rather investigates the contingency in what has *actually* come into being. Both critique and genealogy aim at showing the contingency of constituted formations – critique focusses on which rarefactions have been instantiated, genealogy focusses on what has hereby come into being.

So, critique localizes rarefactions and exclusions, archaeology and genealogy demonstrate what is created out of these rarefactions and exclusions. In that sense, critique is a crucial point in Foucault's writings from the 1970-lecture and on. It is true that he in the 1970's mainly talks about his own work as *genealogical* investigations, and it could therefore be argued that he mainly focusses on the affirming aspects of limitations. I grant that in the methodological reflections of Foucault, the reflections on genealogy are more accentuated than the reflections on critique. I think, however, that it can be argued that this is not due to a preference in relation to his actual analyses: (1) The methodological reflections of Foucault were – as mentioned – initiated by an attempt to avoid some of the misunderstandings of his work. Foucault's choice of vocabulary – that he investigated social practices as *power*-relations – led to the misunderstanding that Foucault conceived of these practices as repressive, egocentric, survival-of-the-fittest-based activities. Power is often conflated with what Foucault calls *domination*: i.e. the ability to prevent others from doing what they would choose to do, if they were free from the constraining power (on this distinction, see below p. 163). In order to stress that his power-analyses were *not* to be understood in that way, Foucault had to accentuate the genealogical aspect of his research. (2) Secondly, Foucault once admitted that his choice of fields for historical analysis were shaped by a critical intention (Foucault 1982a, p. 250). (3) Thirdly, despite of the emphasis on the genealogical aspect of his investigations, reflections on the critical implications very often pops up in short statements, in which Foucault affiliates himself with critical projects (e.g. in Foucault 1971a, pp. 72-82; 1971b, p. 1024; 1977b, pp. 163-6; 1990; 1982a, pp. 249-50; 1982b, p. 1051; 1984c; 1984e; 1984f, pp. 1450-1; 1984g, pp.1542-1543+1548).

The reflections on critique are most continuous in the last years of Foucault's life. In addition to the already mentioned points (that critique reveals principles of assignment, exclusion and rarefactions of power-formations; that critique has to be locally founded; that critique is a contemplation of the relationship between freedom and reality) the following points will be important in the following assessment of his account of critique: (i) critique as experimental

problematization rather than rejection; (ii) critique as an *êthos* rather than a move towards determinate aims; (iii) critique as distinct from polemics; (iv) critique as a rejection of *domination*.

(i) Since critique means to reveal limitations that, at the outset, can be both positive and negative, it is clear that Foucaultian critique does not in itself lead to a rejection of what is criticized (Foucault 1984c, p. 1393). The limitations that are revealed may very well have been set out of good reasons. On the other hand, critique does not leave everything as it is either. A demonstration of the limiting effects of certain discursive formations and power-dispositives is a demonstration of a loss in diversity. There has been gains at the cost of certain losses. These losses call for some notion of reasonability: why should these losses be accepted? Why should a rarefied approach to some objects be preferred to a more diversified approach? Why should we accept a focus on certain aspects, or why should certain other aspects not be considered as relevant parameters in truth- and power-claims? Critique does thus not necessarily lead to rejection, but it *does* constitute *problematizations*.

This is also related to the fact that the claims posed in critique are themselves founded on limiting formations: if the critique has only a limited reach, it cannot in itself lead to a rejection of other practices. The critique should therefore be seen as a *counter*-claim in an experimental sense (“what would happen if we thought of things in this alternative way”) rather than as a truth-claim (“this is wrong”). The critique happens by a re-configuration of certain formations, and it leads only to a change in practice if these re-configurations show to be fruitful – due to the test with reality. Foucault summarizes this in the end of his text on Enlightenment,

L'ontologie critique de nous-mêmes, il faut la considérer non certes comme une théorie, une doctrine, ni même un corps permanent de savoir qui s'accumule; il faut la concevoir comme une attitude, un *êthos*, une vie philosophique où la critique de ce que nous sommes est à la fois analyse historique des limites qui nous sont posées et épreuve de leur franchissement possible (Foucault 1984c, p. 1396).

(ii) This quote also reveals another significant aspect of Foucault's notion of critique: critique is seen as an *attitude* (*êthos*) rather than as a theory or development towards a particular end. Critique does not lead *towards* something in any substantial way (e.g. truth or goodness), but *away from* or *beyond* something.

This notion of a critical *êthos* was something that Foucault discussed repeatedly in the last year of his life. The critical *êthos* is introduced as an attitude that has become important in a certain historical era – i.e. the modern era – and Foucault claims that the first articulation of it is to be found in Kant's text *Was ist Aufklärung* (1784). The idea that critique is something that is attached to a specific historical era was already presented in *Les mots et les choses* (Foucault 1966, pp. 92-5+249-56), but whereas Foucault in the early book proclaimed this historical era to

be coming to an end, Foucault actually *affiliates* with this critical era in his discussion of Kant's Enlightenment-text. But the possibility of the approach losing its relevance is held open. Both the negative and positive characterizations of critique that are articulated in the text are therefore (according to Foucault) only valid in that limited era.

This probably has to be explained in relation to Foucault's notion of freedom. If the notion of freedom is understood as "it could have been otherwise" then a critical notion of freedom (such as "we have the freedom to contemplate the prevailing limitations and experiment with the possibility of going beyond them") could also have been otherwise. It is possible to think of normative formations in which freedom is understood as something like "the freedom just to accept the prevailing normative outlooks without having to question them". Foucault consequently has to leave the possibility open that the critical *êthos* someday will lose its relevance. This will become significant below (pp. 166ff).

(iii) This openness to other possibilities is not the same as saying that every outlook is equally good. At the outset it is merely to say that no outlook can claim *absolute* universal validity. Foucault has a rather firm notion of the difference between fruitful critical approaches (*discuter*) and bad criticism (*polémique*). In an interview from 1984 he (quite surprisingly) states that critical discussions concern "la recherche de la vérité et la relation à l'autre" and that "Dans le jeu sérieux des questions et des réponses [...] les droits de chacun sont en quelque sorte immanents à la discussion" (Foucault 1984e, p. 1410). This definitely sounds rather Habermasian. Once again the foundation for such claims should be found in the fact that Foucault does not take *abstract* freedom to be a relevant notion of investigation. It is of course *possible* to state whatever one wants to, but statements without a certain commitment to notions like truth or respect for the others are at best uninteresting. Critical reflections can thus not happen as a total dissolution of the prevailing normativity and reality – they have to take prevailing approaches towards truth and respect for others into account. This does not mean that truth and the others always have to be understood in the way it is presently done. But critique in a total abstraction of these notions would isolate the critic from any possible addressee.

There is concord between Habermas and (at least the late-) Foucault on this point. This concordance is even more clear in Foucault's text on Enlightenment in which he points out the following systematicity to be a general hold against the disorder and contingency that springs from the locality-approach,

Ces ensembles pratique relèvent de trois grands domaines: celui des rapports de maîtrise sur les choses, celui des rapports d'action sur les autres, celui des rapports à soi-même (Foucault 1984c, p. 1395).¹³⁵

In Habermasian terminology that statement could sound something like: linguistic practices are constituted by objective, intersubjective and subjective claims.

(iv) The last point of critical relevance in Foucault's writings that I will bring out, is the distinction between domination and power. As with the previous points this is a point that, even though it is most strongly emphasized in his later writings, plays a role in the earlier writings too. Even though the most clear formulation of the distinction is presented in one of the last interviews that Foucault gave (Foucault 1984g), it can also be found in Foucault 1976a, ch. 4; 1977b, p. 180; 1982a, p. 247; 1982b, pp. 1052-3.

It should be clear by now that the Foucaultian notion of power should not only be understood as something that *prevents* something from happening – power-formations also create new possibilities. Foucault understands power as a certain shaping of the relations between people and things. One of the first statements of the distinction between power and domination sounds as follows,

... ne pas prendre le pouvoir comme un phénomène de domination massive et homogène; domination massive et homogène d'un individu sur les autres [...] Le pouvoir, je crois, doit être analysé comme quelque chose qui circule [...] Autrement dit, le pouvoir transite par les individus, il ne s'applique pas à eux. [...] c'est-à-dire que l'individu n'est pas le vis-à-vis du pouvoir, il en est, je crois, l'un des effets premiers. (Foucault 1977b, p. 180).

Power should not primarily be understood in terms of domination because domination presupposes a rather fixed notion of human individuality – a notion that is itself shaped by power-relations. This is the main theme of the first volume of *Histoire de la sexualité*. The question in this book is not whether or not there exists a sexuality that has been repressed, but rather how we came to think of it as repressed. What are the unquestioned presuppositions about sexuality and human subjectivity that led to this view? What are the limits of it? And are these limits still fruitful today? The notions of repression and domination are intimately connected with a notion of liberation. On the question whether Foucault believes to have revealed progresses of liberation, he answers,

Je serai là-dessus un peu plus prudent. J'ai toujours été un peu méfiant à l'égard du thème général de la libération, dans la mesure où, si l'on ne le traite pas avec un certain nombre de précautions et à l'intérieur de certaines limites, il risque de renvoyer à l'idée qu'il existe une nature ou un fond humain qui s'est

¹³⁵ This text was written as a contribution to a conference in which Habermas and Foucault were to meet, and the allusion to Habermasian vocabulary is therefore not surprising. The same systematicity is, however, found both in Foucault 1971a, p. 11 (“Tabou de l'objet [objectivity], rituel de la circonstance [\approx intersubjectivity], droit privilégié ou exclusif du sujet qui parle [subjectivity]”) and (slightly differently though) in Foucault 1982b, pp. 1052-4.

trouvé, à la suite d'un certain nombre de processus historique, économiques et sociaux, masqué, aliéné ou emprisonné dans des mécanismes, et par des mécanismes de répression. (Foucault 1984g, pp. 1528-9).

and later,

Les analyses que j'essaie de faire portent essentiellement sur les relations de pouvoir. J'entends par là quelque chose de différent des états de dominations. [...] Cette analyse des relations de pouvoir constitue un champ extrêmement complexe; elle rencontre parfois ce qu'on peut appeler des faits, ou des états de domination, dans lesquels les relations de pouvoir, au lieu d'être mobiles et de permettre aux différents partenaires une stratégie qui les modifie, se trouvent bloquées et figées. [...] Il est certain que, dans un tel état, les pratiques de liberté n'existent pas ou n'existent qu'unilatéralement ou sont extrêmement bornées et limitées (Foucault 1984g, p. 1529-30).

So, domination is only one side of power – namely where the power has been fixated to such an extent that freedom is absent. Later in the interview he actually states that power-relations presuppose that the involved agents are free (Foucault 1984g, p. 1539). So in a certain sense domination-relations are not power-relations, or at least only in a limited sense. This is because Foucault's notion of power (being a relationship between reality and freedom) presupposes the possibility of resistance, and in domination-relations this possibility has been minimized. In the cases of domination, Foucault agrees that liberation is valuable. But such liberation will not lead us to a particular notion of "humanity" or "happiness". If the aim of liberating processes is fixated too much, it turns into a kind of domination itself (Foucault 1982a, p. 247). It is not given in advance what liberation would lead to. That depends on what notion of freedom is taken to be most valuable. The critique of domination-relations can only happen through a demonstration of *possible alternatives* (Foucault 1984g, p. 1543), and,

Cette tâche a toujours été une grande fonction de la philosophie. Dans son versant critique – j'entends critique au sens large –, la philosophie est justement ce qui remet en question tous les phénomènes de domination à quelque niveau et sous quelque forme qu'ils se présentent – politique, économique, sexuelle, institutionnelle (Foucault 1984g, p. 1548).

So, according to the late Foucault, philosophy has always had critique as one of its main functions.

One of Foucault's main concerns has generally been to reveal which notions of *freedom* the notions of domination and liberation stem from. If, for example, we think of the development from punishment through torture to disciplining through imprisonment as a liberating move, there may be good reasons for this. These reasons are, however, founded on rather specific notions of what freedom amounts to, and it might show to be fruitful also to contemplate these notions.¹³⁶ Maybe it can hereby be demonstrated that the progress in relation to avoidance of bodily pain are accompanied by regress in relation to other (relevant) aspects of the freedom/reality-relationship – this regress being concealed by the obviousness of progress in relation to bodily pain. The point

¹³⁶ This contemplation was the aim with *Surveiller et punir* (1975).

of such demonstration is not that there has not been progress in relation to bodily pain. Neither, that we should return to previous states of affairs.¹³⁷ The point is rather that the (progressive) changes have *actually* been accompanied by regressive changes.

The point is furthermore that there is no necessary connection between certain progresses and certain regresses. It *could* have been otherwise – but it is not. A certain constellation of progresses and regresses has been chosen (in a rather abstract sense: Foucault does not claim that there has been conscious or intentional *choices*) and this reveals a certain view on what is taken to be of value. The reformists of the penal system certainly *could* have chosen to reform the penal system in other ways – e.g. by abolishing the very notion of penalty. But they did not, because this would make it difficult to avoid crimes, something that – due to certain values – was seen as more important than the well-being of the criminal person. And probably very few would – even after having read Foucault’s analysis – say that this is a wrong disposition; it *is* important to have some kind of penal-system in order for a (certain kind of) modern society to function. It is therefore probably necessary that criminal persons are exposed to unpleasant consequences. To that extent most of us still share values with the reformers of the penalty-system in the 18th and 19th centuries. But it is not given in advance that it should be exactly *these* kinds of unpleasantnesses that should shape our penalty-institutions.

The point is that due to certain very obvious progresses in the penalty system we are seduced into not contemplating the limitations that have been accompanying consequences of the reforms. The penalty power-relations therefore generate into domination-relations: the relations are fixated to such an extent that the freedom-aspects of the dispositives are minimized. The genealogical investigation in *Surveiller et punir* is meant to accentuate this aspect (Foucault 1975a, pp. 30-2).

§2. Evaluation of the Foucaultian Notion of Critique.

So, at least in Foucault’s self-understanding there is and should be critical gains from his work. And as noted above, I take it that the critical gains of his actual work are self-evident. But is Foucault’s own account of these critical gains convincing? As mentioned above, this has been a highly disputed subject from the 1980’s and onwards. I will argue that Foucault *does* give a convincing account of what critique can be. The main differences between Habermas’ and Foucault’s accounts are a difference in acceptance of universality and a difference in emphasis on the reflective vs. receptive aspects of critique.

¹³⁷ Taking Foucault’s cruelly detailed description of the execution of Damians in 1757 at the beginning of the book (pp. 9-12) it would be absurd to attribute that view to him. See also Foucault 1982a, p. 248 on the nostalgia-issue.

Foucault's concept of critique can be summarized thus: in critique we reveal principles of assignment, exclusion and rarefaction of power-formations. It is a locally founded contemplation of the relationship between freedom and reality. Due to the locality-aspect it can merely be an experimental problematization that reveals possible alternatives to the actual power-formations. As such it is not a theory but an *êthos*: it does not lead *towards* something specific, but rather *away* from the present dispositives. The moral gains of critique are that it delimits domination-structures – but it is not given in advance *what* domination amounts to (except from a lack of freedom in the power-relations).¹³⁸

i. "Why Fight?"

In relation to *my* account of critique, it should be pretty obvious that Foucault presents a convincing notion of critique. Even though he is reluctant about both the concepts of normativity and reality, his notion of freedom articulates some of the aspects that I try to point at with the notion of normativity: an articulation of what is being done with a diverse reality; an establishment, through certain notions of relevance, of a certain (coherent) order that limits the diversity of reality, because the systematization only can happen through a focus on certain aspects at the cost of others. Normativity and freedom are therefore creative as well as reductive. Reductions are necessary but also problematic because they may lead to negative side-effects.

There may, though, be a slight difference in the understanding of the relationship. I have argued that normativity on the one hand reduces reality, but on the other hand reality is the aim of normativity. There is consequently a tension between normativity and reality: normativity is directed towards reality; this directedness at the same excludes aspects of reality as non-relevant. I have argued that the pointing out of tensions between normativity and reality is, *ceteris paribus*, a problematization, because normativity is at the outset directed towards reality, and a failure in this is therefore a demonstration of a problem. In many cases we may *accept* tensions either because of certain positive gains, or because the possible alternatives seem to be even more problematic. But there has to be good reasons for maintaining a tensed constellation.

In Foucault's view, however, the source of the inevitability of critique is not that reductions are bad, but that no reduction is (absolutely) necessary. It is therefore always possible to ask

¹³⁸ In 1978 Foucault presented in a lecture on critique the following definition of critique: "Je proposerais donc, comme toute première définition de la critique, cette caractérisation générale: l'art de n'être pas tellement gouverné" (Foucault 1990, p. 38). The reason why I have not discussed this centrally placed definition is that it is articulated in rather specific terms: it does not characterize critique as such, but mainly a specific kind of critique: social-political critique. The definition is in accordance with the notion I have sketched out, in the sense that it points at a move *away* from, rather than *towards*, a certain dispositive.

whether the prevailing reductions are the most appropriate or fruitful. Whether we still subscribe to the norms that were the point of departure for them. Since Foucault's notion of critique stems from a relationship between *freedom* (rather than *normativity*) and reality it is evident that he cannot claim (on an absolute level) that reductions per se are problematic. The question is therefore what Foucault would say in a situation in which the demonstration of possible alternatives has revealed neither good nor bad consequences of the prevailing dispositive? Would the dispositive then have been problematized? Is there something in the concept of freedom that makes it self-evident that unnecessary limitations are bad? Intuitively most of us would probably say that unnecessary limitations *are* bad, because it is good to understand the world adequately, it is good to be able to act as freely as possible, and it is good to be able to express our feelings as freely as possible. It feels intuitively right to say that limitations should only be accepted as a means to certain gains. But why is that so?

A way to avoid this question could be to deny that the sketched situation could ever happen – i.e. to deny that it is possible to think of limitations with neither positive nor negative effects. One could argue that it would presuppose a metaphysical notion of reality: a notion of reality that is independent of the normative approach to it. If normativity and reality on the contrary are thought of as interdependent it does not make sense to think of a normative limitation without an effect in reality. This is true, but the point still remains: if limitations are, themselves, neither positive nor negative, what is then the point of focussing on limitations? Why are archaeological and genealogical investigations important? Are their importance merely constituted by the appearance of a critical *êthos* that only exists in a limited historical era?

Foucault would probably confirm this, but I think that by showing the connection between critique and the normativity/reality-relation, it becomes evident that archaeological and genealogical investigations have a relevance that is implicit at the outset of this relation – because normativity at the outset aims towards reality, but in a fallible way. I agree that this does not give us a robust notion of critique – because *how* to demonstrate tensions may change severely – but it does show that every normative approach to reality is potentially subject to criticism.

This point relates to a common objection raised from critical theorists against Foucault. This objection can be summarized by the catchword “why fight?” and has been raised by (among others) Habermas (Habermas 1984c, p. 130-1; 1985, pp.331-6), Honneth (Honneth 2003b, p. 118-20), Dreyfus and Rabinow (Dreyfus/Rabinow 1982/3, pp. 205-7), Ashenden and Owen (Ashenden/Owen 1999, p. 13) and Bernstein (Bernstein 1991, pp. 156-66). The main point with the objection is that Foucault cannot – at least in general terms – account for in what sense critique may be “called for”. That is: why is it a good thing to demonstrate the limitations that

constitute prevailing power-relations? In what sense is it possible to claim that the change which a critique may initiate leads to something better? In section (IV,4) I will reflect on the relationship between critique and improvement. For now suffice it to say that Foucault does *not* claim that there are general (ahistorical) reasons for claiming critique to be called for. But this is not the same as to say that critique is *never* called for. Rather, it means that the justification of critique has to be established by drawing on certain *actually* prevailing norms. This calling is based upon a problem between the freedom/reality constellation that is taken to be relevant. It is true that critique is only called for as long as one accepts the norms of relevance on which the calling is based. In the terminology of this thesis: a critique is always vulnerable to a counter-critique that questions the relevance of the articulated tension. But Foucault would have to be even more open. According to him, a critique can furthermore fail if the addressee does not take tensions to be problematic at all.

One could try to avoid this openness in Foucault's approach by a turn towards Foucault's reflections on domination. It might thus be said that these reflections could serve as a possible hold for claiming that critique is generally important. I think, however, that one should be careful with that strategy. Even though the relationship between power and domination has been important throughout in his writings, it is only in one, very late, interview that he expresses that domination generally is something that we should try to avoid. Furthermore, I am not convinced that such a claim can actually be justified in a Foucaultian outlook, because in certain situations it might very well be argued that domination-relations can have positive, creative effects. For example it has such positive effects when I in the rush hours in Paris, subject without any questioning to the rules of traffic lights, and stop when they turn red. The unquestioned subjection to this rule makes it possible for many people to live together on a rather small area. Furthermore, some parents might argue that in a certain age in the upbringing of children it can be a good thing to introduce certain domination-patterns for the child, so that not everything is seen as questionable all the time. Domineering relations can thus also have both negative and positive consequences, and it is not clear what should count as a general rule for (inside a Foucaultian universe of thought) when they are positive or negative.

I will therefore claim that there is no clear-cut distinction between power and domination, but that one should rather think of domination as a special kind of power-relation – namely a relation of power in which the freedom aspect is rather downgraded. It is not quite clear whether Foucault would concede to this or whether his claim that domination is a situation in which there is no freedom, and his claim that power-relations imply freedom should actually be interpreted as a claim that domination relations are not actually power-relations. But looking through his main

oeuvre would indicate that it should not be interpreted in the radical way, since Foucault generally has spend a lot of energy in demonstrating how certain domineering relations generally characterize certain dispositives of power. Foucault's explicit reflections on the relation between power, domination and freedom should therefore be considered mainly as a claim that power-relations cannot be *reduced* to domination-relations – that domination-relations only represent one kind of power-relations among others. And the reason why domination-relations are the main subject of critique is not that they are (in themselves) bad, but rather that the freedom-aspect has been concealed, and a critical demonstration of possible alternatives (“that it could have been otherwise”) is therefore relevant.

So the conclusion has to be that there is no room for a *general* answer to the question “why fight” in the Foucaultian thought, but this is not the same as there is no reasons to fight at all. The fights just have to be justified through certain norms of relevance that cannot themselves claim universal validity.

ii. Power as a Reference Point for Analysis.

Another persistent objection against Foucault's approach has been his use of power-relations as the reference-point for analysis. It has been questioned how adequate it is to “reduce” events in the world to instances of power-relations. That the power-focus carry certain blind spots and there are consequently aspects of reality that are lost with this focus.

At the outset, I also concur to the point in this objection. As I have explained in this thesis, every focus carries certain blind spots. But I am not sure whether it is a serious *objection*. That depends on *which* blind spots it entails, and how these blind spots are evaluated.

Habermas and Honneth have put this objection forward in the mid-1980's (Habermas 1985, sect. IX-XI (esp. pp. 322-43); Honneth 1986a, esp. pp. 160-7+298-300). They mainly object against Foucault's understanding of social relationships. The claim is that in analysing these relations as power-relations Foucault ends up in a purely instrumental understanding of them – whereby he fails to realize what is unique in the *Verständigung*-relations.

In order to evaluate whether that is a fair critique, it is necessary to have a clear picture of Foucault's notion of power. That is in itself rather impossible to achieve since Foucault states that power is no unified *point central* but rather

la multiplicité des rapports de force qui sont immanents au domaine où ils s'exercent, et sont constitutifs de leur organisation (Foucault 1976a, pp. 121-2).

So, power is not just one thing but is different in different situations. Power always has to be understood as a *relation* between entities. The above quote *is*, though, situated in a passage in

which Foucault nevertheless tries to say something general about power, and since Habermas and Honneth take Foucault from the mid-70's as their reference-point for their objections, I will in the following take this passage as the starting point for an evaluation of their critique.

In this passage (Foucault 1976a, pp. 121-7), Foucault claims that power is the relationship between entities, a relationship that is on the one hand constituted by the entities, but on the other hand constitutes how they are thought of (system-immanent and system-constituent). The power-formations appear as fights, struggles and confrontations (“de luttes et d'affrontements”) that shape the involved entities. Power hereby both constitutes systems (coherence) and displacements (isolation). And power-formations are furthermore to be understood as strategies that are crystalized as institutions that can have hegemonic effects (pp. 121-2).¹³⁹

So far, power has generally been characterized in terms of power-balance, fight and struggle, something that suggests that social relations should be thought of through war-like metaphors. Foucault reflects shortly on the question whether we should (and could) think also of *political* relations in terms of “la guerre poursuivie par d'autres moyens?” (Foucault 1976a, p. 123) and reaches the conclusion that the war-metaphors *together* with the political metaphors (!) are useful to articulate how to integrate what at the outset is unbalanced, heterogenous, unstable and/or tensed. So, Foucault does not claim the power-relations to exhaust social relations. But he *does* claim that also the political aspect of social relations is *shaped* by power-relations – just as he admits that power-relations are shaped by the political structures.¹⁴⁰

So, the claim is that as long as the analysis is to reveal how unbalanced, heterogenous, unstable and/or tensed phenomena or entities come into relation, the power-perspective is illuminating. Habermas and Honneth want to investigate the point in which there already *is* such a relation – in which the entities (the subjects) have common interests. Habermas and Honneth want to investigate the inter-subjective meeting – Habermas through the analysis of the *Verständigung*-relations, Honneth through the analysis of the recognitive relations. Foucault wants to investigate

¹³⁹ Foucault develops the characterization of power further on the succeeding pages in the book: (1) Power is not something that is achieved or gained, but something that is exercised; (2) power-relations should be understood as something *immanent* between entities rather than something that can be seen from an external perspective; (3) power comes from below – there is no clear cut between the rulers and the ruled; (4) power-relations are intentional but non-subjective (there are purposes and aims but these are not (mainly) carried through by single conscious subjects); (5) power presupposes resistance.

¹⁴⁰ In a broader perspective, one could say that discursively reached consensus and power-based social balances – i.e. truth and power – are distinct but still presuppose and shape each other (a point that Foucault stressed repeatedly – e.g. in Foucault 1975b, pp. 1619-20; 1976a, pp. 129-30; 1977a, p. 147; 1983, pp. 1273-4; 1984c, p. 1395; 1990, pp. 39+44-9).

how this meeting is a product of struggles and unbalances. In that sense Habermas is right that Foucault ends in a “heillosem Subjektivismus” (Habermas 1985, p. 324): in Foucault’s approach the starting point is how the inter-subjectively shared fields have come into being; how this is a product of a struggle between particular interests that have met in a certain balance. So, to the extent that these particular interests are thought of in terms of subjectivity, Foucault’s subjectivism is unavoidable. But first of all, (1) Foucault has repeatedly stressed that subjectivity is not just one thing and that the entities in the power-relations are themselves shaped by the relations in which they participate. The subjectivism of Foucault is therefore rather open. Secondly, (2) the question is whether Foucault’s subjectivism is deeper than the subjectivism of Habermas and Honneth. Both Habermas and Honneth concede that a notion of subjectivity is unavoidable. In Habermas’ view this is articulated as the subjective validity-claims. In Honneth’s view this appears as his acknowledgement of the relevance of the “good life” in moral questions, in his thoughts on the relationship between intersubjective recognition and self-realization, and in his thoughts on the subjective base for recognitive relations (Honneth 1992, p. 276-87; 1993; 2000b, p. 171-2). So the point of Habermas and Honneth cannot be that they want subjectivity to be eliminated as a constituent factor in social relations. The point should rather be that subjectivity cannot be thought of *in abstraction from* objectivity and intersubjectivity. But this is also the case in Foucault’s approach. Foucault also stresses that the entities that are involved in power-relations are themselves shaped through these relations. They just cannot be *reduced* to these relations – because then the relations would not have been relations in the first place (but rather mere unity). Thirdly, (3) the question is whether the *Verständigung*-and recognition-relations themselves can be thought of in abstraction of power-relations. That is: are even pure *Verständigung*- and recognition-relations not at the same time kinds of power-relations? Habermas’ point about the *zwanglosen Zwang* that springs from the *Kraft des besseren Argumentes* (Habermas 1973b, p. 161) indicate that it is – even though it is a very *special* kind of power-relation. *Verständigung*- and recognition-relations are power-relations in which the strategy is not at the outset egocentrically shaped,¹⁴¹ but still they are relations in which an actor (the speaker, the recognizer) wants to affect an addressee (the listener, the recognizee) in a certain way. The actor acts and hereby affect the addressee so that the addressee understands that the

¹⁴¹ Strategies are not per definition egotistically oriented – even though they spring from an ego that wants to bring something about. It is very well possible to have an altruistic strategy: “I want to do you good”. Even though this strategy has to be articulated through an “I want” it is not reasonable to characterize it as egoistic. For the same reasons, Foucault’s understanding of power through strategically oriented terms does not necessitate to characterize his approach as egocentric.

actor wants to share something with the addressee. Also the *Verständigung*- and recognition-relations presuppose two actors that are at the outset separate. Certainly this separation is not absolute – because then the relation could not be established – but *without* separation there would be no *Verständigung* or recognition either. And this is the same in the power-relations: they are not possible without entities that are to some extent separated – but the separation is not absolute because then there could be no power-relations. Fourthly, (4) Foucault would reply that even if *Verständigung*- and recognition-relations in abstraction could be said to be non-power-oriented, every *actual* act of *Verständigung* and recognition is inscribed in relations of power.

Habermas and Honneth would certainly concede in the last point, but still claim that the focus on the *Verständigung*- and recognition-aspects of the relation reveals a point from which the *continuity between and common interests of* the involved agents are unproblematic. And that the very fact that there are such points can be taken as the reference point for a reconceptualization of how we should think of social relations. In that sense, their work has been of invaluable worth as a counter-voice against traditional sociology based on an atomized conception of subjectivity. But to claim that Foucault belongs to this tradition is simply a misunderstanding. Foucault does not deny that social continuities shape how it is possible to think of the participating subjects. As a matter of fact this is one of his main points in (at least) *Les mots et les choses*. Rather his point is that there is another “story” that needs to be told also – namely the story about how these continuities between (for example) subjects came to apply their present shape. The present shape of these continuities could always have been otherwise. Even *Verständigung*- and recognition-relations should be committed to critical scrutiny. This is perhaps a critique of the very core of our reasonability, and such critique certainly has possible dangerous effects, but

... if it is extremely dangerous to say that Reason is the enemy that should be eliminated [EH: or criticized], it is just as dangerous to say that any critical questioning of this rationality risks sending us into irrationality (Foucault 1982a, p. 249).

A problematization of *Verständigung*- and recognition-structures does not necessarily lead to the abandonment of these aspects of our social being. His point is that we understand and exercise these aspects in certain (institutionalized) ways and these ways are always products of struggles in which the diversity of reality has been rarefied so that the “stories” of continuous practices have become apparent.

This is – according to Foucault – the object of critique. Habermas and Honneth may certainly be right that this can only happen inside a frame of *Verständigung* and recognition. There is no atomized standpoint from where one can criticize all continuities. But that is no relevant objection against Foucault since he repeatedly stresses that critique does not lead us to more fundamental

realms of being.¹⁴² Critique merely demonstrates possible alternatives – that have to be articulated through a perspective that is itself criticizable.

Summing up, it makes sense to say that the difference between the Foucaultian power-approach and the approach of Habermas and Honneth is not substantial. Whereas Habermas and Honneth want to point out the possible points in which there is no conflict between the interests of the self and the others, Foucault wants to focus on how these points came into being. This is not to say that Foucault's analysis is more fundamental than Habermas' and Honneth's because one could also say that Habermas and Honneth investigate the points in which the possibility of articulating the Foucaultian points comes into being. In that sense the two approaches should be thought of as dialectically and mutually illuminating – rather than as conflicting approaches.

Certainly it *is* true that since Foucault focusses on possible alternatives to the prevailing relations between (e.g.) subjects, he had to accentuate the differences and separations between subjects (in order to show that the prevailing relations are not necessary). It is therefore justified to say that he did not actually have much to say about the *resources* of these relations (but actually he has a lot to say about the resources of the relations of which they have risen – cf. the genealogical approach). A reading of Foucaultian writings should thus be supplemented with readings of (e.g.) Habermas and Honneth. But the opposite counts as well: a reading of Habermas and Honneth should be supplemented with a reading of (e.g.) Foucault, since the understanding of the social becomes too abstract and free-floating without the awareness of the actual shapes of the Verständigungs- and recognition relations. I will therefore claim that Habermas and Honneth only have a serious objection if the Foucaultian analyses were to be understood as exhausting the social. This is, however, not implied by Foucault.

iii. Cryptonormativism.

A third objection that has often been raised against the Foucaultian approach is that it is cryptonormative. I.e. that Foucault's approach is based on normative assumptions even though it pretends to question every normative starting point. This objection has been raised by (among others) Taylor (Taylor 1984; 1985d) and Habermas (Habermas 1985, pp. 331-6).

I have pointed out above (pp. 101ff) that one should be careful not to conflate Foucault's affiliation with a felicitous positivism with a quest for neutralism. The positivism of Foucault's

¹⁴² This is also the reason why Habermas point against Foucault that his view rests on three reductions (the participator and interpretation-perspective is ignored; validity-claims are reduced to effects of power; normative aspects are reduced to (a naturalistic conception of) mere being – Habermas 1985, p. 325) is wrong: it is true that Foucault wants to investigate how these aspects are products of certain struggles, but he does not claim these struggles to be primordial in relation to the resulting aspects. The opposite story might therefore just as well have been told.

approach does not mean that his analyses avoid normativity but rather that they only deal with what is open and accessible to everyone that is willing to take a look. The affiliation with positivism is mainly a rejection of references to hidden structures and intentions. It is therefore at the outset not really a relevant point to say that Foucault *actually* presupposes certain normative outlooks. In order for this to become an objection, it will have to be shown that these normative assumptions are problematic (that they are unconvincing in themselves, or in discordance with other aspects of his view).

In a rather influential paper – “Foucault on Freedom and Truth” – Charles Taylor reflects upon Foucault’s approach. Taylor arrives at three critical objections. He objects against what he sees as Foucault’s attempt of externalism/neutralism, Foucault’s alleged rejection of freedom as a reference point for evaluation of power-formation, and Foucault’s alleged turn towards anti-subjectivism. It should come as no surprise by now that I take all three points of criticism to be founded on a misunderstanding of the character of Foucault’s approach.

Taylor attributes Foucault with a stance of neutrality (“Ultimately, as is wellknown, he [i.e. Foucault] wants to take a stance of neutrality” – Taylor 1984, p. 156). This attribution is repeated several times on p. 163 and must be the foundation for the claim on p. 182 that Foucault should want to take “the outsider’s perspective”. The claim is not supported by any explicit text evidence but seems to be derived by what Taylor takes to be Foucault’s rejection of the subject, truth and norms of freedom as relevant reference points for analysis.

As demonstrated above (pp. 101ff) I do not agree that it is “wellknown” that Foucault wants to take a stance of neutrality – because this is not Foucault’s aim at all. Taylor’s objections were articulated before the publication of *Histoire de la sexualité 2 & 3* and the interviews and methodological reflections from the last years. Since these writings emphasize a new aspect of Foucault’s works (some would say that they even *change* it), this explains the misreading of Taylor to a certain extent. But even though it is true that the negative perspectives of Foucault’s treatment of notions like subjectivity, truth and freedom (i.e. the perspectives that point towards a rejection of the prevailing notions), there is (to my knowledge) no statement in the early writings that confirm that Foucault thought that the notions of freedom and truth could be avoided in toto. On the contrary, they were reference-points for Foucault himself. This is clear in relation to truth in a quote that Taylor himself makes in the text,

We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth (Taylor 1984, p. 178 – the quote is taken from Foucault 1977b, p. 176).

It should be clear from this that Foucault does not want to do without a notion of truth. Taylor’s problem is, however, that this notion is shaped through formations of power, because then it is

based on “secrets” which in Taylor’s terminology immediately is translated to *falsehood* (Taylor 1984, p. 176).

This illustrates rather clearly in what sense Taylor misunderstands Foucault’s point. In saying that notions of truth are based on secrets, the point is not that the notions of truth should be rejected. The point is to *problematize* the notions rather than to *reject* them. Foucault’s point is that we cannot have truth that is independent of power; it is therefore not in itself an objection against certain notions of truth that they are based upon power-formations. In pointing out that something is put into the shade one merely shows that it *could* have been otherwise (that our notions of truth are not given once and for all) – not that it *should* have been otherwise (that we should try to find a better, and less contingently based, notion of truth). Notions of truth being based on secrets are not hereby based on falsehood – but are merely shown to be based on contingent limiting focusses. In this light, it would thus be odd to claim that notions of truth and power-relations could be performed from a neutral stance, and I do not agree that Foucault does this. That is the very point when stressing the local character of critique (a point of which Taylor seems to be aware – cf. Taylor 1984, p. 179). Foucault’s analyses are therefore also of local validity. The reason why he points out the limitations that he does, is that they have for some reasons come into his focus. The limitations on which they are founded have somehow become urgently problematic to him. And only to the degree that he succeeds in demonstrating this urgency to his readers, does he have a critical point. That is the point of stating that the criticisms should be put to the test of reality.

As shown above (p. 155f), I can certainly not agree to Taylor’s point that Foucault should try to avoid or to dissolve notions of freedom and liberation in his analyses either. Taylor is again to some extent excused by not having been able to read the late writings of Foucault, because the most profound explications of Foucault’s view on these notions are published in 1984 (most notably in Foucault 1984g).¹⁴³ In Taylor’s interpretation of Foucault it is clear that Taylor conflates the notions of power and domination, and that he takes Foucault to oppose power to notions of freedom and liberation. At least that seems to be his objection on pp. 167+174-7 in which he criticizes Foucault’s account of power and domination for actually being based on notions of freedom – the implication being that Foucault is hereby either cryptonormative or

¹⁴³ Only to a certain extent, though. Taylor refers to Dreyfus/Rabinow 1982/3 in which the following statement from Foucault is also found,

When one defines the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others [...] one includes an important element: freedom. Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free (Dreyfus/Rabinow 1982/3, p. 221 – the quote is an English translation of Foucault 1982b, p. 1056).

incoherent.¹⁴⁴ As stated above (p. 155f) I do not agree that Foucault would have any problem admitting the centrality of notions of freedom and liberation – that actually all his main works can be seen as an investigation into how such notions have been at play in the history of various institutions. He merely wants to problematize actual historical notions by demonstrating that they are themselves based on power-formations that bring out certain aspects of reality – at the cost of others. Once again, the point of problematization is not to say that we should (or could) be without freedom and notions of liberation, but rather that there are no neutral or universal accounts of these notions.

In relation to Taylor's discussion of the role of subjectivity in Foucault's thought, I think that Taylor is closer to a relevant point. It *was* very well possible to read Foucault's early writings as a rejection of the general validity of subjectivity thoughts – most notably in *Les mots et les choses*. Once again, though, I think that this is not a necessary reading, and it is certainly not the *best* reading. In 1984 Foucault claims that subjectivity has always been the most important target of his writings (Foucault 1984g, p. 1527-8+1536-8). On the other hand, however, in 1966 he ended this investigation with the conclusion,

Une chose en tout cas est certaine: c'est que l'homme n'est pas le plus vieux problème ni le plus constant qui se soit posé au savoir humain. [...] Si ces dispositions [i.e. the dispositions on which the idea of man is based] venaient à disparaître comme elles sont apparues [...] on peut bien parier que l'homme s'effacerait, comme à la limite de la mer un visage de sable (Foucault 1966, p. 398).

Admittedly, with these sentences as the closing of a book, it would be obvious to conclude that investigations of “man” (or better: humanity) would soon lose their significance, since there would be no object to be investigated. But that would only be a reasonable consequence if the notion of humanity was thought of as a *mere* construct. In the succeeding item I will shortly reflect on this common criticism of Foucault's writings. But it should be clear already from the preceding pages that I do not take this interpretation to be a fair reading of Foucault. To some extent humanity *is* a construct, but it is a construct that answers certain demands that spring from displacements inside previous constellations (cf. Foucault 1966, pp. 229-39). It should therefore be clear that to give up the prevailing notion of humanity does not mean that subjectivity as such should be given up. It rather means that a particular humanist understanding of what subjectivity could mean is proven deficient (a view Foucault maintained as late as 1984 (in Foucault 1984c, pp. 1391-2)). I think thus that Taylor comes closest to the significance of Foucault in the following quote,

¹⁴⁴ E.g. when Taylor asks: “‘Power’ without ‘freedom’ or ‘truth’: can there really be an analysis which uses the notion of power, and which leaves no place for freedom, or truth?” (Taylor 1984, p. 174). Well, certainly not! That is the very point with most Foucaultian analyses.

We can also discern losses. Indeed, Foucault ought perhaps best to be interpreted as having documented some of these losses (Taylor 1984, p. 181).

The reason why this is not enough to Taylor is that it is only possible to think of gains and losses if there is a ground for comparability. And this is of course true, but as I will discuss in the following section, this ground for comparability does not have to be universally valid.

In his investigation of Foucault's view on subjectivity, Taylor also objects against Foucault's idea of power as "intentionnelles et non subjectives" (Taylor 1984, p. 169-74). Foucault's point with this claim is, and this is recognized by Taylor, that the investigated power-formations are not formed by one or a definite number of subjects, but they are rather seen as something that merely happens. I.e. that it can be fruitful not always to understand power-formations as willed by certain subjects. The fruitfulness of this is not recognized by Taylor, because the ethical question can then be postponed until a later stage in the analysis.

Concerning all three categories (truth, freedom and subjectivity) Taylor's point is that Foucault tries to reach a point of neutrality by making analysis without committing himself to the problematized notions; and that Foucault cannot succeed in this and therefore slips a hidden normativity in through the backdoor. This is clear in the following quote,

Foucault's analyses are terribly one-sided. Their strength is their insightfulness and originality, in bringing neglected aspects to light. The weakness is that the other aspects seem denied altogether (Taylor 1984, pp. 164-5).

Is this a fair objection? I do not think so. First of all I do not agree that Foucault denies the other aspects as relevant. Rather he *problematizes* these other aspects by showing their foundation in limitations. Secondly, the significance of Foucault should (as with all significant writings) be evaluated in relation to what he writes against. It is true that Foucault often articulates his points in rather rash ways, but I think that Bernstein has a point when saying that the gains of Foucault's work are better assessed if one sees these exaggerations as a way of demonstrating more efficiently the deficiencies in the common approaches – that the exaggerations are necessary because the reader normally is so convinced by the goods of what is being problematized. That a mere "pro et con" would be without appeal if the cons were not made very explicit (Bernstein 1991, pp. 155-6). Since (for example) the gains of the prison-institutions are so obvious in relation to the torturing institutions which they substituted, a less one-sided articulation of the problems entailed in these improvements would make it natural to conclude that "Even though there are certain problems with the prevailing institutions, one should stick to them since the alternatives (the torturing systems) are worse".

Habermas has posed similar objections against Foucault's approach. When Habermas accuses Foucault of cryptonormativism (Habermas 1985, pp. 331-6) his main point is that Foucault does not want to take an explicit stance in relation to what is being analysed. Since it is actually not possible to avoid to take a stance (i.e. being committed to a normativity), the normativity of Foucault is consequently hidden.

It is true that Foucault was generally uneasy about taking an explicit stance to the phenomena that he analysed. He does not make an explicit *assessment* of (e.g.) humanistic theories, punishing institutions or practices and theories of sexuality. He only points out problems in the prevailing practices and does not make a final assessment of whether or not these problems are severe enough to lead to a quest for change. Why is that so? It should be clear from the above considerations that it cannot be because of an effort of being neutral on the question, since the confrontation with neutrality is the main aim of his writings. I think rather that the hesitation should be understood in the light of his points about critique being of merely local validity. When not explicating his own stance it is because he takes the view of the writer to be irrelevant – it is more important what the reader comes to think after having read the book. It would actually be absurd to think that someone would write extensive books (based on extensive readings of historical sources) without believing that the revealed problems are severe. But an explication of this normativity would threaten to move the focus from the revealed problems to the views of the writer – whereby the revealed problems are put into the shade. Foucault chose therefore (according to this interpretation) to focus on the descriptions of the practices and then let the critique come to the test of reality: does the reader, through the descriptions, recognize the revealed problems to be severe. The test of reality is not whether or not the reader and writer are in concord, but whether or not the reader recognizes a tension in the relationship between a prevailing normativity and an existing reality. The locally founded view of one writer is (in this interpretation) considered to be less important than the (also locally founded) view of many readers.

I will not deny that even in this interpretation, the Foucaultian hesitation of taking a stance is a little naive. The succeeding discussions of Foucault's writings demonstrate this rather well. Since books are read as created by conscious and intentional writers, it is natural to want to discern what the intentions with the books are. And if we cannot find a clear intention, it is consequently natural to become suspicious. In that sense Habermas certainly has a point: the abolition of the intentions of the writer is a *reduction*. But this is not the same as saying that the entire approach of Foucault is at the outset failed.

iv. Constructivism.

Finally, I will shortly comment on a common objection against Foucault's view as expressing a mere constructivism (see also above, pp. 157ff). This criticism has been articulated by (among others) Putnam (e.g. in Putnam 1981, pp. ix+121+155-62). Putnam's critique actually aims at the radicalness of Foucault's *relativism* and its foundation on irrational mechanisms, but since Putnam himself ascribes to a certain culture-relativity I take it that this is only understandable as a criticism if it is entailed that Foucault's relativism is founded on a radical constructivism.

Since I have already considered the differences between the view on reality in the thought of Putnam and Foucault (above, pp. 157ff), I will not go into a detailed discussion on the issue here, but merely repeat that reality plays a different role in the thought of Foucault than in the thought of Putnam. This does not mean, however, that there is no room for reality at all. And even though Foucault claims that every view is open to relativizations because there are constructive elements in them, this does not mean that the relativizations are without bounds. Foucault would think of the relativizations as *indefinite* – rather than *infinite* – in scope. To take one of the probably most provoking relativizations made in Foucault's oeuvre: the claim in *Les mots et les choses* that the era of "man" is of recent date and probably moving towards an end (Foucault 1966, pp. 398). This certainly demonstrates that Foucault took man (or humanity) to be a construction to some degree. But it is not a *mere* or *accidental* construction. And the displacement of the notion of man is not merely accidental either. The displacements are – for some reasons that are sought revealed in the book – called for. The character of these displacements are highly complex and cannot be understood in abstraction from certain constructions. But they cannot be exhausted by them either. That is clear in the preface. In analysing the *relationship* between empirical elements and structural order it becomes evident

qu'elle se trouve devant le fait brut qu'il y a, au-dessous de ses ordres spontanés, des choses qui sont en elles-mêmes ordonnables, qui appartiennent à un certain ordre muet, bref qu'il y a de l'ordre (Foucault 1966, p. 12).

Order presupposes something to be ordered. A dissolution of the notion of humanity is therefore not a *mere* dissolution. Rather it means that a reconfiguration is called for – i.e. that we have to think of humanity in new ways. The "reality" of humanity does not disappear, it is rather changed.¹⁴⁵ We have to (or rather: are led to or incited to) think of humanity in new ways, because

¹⁴⁵ This is also made clear in the preface,

Dans l'émerveillement de cette taxinomie [from the Chinese fable], ce qu'on rejoint d'un bond, ce qui, à la faveur de l'apologue, nous est indiqué comme le charme exotique d'une autre pensée, c'est la limite de la nôtre: l'impossibilité nue de penser cela (Foucault 1966, p. 7).

certain deficiencies in the prevailing approach have been revealed. The displacement of the prevailing understanding will be highly complex since there are certain good reasons for it to be prevailing. It cannot be merely dissolved – it must be displaced by something else.

Even though it is *understandable* that Putnam has difficulties in seeing that Foucault's approach is based on realist-intuitions, it nevertheless most of all demonstrates a narrowness in Putnam's own understanding of the relationship between normativity and reality. Besides of being a hold against relativity, reality is furthermore what sometimes calls for changes in normative outlooks. *Both* of these aspects are important in order to have an adequate understanding of critique.

§3. Critique as Receptive Problematization.

It should thus be clear that Foucault *does* give a convincing account of critique. But still the intensity of the discussion on the issue is significant, because it shows that Foucault's account must somehow be rather different in relation to the accounts that are defended by the opponents. In the following I will demonstrate that at least one of these differences can be found in his receptive orientation as opposed to the reflective orientation described in the preceding subsection (subsection IV,3,a).

Before doing this it is necessary with a clarification on what will be the point with this demonstration. It should be noted that in actual critique it is not possible to separate a reflective and a receptive approach. And since I recognize that both Habermas and Foucault have made important critical contributions to the contemporary debates, I will not claim that (e.g.) Habermas is not receptive when criticizing certain affairs in the world; neither will I claim that (e.g.) Foucault does not reflect in his critical writings. There could, furthermore, probably be found methodological considerations on receptivity in the writings of Habermas, and methodological considerations on reflectivity in the writings of Foucault. But I *will* claim that there is a difference in accentuation, and that this difference is clearly visible in what they take to be the *aim* of critique. Whereas Habermas focusses on how we through critical argumentation can come to *agreement* (reasonable consensus) through reflection (i.e. a move towards a kind of unity in views), Foucault focusses on how every kind of agreement reduces the object of agreement; that critique does not lead *towards* something but *away from* or *beyond* something, and we become aware of this by a reconfiguration of our receptivity. The aim of Habermas is a kind of unity, the aim of Foucault is an awareness of diversity.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Foucault repeatedly stresses that the awareness of diversity is important in his writings – e.g. in 1976, p. 135; 1977b, p. 165; 1992, p. 48.

In order to demonstrate my point, I will discuss four aspects of Foucault's writings: (i) his distinction between analyses of *documents* (traditional history of ideas) and *monuments* (Foucault's archaeological approach); (ii) the analysis of expressions as events rather than as actions; (iii) his repeated orientation towards *positive effects* rather than (hidden) intentions; (iv) the relationship between his focus on dispositives of freedom and his receptive orientation.

i. Foucault's Distinction between Analysis of Monuments and Documents.

In 1969 Foucault introduced the distinction between historical analyses that seek to transform monuments of the past into "speaking documents" and historical analyses that transform documents into monuments (Foucault 1969, pp. 14-5). Foucault affiliates with the latter approach. The problem with the former approach is that it seeks to make the monuments of the past – that are at the outset silent – say, express or signify something that is not available at the immediate level. The latter approach on the other hand seeks to give a "description intrinsèque du monument" (Foucault 1969, p. 15). In that sense the archaeological approach is not an interpretive discipline, because the results of the analyses are not supposed to reveal something *underlying* or cached behind the apparent monuments (Foucault 1969, p. 182).

It is certainly possible to question whether it is *possible* to have historical analyses that are purely documental (would it be convincing to make monuments "speak" independently of their silent being) or purely monumental (is it possible to separate out every connection of the analysed objects with other objects?). But that is not of importance in this connection. More important is Foucault's emphasis that it is not the prime aim of his analyses to present objects in their *unification* with other objects (i.e. how the significant relation is between various objects), but rather to let historical objects appear in their silent being. The task of the historian is not (at least mainly) to demonstrate connections between objects (unifying reflectivity) but to allow objects to appear as they are, without the *restriction* that there should be a certain connection with other objects in order for the analysed objects to be worthy of being analysed. What is important is that we become aware of new aspects of reality – and the exact relations between these aspects should therefore in the first place be postponed.

ii. Making Expressions Appear as Events.

An example of such an archaeological investigation is the analysis of discourse and expression in *L'archéologie du savoir*. That becomes obvious in Foucault's repeated emphasis that what he wants to reveal is not what is said, but to reveal

des systèmes qui instaurent les énoncés comme des événements (ayant leurs conditions et leur domaine d'apparition) et des choses (comportant leur possibilité et leur champ d'utilisation) (Foucault 1969, p. 169).

The aim of analysis is to reveal expressions as events and their fields of utilization. Foucault wants to demonstrate that taking a look at expressions as parts of actual discursive formations, rather than as reflective practices, reveals that besides of their pragmatic gains, expressions also are founded on something else – the ruptures that found what is relevant to express. This would not become visible if only the unifying aspect of expressions were accentuated. So, even though it is impossible to analyse anything without unifying normativity, it can still be fruitful sometimes to *downgrade* or at least *alter* the reflective normativity by not having unification as the prime aim, because this allows the analyst to become aware of (through a higher sensibility of) a higher degree of diversity in the analysed object(s).

In “Qu’est-ce que la critique?” (based on a lecture held in 1978, published in 1992) Foucault thus suggests that instead of investigating the *legitimation* of certain modes of practice, critical thought should approach as “une épreuve d’évenementialisation” (Foucault 1992, pp. 47-8), which is explicated as a mere *assembly* of elements “donc la façon tout à fait empirique et provisoire” (p. 48) – i.e. that the investigated elements just *actually* appear together and with no (at least at the outset) *principal* connection between them. By stressing the non-principal character of the archaeologically and genealogically assembled elements, it is possible to allow for internal heterogeneity and diversity, and then let *this* heterogeneity and diversity be the starting point for reflections on what are the ties and connections between them. The aim with this approach would not be to determine what is true/false, just/unjust, real/illusory, scientific/ideological or legitimate/abusive (p. 48) but to determine what are the norms that found these criteria – in the language of this thesis: what are the criteria of relevance?

In 1983 Foucault still defended the view that philosophy should “make-appear”, when he claims

que le travail de l’intellectuel, c’est bien en un sens de dire ce qui est en le faisant apparaître comme pouvant ne pas être, ou pouvant ne pas être comme il est (Foucault 1983, p. 1268).

In this quote, it is clear that there is a close connection between the view that critique demonstrates how things could have been otherwise and that critique should sharpen our receptive abilities: the point is that receptivity is not *determining* in the sense that it fixates our view to one fixated approach towards reality (in a metaphysical sense) – reality is open to several approaches, and the problem is that this is often forgotten, whereby a particular normative outlook fixates what it is possible to think about reality.

iii. Focus on Effects rather than Intentions.

The eventualizing approach also explains Foucault's repeated affiliation with a kind of positivism, which is again an indication of Foucault's accentuation of receptivity: by focussing on what is positively given (and once again: this does not mean *neutrally* given), and rejecting to extract hidden underlying links between this positivity – i.e. by revealing actual effects rather than possible underlying intentions (e.g. in Foucault 1971a, pp. 67+71; 1976, pp. 124-5; 1977b, p. 179; 1992, pp. 39+51) – it is once again receptivity towards the actual givenness rather than reflectivity on the possible connections that determines the object of analysis in Foucault's writings,

la philosophie est justement ce qui remet en question tous les phénomènes de domination à quelque niveau et sous quelque forme qu'ils se présentent¹⁴⁷ (Foucault 1984g, p. 1548).

The point is that as long as we approach a given object as it is positively given, and not as it is a sign of some more global or general unified phenomenon that is at play “throughout” the world and its history, norms of relevance are themselves more open to modifications. If, for example, a given field of investigation is to be investigated in order to demonstrate how a particular view on sovereignty is constituted, then the norms of relevance that will guide such an analysis are rather restricted (by the presupposed notion of sovereignty), and this again affects which parts of the investigated fields that can be taken in as significant. If on the other hand, one chooses to investigate which kinds of power-formations appeared in a given period, then it could perhaps be shown that the notion of sovereignty that was the starting point for the former kind of analysis could turn out to be a mere construction that perhaps (but perhaps not) is relevant in present-day power-analyses, but at earlier times only has emerged out of a struggle between other kinds of structuring formations of society. And the latter strain of analysis would in that case have proven to be more efficient in questioning whether the norm of sovereignty is still a fruitful norm of relevance for analysis at all (a point taken in Foucault 1976, p. 135). Foucault's focus on effects and positivity does therefore not aim at an abolishment of thought (Foucault 1969, p. 267). It is certainly not possible to make analysis without reflective connections. The aim is rather to reconfigure the criteria of relevance on which thought is based. And one way to reach that aim is to emphasize the receptive aspects of knowledge.

¹⁴⁷ Notice that the English translation of “se present” into “exists” does not capture the receptive character of the claim (cf. Rabinow, P. (ed) *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, vol. I.* New York: The New Press, 1998, p. 300).

iv. Analysis of Dispositives of Freedom.

A possible objection against my claim that Foucault is a receptively oriented philosopher could be that it is difficult to see how this accords with my claim that one of Foucault's main preoccupations is with the notion of freedom (cf. above, p. 155f). The notion of freedom most obviously belongs to the reflective category, since it articulates the being able to do something with what we are presented with.

This objection is easily met by considering the character of this preoccupation of Foucault's: it is true that "dispositives of freedom" is a general theme in Foucault's writings, but not in the sense that he wants to demonstrate how agents exercise their freedom. He rather investigates the *shapes* and *conditions* for freedom being exercised – i.e. how freedom is situated inside (and shaped by) certain worldly conditions. The notion of freedom can in Foucault's thought never be separated by the *situation* of freedom. That would merely be an "empty dream" of freedom (i.e. freedom in abstraction), and this empty dream is at best: empty. Foucault's object of investigation is the *situation*. Not freedom as some abstract ability, but freedom as something that appears in real situations in a real world. The notions of freedom are analysed in relation to their positive "eventualized" effects, these effects (among other things) being that certain aspects of the world are emphasized at the cost of others (on this, see Foucault 1969, pp. 40-3). It is true that Foucault says that the objects are formed by the practices of talking about them (Foucault 1969, p. 66-7), and this could imply that the spontaneous forming was more important to him than the receptive perception of the things. But this claim is followed by,

Certes, les discours sont faits de signes; mais ce qu'ils font, c'est plus que d'utiliser ces signes pour désigner des choses. C'est ce *plus*, qui les rend irréductibles à la langue et à la parole. C'est ce « plus » qu'il fait faire apparaître et qu'il faut décrire (Foucault 1969, p. 67).

So even though it is a condition for analysis that the investigated objects are formed (but not created!) through our practices, Foucault accentuates that the primary aim of his analysis is a certain "surplus" as to this formation.¹⁴⁸ This surplus is what should "be made visible" through description. So, it is clear that even the formulations of Foucault that point in a rather constructivist direction, point (on further notice) in a receptive direction. There is no contradiction in Foucault's horizon between constructivist and receptive orientations – because none of them are understood in absolute isolation, but rather as interdependent.

¹⁴⁸ The terminology should not mislead us here: the surplus is certainly not to be understood as something *external* in relation to the freedom/reality relation, but rather as the relationship itself that cannot be reduced to *either* reality *or* freedom. This point is made (in relation to the so-called pre-conceptual) in Foucault 1969, pp. 82-3+100-1.

It should thus be clear that there is a receptive strain in the thought of Foucault. This strain is intimately connected with a descriptivist strain in his thought: thinking of philosophical analysis as having the sharpening of the receptive abilities as the prime aim, makes it obvious to understand philosophy as a way of presenting the receptively given objects in ways that make new aspects come to the fore. Description is a way to present something, and redescription is a way to present something in new ways. Thus,

Elle [i.e. archaeology] n'est rien de plus et rien d'autre qu'une réécriture: c'est-à-dire dans la forme maintenue de l'extériorité, une transformation réglée de ce qui a été déjà écrit. Ce n'est pas le retour au secret même de l'origine; c'est la description systématique (Foucault 1969, p. 183).¹⁴⁹

The archaeological approach is characterized as a way to redescribe what is already described in certain established ways. Not in order to reveal secrets, but to reveal an openness of the world towards other descriptive approaches (“j’ai libéré un domaine cohérent de description” – Foucault 1969, p. 150). And later,

Ainsi doivent alterner, prendre appui les unes sur les autres et se compléter les descriptions critiques et les descriptions généalogiques (Foucault 1971a, p. 71).

Both the genealogical and critical approaches are also understood as descriptive approaches. In a later statement, it could seem that Foucault would deny that critical (prescriptive) value of his work,

je dirais que le travail de l'intellectuel, c'est bien en un sens de dire ce qui est en le faisant apparaître comme pouvant ne pas être, ou pouvant ne pas être comme il est. Et c'est pourquoi cette désignation et cette description du réel n'ont jamais valeur de prescription sous la forme « puisque ceci est, cela sera » (Foucault 1983, p. 1268).

A close look, however, makes it evident that it is a *particular* kind of prescriptive force that Foucault repudiates. It is the claim that there is one uniform connection between what is and what will be. One of the reasons why such conclusions must be repudiated is that any claim of what is, is in itself open to reconfigurations. Another reason is that such conclusions would have to presuppose very fixated views on how human freedom is exercised. Something that would also be inconsistent with Foucault's general views.

The latter quote also indicates in what sense it makes sense to characterize Foucault's approach as world-disclosing in the sense explicated above (p. 146f): the starting point for Foucault is that

¹⁴⁹ The descriptive understanding of the archaeological approach is also articulated in Foucault 1969, pp. 15+172-3 and throughout in chapter IV.

there is not one approach towards reality that can claim to be exhaustive. There is always a deficit and reality could always have been approached otherwise. In the quote, that is true, the “could have been otherwise” characterizes a relationship between past and present states of affairs, and in that sense it is a historical claim. But as I have shown above (p. 154f) Foucault extends this claim to every statement about reality.

Furthermore, it is clear that it is the world-disclosing reconfiguration of our receptivity that bears the critical implications of his writings. By demonstrating a possible alternative to the prevailing relationship between normativity and reality, it is demonstrated that the prevailing relationship is problematic – i.e. tensed: it is tensed in the sense that normativity reduces reality. The gains of Foucault’s approach are reached by leaving even robust norms like truth and subjectivity open to discussion. Not in the sense that they are radically dissolved or rejected – no claim that problematizes formations of truth can do so independently of other notions of truth – but in the sense that if reality calls for revision of the prevailing formations, this is not necessarily solved by trying to change our approach towards reality, but may just as well be solved by revising the very norms of relevance that shape our approach.

How then, is this Foucaultian account different from Rorty’s account? How come that I take Rorty’s account of redescription to be unhappy and Foucault’s to be valuable? As indicated (above, p.150) the main problem is that Rorty *reduces* critique to mere re-description and in this rejection also rejects its argumentative value. And the problem with this is that to claim something to be a “mere description” actually can serve rather criticizable rhetorical strategies. On this point, Foucault is much more aware than Rorty that descriptions *also* have critical implications. Whereas Rorty *reduces* critique to redescription, Foucault *extends* redescription to be critical too.

This awareness is connected with Foucault’s less reluctant use of realist intuitions. The point is that as soon as one accepts that it has significance that statements relate to the world, and that this relation is always in a certain sense tensed, it becomes clear that the point with the embeddedness-insights cannot be that every description is “equally good”, but should rather be thought of as “not good enough”.¹⁵⁰ It is of course true that every statement is equal in being “not good enough”, but this is a rather abstract similarity since the “not good enough” is different in various contexts. And even if it is not possible to say once and for all how open reality is towards various norms of relevance, there is still the significance of reality that it has consequences to

¹⁵⁰ A thought that Rorty repudiates by stating that it can only have one function – “the function once performed by the doctrine of Original Sin” (Rorty 2000b, p. 62). Even though Rorty does not accept the distinction between logical argumentation and rhetorical persuasion, I cannot help but characterizing this repudiation as rather rhetorical...

apply a certain outlook and to put forward statements inside this outlook. Reality is thus a hold against absolute relativism (the Putnamian point). Foucault furthermore demonstrates that realistic intuitions entail that it is never *innocent* to put forward a description. Due to the norms of relevance that shape linguistic statements there is an implicit critique of alternative linguistic statements that would be founded on alternative norms of relevance. So, when someone for example describes a population as consumers, there is an implicit critique of alternative descriptions that would describe it as partitioners of a democratic community. Not in the sense that the two descriptions *contradict* each other, but in the sense that they contradict each other as to the underlying norms of relevance: the first description takes the financial aspects of the population to be the relevant in the situation, while the other description takes certain deliberating and idealistic aspects to be the relevant. The point is that it has consequences for our approach towards reality whether we are made to relate (either affirmative or refusing) to the first kind of descriptions rather than the second. By relating to one of these normative outlooks we come (due to the underlying norms of relevance) to focus on certain aspects of the world – at the cost of others. This is certainly unavoidable (since no outlook is “good enough”). The solution is consequently not to uncover everything, but rather to become aware that this is so – i.e. by not claiming that we *merely describe* how things are, but rather by being open towards what can be learned from alternative approaches, i.e. being more receptive to the plurality of reality.

The question whether arguments are *merely* (re-)descriptions or descriptions *also* have argumentative implications is very complex and relates heavily on what one takes to be an argument at all. But returning to the discussion between Habermas and Rorty that I outlined above (pp. 21ff), it is now possible to substantiate my stance further: in the outline I claimed that the distinction between arguments and persuasions should be found in whether or not it is implied that the speaker is ready to give good reasons for his claim, and whether or not the act fails if it has its validity claims questioned. The argumentative act is characterized by being open to such questioning, the persuasive act fails as soon as the underlying validity claims are questioned. This is due to a difference in what the prime aims of the acts are: the aim of argumentative validity-claims is to reveal new aspects of reality, whereas the aim of persuasively posed validity-claims is the attainment of subjective goals of the speaker. Rejecting the significance of reality-intuitions makes it obvious for Rorty to conclude that every redescription actually only carries persuasive implications (“We ironists hope, by this continual redescription, to make the best selves for ourselves that we can” – Rorty 1989, p. 80). His claim that descriptions only can be answered by alternative descriptions (“there is no answer to a redescription save a re-re-redescription” – Rorty

1989, p. 80) entails therefore that this answering is only persuasive – i.e. based on subjective well-being.¹⁵¹

And this is where Foucault and Rorty depart: in the thought of Foucault the critical problematization of outlooks is not merely urged by pragmatic aims towards subjective well-being. They are urged by an awareness of the limiting character of linguistic practices – i.e. the deficit in linguistic practices on which they are initially founded. So even though Foucault agrees that descriptions can only be answered by alternative descriptions, this is not an internalist claim in the same sense as Rorty's. Even though the pre-discursive (or pre-descriptive) is itself discursive, this does not mean that Foucault will not speak about the pre-discursive as significant. On the contrary it is the very aim of his writings to illuminate the relationship between the discourse and the pre-discursive (“Comment se fait-il qu'il y ait du sens à partir du non sens?” (Foucault 1992, p. 44) – see also above, pp. 156ff) – because the discourse is shaped by and can thus be understood through its account of the pre-discursive. The discourse does not make sense *without* the relationship to the pre-discursive. The discourse is defined by its account of the pre-discursive, and it is therefore significant to come to terms with this relation.

This is the strain in Foucault's writings of laying something out in the open (world-disclosure) – whereas Rorty takes it that there is nothing to be laid out in the open. It is true that Foucault points out that this can never happen, without at the same time hiding something. It is therefore also true that there will have to be made a choice as to what to bring out and what to put into the shape. And there is in the thought of Foucault no universal norms that can determine this choice. So in a certain sense Foucault would also have to concede that the choice will have to be pragmatic based (the critique will have to be put to the test of reality – cf. above, p. 156f). But – contrary to Rorty's view – this pragmatism is not merely understood as subjective well-being. The very point of analysing practical formations as power-relations is that there is no notion of subjectivity independently of relations with others and relations with the world,

Ces ensembles pratique relèvent de trois grands domaines: celui des rapports de maîtrise sur les choses, celui des rapports d'action sur les autres, celui des rapports à soi-même. Cela ne veut pas dire que ce sont là trois domaines complètement étrangers les uns aux autres. On sait bien que la maîtrise sur les choses passe par le rapport aux autres; et celui-ci implique toujours de relations à soi; et inversement. Mais il s'agit de trois axes dont il faut analyser la spécificité et l'intrication: l'axe du savoir, l'axe du pouvoir, l'axe de l'éthique. [...] comment nous sommes-nous constitués comme sujets de notre savoir; comment nous sommes-nous constitués comme sujets qui exercent ou subissent des relations de pouvoir; comment nous sommes-nous constitués comme sujets moraux de nos actions (Foucault 1984c, p. 1395).

¹⁵¹ In Rorty 2000 he even claims that the quest for coherence should be understood mainly as stemming from “the need to make one's beliefs coherent, the need for the respect of one's peers, and curiosity. We pragmatists think that the reason people try to make their beliefs coherent is not that they love truth but because they cannot help doing so” (p. 15). Every aspect of human understanding is thus explained through terms of fulfilling psychological desires or needs.

The point that there are always hidden subjective goals that are sought achieved in actual argumentative practices is therefore not enough to establish that argumentative practices should be reduced to persuasive practices. That would in fact be an example of emphasizing (in a universal manner) only one aspect of rather complex practices – at the cost of others. The point of reducing all linguistic practices to persuasive practices is only defensible inside a radically subjectively based pragmatism – which is untenable.

The point is thus that descriptions themselves already have argumentative implications – at least as long as they are put forward inside contexts of elucidation and revelation (as opposed to persuasive, strategic contexts in which there is no pretension of disclosure) – because they imply norms for relevance that are not directly compatible with alternative norms of relevance that might as well have been used to describe the states of affairs. Descriptions entail that a certain outlook is accepted as the relevant outlook in the prevailing context. It is true that this implication is not put forward openly in an argumentative manner, but in certain contexts – namely in contexts in which both the speaker and the addressee take it that the speaker wants to disclose rather than persuade – it is implied that the speaker would actually be willing to give good reasons for these norms. So even in descriptions there is a critical implication as to alternative descriptions. We thus cannot have non-critical descriptions. This is very obvious when we have two competing descriptions, but it is also true when there is general consensus about which descriptive outlook to apply to a particular field: in that case the critical implications are directed towards other *possible* outlooks. Therefore: just as we cannot have critique independently of descriptive outlooks, we cannot have descriptions without critical implications.

The Foucaultian approach is thus (to my mind) more convincing than the Rortyan in relation to the role of reality in critical contexts. But both approaches go wrong in being exaggeratedly suspicious against the reflective aspects of critique. This distrust probably stems from the insight that the results of reflective actions are always caught in the dilemma between on the one hand having to rely on universal norms, but on the other hand this universality being unaccounted for. But as I have sought to demonstrate (cf. above, section III,2), the solution to this dilemma is not to take flight into a radical localism (claim x is only valid in context y) or subjectivism (claim x is only valid insofar as it is beneficial to me) because both these views are unsustainable (since they ultimately vanish into radical particularism). The solution is rather to acknowledge a fallible universalism: universal claims are both impossible and unavoidable, they should therefore be put forward with the openness of being modified if they are proven unfruitful (out of certain pragmatic – in a broad sense – reasons).

In section (III,2 – esp. pp. 78ff) above, I stated that universal norms are necessary if the aim is to refute norms that are taken to be universally valid, because the only reason to give up an apparently universal norm is that other norms are taken to be even more universally valid. I also shortly touched upon the question whether the receptive approach discussed in this subsection could not be a possible counterexample of this claim. The reason why I rejected this was that receptivity in abstraction from a normative outlook cannot do this. A purely receptively oriented critique can merely problematize in the sense that it demonstrates deficiencies in certain normative outlooks in the sense that there are certain aspects of reality that are not taken into account. This only *refutes* the norm if there are reasons to state that these aspects *should* be taken into account. And these reasons would have to be taken to be even more universally valid than the norms that are sought refuted.

It may thus be that critical problematizations are possible without universal norms (at least if it is – universally!! – acknowledged that norms *should* apply to a receptively accessible reality) but *problematizations* do not automatically lead to *refutation*. A critical theorist can then certainly – just as Foucault was consequent enough to do it – state that he/she is not interested in refuting the investigated constellations, but merely wants to point out deficiencies. But even this account of critique would call for a reaction from the addressee – because it demonstrates a point of *failure* in the normativity/reality-relation. The addressee therefore has to either dissolve the tensions, show that they are actually not existing, or give good reason for maintaining them.¹⁵² If universal norms are critically problematized, the answer to the critique will have to be based upon universal norms. And these possible answers has to be taken into account in the initial critique as well.

This exaggerated suspicion against reflectivity of Foucault's is exemplified in his lack of empathy towards the central role of communication in the thought of Habermas: Foucault objects against Habermas' ideal of a communication that circulates freely, without constraints or coercive effects (the ideal speech situation – Foucault 1984g, p. 1545-6) that it is utopian. As an alternative to that approach, Foucault suggests that we should merely try to minimize domination. As I have indicated (above, pp. 80f) it is not in itself a relevant critique of Habermas' notion of the ideal speech situation that it is utopian (because the ideal is a critical ideal, rather than an ideal for accomplishment). Furthermore, I have (above, pp. 166ff) argued that the minimizing of dominance cannot be a starting-point for critique in Foucault's understanding (because it is not

¹⁵² Foucault does, cf. the discussion above (item IV,3,b,2,i – p. 166f), not have to say this. But this is the reason why he has troubles in answering the “Why fight?”-question.

clearly distinguishable from power, and is thus embedded in notions of freedom that are not ahistorically valid themselves).

The point is that even though Foucault may well be right that the Habermasian account of an ideal speech situation is utopian, this does not mean that it cannot be of pragmatic relevance to have this ideal as a regulative critical tool, against which concrete situations are assessed, and – if found in contradiction with the ideal – are assessed negatively. Certainly, it is important that the ideal is understood as universally valid in a fallible sense – i.e. open towards critique. It may very well be demonstrated that the ideal is, or has become, unfruitful, and in such cases it should be revised. And certainly, the receptive approach is probably the most important approach to turn down universals. But still: until this has been done,¹⁵³ the ideal speech situation could be considered to be a universally valid critical ideal for assessments of arguments.

c. Critique as Reflective and Receptive.

The point with this section has been that critique has two aspects: it is reflective and receptive. On the one hand critique is a contemplation of how well the included aspects of reality are situated in the general normative outlook. On the other hand, critique is a contemplation of the adequacy of the outlook. Critique investigates how well the normative unity and the realistic adequacy in relation to diversity are handled in the present outlook. And since critique contemplates a relationship between normativity and reality, *both* these aspects are pertinent.

I have furthermore claimed that there are two strains in contemporary critical theory that accentuate one of each these aspects. On the one hand there is the strain that is represented by Habermas, Honneth, Taylor, Benhabib, Fraser, McCarthy, a.o. who accentuate the reflective side of critique. On the other hand there is a critical strain, represented by Heidegger, Adorno, Derrida, Foucault, Wellmer, Owen, Lafont, Geuss, a.o. who accentuate the receptive side of critique.

How should one think of the relationship between these two aspects of critique? A first answer to this question is that critique is not possible without both aspects. On the one hand critique has to be a doing in the sense that it contemplates and reconfigures how the elements of a certain outlook relate to each other – i.e. critique has to be able to give an account for the systematic connection of certain elements. On the other hand, critique should also be able to demonstrate how the critical claims relate to the reality – i.e. the reality that is the incitement, directedness and possibility of fallibility of the posed claims. As emphasized several times: I do not claim that any

¹⁵³ And perhaps it *has* been done – cf. the discussion of Young’s problematization of deliberative strategies, above pp. 83ff. As noted, however, I still think that it has some relevance left.

of the above philosophers *actually* criticize in abstraction of one of these aspects. My claim is rather that their understandings of what is essential in these (successful) criticisms are inadequate.

This general inadequacy of critical theory is one of the reasons why critical theory has been led into the defensive: in accentuating that critique primarily is reflective or receptive it has been overlooked that the embeddedness-insights do not make critique impossible, but rather demonstrate the paradoxical situation that critique – *as well as every other linguistic act* – is situated in: on the one hand it is necessary to approach the world through norms of relevance, but at the same time this excludes certain aspects of the world from the approaches. We can only approach reality by not approaching reality adequately – and this is the object of critical investigations. This is the reason why critique is, rather than being dissolved, always potentially *called for* – even though the redemption of this “calling” is itself criticizable.

The radical criticizability is on the other hand not to be conflated with radical relativism. On the one hand this is so because the claims that spring from critique are committed to a systematic unity. On the other hand because the claims are committed to being a reasonable approach towards reality. Both these commitments spring from the very nature of the relationship between normativity and reality: a normativity and reality that were not mutually committed to each other would be a mere philosophical abstraction, and do consequently not have any role to play in a critical theory. A purely non-systematic criticism would be characterized as irrational (in a narrow sense). A criticism that ignored the prevailing state of affairs would be characterized as insensitive or unrealistic. And both these abstract criticisms would (and should) thus be rejected as failed. Thus the radical criticizability does not amount to radical relativism (that every claim can be made true) but rather to a rejection of radical universalism (that no claim can have universal validity in an infallible sense). Even though it is possible to criticize (relativize), this does not mean that it is without consequences to do so.

In saying that both aspects are necessary in any critique, I do not claim, however, that both aspects are equally called for in every situation. The reflective aspect of critique is most obviously called for in situations in which the analysed problems concern the coherence of our understanding of a world – that is when the problem seems to be a lack of internal unity between some elements. The receptive aspect is most obviously called for when the internal unity seems to be too firm and accepted, while there seems to be aspects of reality that do not fit into this unity.

The problem is, however, that it is not (at least always) obvious in actual situations which kind of critique is mostly called for. Especially the receptive critique can often be called for without the notice of the involved agents, because the need for receptive critique is covered through the

success of the norms of relevance – that means that the non-focussed aspects are out of focus and hence hidden in the ordinary pragmatic lifeworld situations.

A common strategy to the seeming incompatibility of the critical approaches of Habermas and Foucault has been to claim that they merely investigate two different kinds of critique.¹⁵⁴ Even though I agree to the analysis that the aims of Habermas and Foucault to a certain extent differ, I would still claim – due to the above sketched interdependence – that this should not be used as an excuse merely to accept that critique can mean different things in different contexts. Both approaches should rather be seen as extending each other. The seeming difference is only radically different if seen from a reduced understanding of the relationship between normativity and reality. It is true that I also talk about two (different) aims of normativity (systematism and adequacy), but this is only in order to reveal different aspects *of practices that are at the outset concrete and hence unified (or better: non-divided)*. Doings and undergoings are not separated in real practices, and it is only justified to do so analytically insofar as it gives us a better understanding of the practices. So, the point that Habermas and Foucault reveal *different* kinds of critique should not be seen as a philosophical conclusion, but rather as a philosophical starting point for revealing the deficiencies in the defended notions of critique: that a reflective and a receptive approach reveal how critique is embedded in a rather complex relationship between normativity and reality that are both interdependent and irreducible; which is the reason why critique on the one hand is unavoidable, even though it at the same time is only fallibly valid.

My account of radical criticizability thus refutes a robust universalism (absolute staticism) because the receptive awareness of the diversity of reality makes this impossible; and it refutes absolute relativism, because critique cannot happen independently of reflective systematic accounts of what is relevant.

4. Critique and Improvement.

Having thus demonstrated the inevitability of critical practices, one would be tempted to conclude that the initial problem of critical theory (“How is critique possible given the embeddedness-insights”) is solved. But the question is whether the price has been too high; whether it is critique in the *desired sense* that has been saved from dissolution? Whether the notion of critique is strong enough. An obvious concern could be why critique in the presented account is *important*. Why

¹⁵⁴ See for example Kelly 1994b, p. 374-6; Ashenden/Owen 1999, p. 11; Owen 1999, p. 42; 2002.

is the notion of critique so important that it needs to be an object of immense philosophical efforts? A common answer to this question has been that critique leads to a better state of affairs – that it leads to a better understanding of the world, better social arrangements, better understanding of moral claims and actions, etc. In short: critique is an important philosophical issue because it leads to *improvements*. Some – e.g. Honneth (in Honneth 2002, pp. 508-9) – would even say that critique *presupposes* a notion of improvement. And that the real problem is that a notion of improvement would vanish in an absolutely relativized account – because the norms of improvement would be absolutely relativizable too, and notions of improvement presuppose that there is a certain bulwark against relativity – because it has to be possible to compare various states of affairs according to the same standards.

How does my notion of critique respond to that view? Having accepted that the relationship between normativity and reality is open to relativizations to an indeterminable extent, I have to accept that every norm of improvement is indeterminably open to relativizations too. How much help is it that the commitment to reality hinders absolute relativity if the extent is not determinable and hence not pragmatically useful?

First of all, it should be noted that I agree with Honneth that critique does not make sense in abstraction from any notion of improvement. That is entailed in my notion of critique as a pointing out of a *tension* between normativity and reality, and the above contemplations of whether or not it is an improvement to solve tensions (cf. subsection IV,2,c). But this account is not enough to substantiate a claim that the critics are generally leading the world into a better state of affairs, whereas the defenders of the prevailing states of affairs are regressive and leading the world into stagnation or (even worse) to retrogression; because in a broader context it might very well be that improvements on the abstract level (of solving tensions) turn out to be regressions in a larger context. Critique might well be turned against ideals of innovation (they can for example be demonstrated to be unrealistic). Assessments of the results of a critique as improvement depend on the assessment of the abstractly achieved improvement in relation to its consequences for the world or our understanding of it in general.

So, I agree that it is reasonable to claim that a notion of critique entails a notion of improvement and that the notion of improvement constitutes an important characterization of the notion of critique. It is, however, also clear that the notion of improvement has been problematized together with the lack of universally valid (in the traditional sense) norms. In this section I will therefore discuss which notion of improvement is available in the light of both the embeddedness-insights and the understanding of critique as linguistic practices. This will be done through a reflection on (a) in what sense critique necessarily entails a notion of improvement; (b)

in what way my notion differs from the Hegelian notion; (c) how it is possible to think of improvement inside the outlook presented in the thesis; (d) how the notion of improvement is differently at play in descriptions and critique.

a. The Inevitability of Improvement-claims in Critique.

In what sense is it reasonable to claim that a notion of improvement has to be implied when posing a critique? I will first relate to that question on an immediate and intuitive level. On this level, it should be clear that the critique itself does not necessarily *articulate* a statement of what would be an improvement. Sometimes it does (“It would be better if you shared your prosperity with the destitute”), but it is indeed possible to pose critique without having a clear notion of which state of affairs would be better (“Hier zeigt sich nämlich ein neues Phänomen der menschlichen Vernunft, nämlich: eine ganz natürliche Antithetik, auf die keiner zu grübeln und künstlich Schlingen zu legen braucht, sondern in welche die Vernunft von selbst und zwar unvermeidlich gerät” – Kant 1981/7, B433-4). Critique is a pointing out of a problem – not necessarily an indication of what would be the solution of the problem.

But it is also clear that to claim that something is problematic, entails that it would – other things being equal – be an improvement if that problem could be solved. The waters divide around the “other things being equal” part of this point, since it is debated whether there are problems that it would *always* be an improvement to solve; whether, and in what sense, we can/should substitute “other things being equal” with “other *relevant* things being equal”; or whether it is *ever* possible to redeem the “other things being equal”-claim (and whether critique, consequently, is possible). But to claim that there is *no* notion of improvement involved in a problematization would be a self-contradiction.

In this minimal sense, there is no problem in the relationship between my account of critique and improvement. In saying that critique is a pointing out of tensions between a prevailing normativity and reality, the improvement-claim is implied in the tension-part, since it would be an improvement if the tensions were dissolved – cf. above, subsection (IV,2,c). Having been presented with such tensions one is urged either to revise the prevailing normativity (so that it fits “better” to reality – i.e. is more realistic) or change reality (so that it is in accordance with the prevailing norms). This urge springs from the fact that tensions indicate a *failure* in the relation between normativity and reality. However, since I have argued that a normativity/reality-relationship *without* tensions is impossible, and it is consequently necessary to assess the severity of various kinds of tensions against each other, it is also possible to *accept* the tensions indicated

in the critique. But in that case reasons need to be given – reasons that articulate in what way the possible alternatives are worse.¹⁵⁵

Due to the centrality of the embeddedness-insights and the notion of relevance in my articulation of the relation between normativity and reality, it is natural for me to situate my stance around the second option in the “other things being equal”-distinctions above: it is on the one hand not possible to ignore the embeddedness of the criticized tension in a context of other tensions, so there is no direct mechanism from the demonstration of tensions to a request for changes, and in that sense an “other things being equal”-modification is necessary. It is on the other hand not possible to relate the criticized tension to every other aspect of the world. Every account of the world is itself shaped by norms of relevance, and it would thus be a misunderstanding to have a global “other things being equal” as the measure for critical assessments. It is not only *impossible* to have a global “other things being equal” – neither is it *desirable* (because the desire would spring from a misconceived notion of reality). So the “other things being equal”-implication of critique only reaches towards a *relevant* field of things (which of course is a reason why every posed critique is itself open to critique – of the implied norms of relevance...).

As demonstrated above (section IV,2 – esp. subsection c) I base the notion of improvement in critique on the claim that there is a dual aim of normativity: the aim of systematism and the aim of being applicable in relation to reality in an adequate way. Certain aspects of reality has to be put into the shade in order to approach reality as continuous and coherent – but this reduces the diversity of reality. The aims of systematic consistency and adequate correspondence (reality in its diversity) do, as it were, not converge. The question is whether this is a possible starting point for a universal approach to critique?

I think that this question should be affirmed, but in order to avoid the critique of representationalism that has been put forward by (among many others!) Rorty (e.g. in Rorty 1979), it should be done with great caution: it is a weak, fallible universal reference point for critique, rather than an absolute, robust universal starting point for critique. I.e.: it will always have critical implications to point out failures in relation to systematism and adequacy, but there are no *robust* norms of systematism and adequacy. Systematism and adequacy mutually shape each other, and are differently at play in various contexts. So, if a critic (e.g.) objects against the lack of correspondence between reality and the views defended by the addressee, it is a legitimate

¹⁵⁵ One could certainly also accept the tension due to the point that it is not important. But that would merely be a paraphrase of the latter alternative above: the indicated tension is so unimportant that the trouble of revising it could not be counterbalanced by the possible gains.

response to this critique to object against the underlying norm of correspondence (what is relevant adequacy) of the critic. Questions about systematism and adequacy are universal points to turn to *in order to localize fields of consent and dissent* – rather than direct tools to reach robust consent and dissolve every dissent.

Analysing linguistic practices, and among these critique, as a meeting between normativity and reality is founded on the view that linguistic practices would not make sense outside such a frame. As such, this entails a universal claim. But it is certain that it is not possible to give an exhaustive argument for this claim. It is partly founded on an intuition, partly founded on a description on how we actually argue. These foundations are articulated locally through certain norms of relevance that are questionable. So, I have raised universal claims from local foundations. The claims are therefore fallible. It nevertheless makes sense to think of the claims as universally valid in the sense that they are fundamental for our understanding of our approach to the world in general – i.e. we do not *actually* question them in our concrete practices. They articulate what is not actually held open to discussion in critical contemplations. Perhaps someday they would have to, but it is not (I claim) possible for us to think of what such an enforcement would amount to. As mentioned above (p. 30ff and 33) I concede that philosophers like Habermas, Honneth, Foucault and Derrida (and others) have discovered other universal reflective reference-points for critique.

The question is how this leaves the notion of improvement? How robust can a notion of improvement be inside such a frame? Hegel is often used as a reference point when discussing notions of improvement, and I will therefore approach the question through an articulation of tenable and untenable aspects of his view.

b. The Hegelian Notion of Improvement.

In articulating the connectedness between normativity and reality, I referred to Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (cf. above, p. 49f). I also claimed that his ideal that "Das Wahre ist das Ganze" is untenable (cf. above, p. 46). The reason for this should be apparent by now: the Hegelian approach is important because it illuminates how the relationship between normativity and reality can take various shapes – without conflating the one with the other. The *Aufhebung* of the dialectic between the immediate and the negation (mediation) into the concrete (absolute) is not to be understood as an abolishment or dissolution of the tension, but rather as an alternation or elevation (*Auf-heben* = up-lifting) into a state in which the tension is not a problem, but rather

illuminates limits in the initial understanding of the immediate and its negation. This part of the Hegelian dialectic is very much in accordance with my approach.

At the same time, however, the notion of improvement or progress is inevitable in Hegel's approach. Thus, in the conclusion of *Wissenschaft der Logik* (1812-3/1816/1832) he further characterizes his method in the following way,

Der Begriff der absoluten Methode *erhält* sich in seinem Andersseyn, das Allgemeine in seiner Besonderung, in dem Urtheile und der Realität; es erhebt auf jede Stufe weiterer Bestimmung die ganze Masse seines vorhergehenden Inhalts, und verliert durch sein dialektisches Fortgehen nicht nur nichts, noch läßt es etwas dahinten, sonder trägt alles Erworbene mit sich, und bereichert und verdichtet sich in sich. (Hegel 1812-3/1816/1832, 2nd book, p. 250 – emphasis by Hegel).

Even though the Hegelian alternation is not to be understood as a dissolution of the tension, the quote shows that Hegel sees it as an absolute *reconciliation* in the sense that all the previous aspects are *fully* taken into account in the altered approach. There is no remainder. *If* the new approach is to be questioned, it will happen through a new alternation that is even more all-embracing. This view makes it reasonable to claim that “Das Wahre ist das Ganze”: gradually we come to understand things better by coming to realize how things are related as a whole. The gradual coming to understanding at the same time shows the previous views to be wrong/inadequate – hence, only the ideas that embrace the world as a whole, can be said to be true.

In the Hegelian outlook fallibility can (at most¹⁵⁶) be a demonstration of how the prevailing understanding of normativity and reality¹⁵⁷ – and the relationship between them – is not sufficiently subtle. In Hegel's view this fallibility necessarily comes from *within* the present constellation – it is an inner necessity of the constellation, and it leads to a higher understanding,

Es sind hier [i.e. in the analyses in *Phänomenologie des Geistes*] Gestalten des Bewußtseyns, deren jede in ihrer Realisierung sich zugleich selbst auflöst, ihre eigene Negation zu ihrem Resultate hat, – und damit in eine höhere Gestalt übergegangen ist (Hegel 1812-3/1816/1832, 1st book, p. 37-8).

¹⁵⁶ If his thoughts on absolute spirit are interpreted as an explication of a stage that is within possible reach – i.e. that “Das Wahre” is not only a regulative ideal – fallibility would from within that stage be dissolved.

¹⁵⁷ I realize that the translation from immediacy and negativity (Hegelian terms) into normativity and reality (in the sense articulated in the thesis) is rather brutal and should have been further substantiated if this was to be an exegesis of Hegel. Especially since *Sein* in Hegel's thought has a rather specific place in the system, whereas negativity is at play at all stages in the system. My answer towards this objection would be that my notion of reality is much broader than Hegel's notion of *Sein*, and that the translation therefore *may* be justified. This is, however, not an exegesis of Hegel, and the justification would lead astray from the present track. The aim with the following considerations is only to articulate one certain difference in relation to the Hegelian approach to improvement.

This is not necessarily to be understood in anti-realistic terms (see also above, pp. 49f): it is not the concepts (or normativity) that in abstraction shows to be too simple. Rather it is the understanding of, for example, consciousness in a certain way – i.e. a reality understood in a certain *Gestalt* – that in itself contains certain aspects that points beyond itself, and necessitates an alternation. To articulate the same with the vocabulary from section (III,1) above: normativity and reality cannot be thought of in abstraction from each other. But the progressive character of Hegel's view shows that he thinks of the fallibility as something that – in the long run – is positive (“daß das Negative eben so sehr positiv ist” – Hegel 1812-3/1816/1832, 1st book, p. 38), because it leads to an understanding that is better, since we both maintain our initial insights and come to understand the relationship between these insights and their negation. The resulting stance is thought of as more adequate.

As should be clear from the above reflections on focus through norms of relevance, I find this latter aspect of the Hegelian approach untenable. Due to the insights into our necessary embeddedness into contingent factors, it is not possible to maintain that our understanding of the world is gradually moving towards completion. It is not even possible to maintain that the development is moving in one unified direction, since the direction would change if our understanding came to be embedded differently. This is not to say that it is impossible to talk about our understanding making progress. Only, it would be an improvement *in relation to certain norms of relevance*.

I do agree that fallibility may be a source for positive developments – if a correction of earlier views is instantiated it will be because it is thought to lead to a better understanding of certain aspects. But at the same time the embeddedness-insights entail that we have to realize that the positive developments may lead in various directions, and what from one normative outlook is seen as progress, may from another outlook be seen as regress. So, in the end Hegel's view on the normativity-reality relationship (if this is granted as a good translation of his dialectic method) focusses too much on the possibility of reconciliation. Even though Hegel does not claim that the alternation leads to the dissolution of the heterogeneity, he still seems too convinced that once the relationship has been elevated it will not be proven wrong afterwards. The result of the elevation will not – according to Hegel – be lost in succeeding revisions.¹⁵⁸ The following quote demonstrates both my agreements and disagreements with the Hegelian approach,

Aber nicht das Leben, das sich vor dem Tode scheut und von der Verwüstung rein bewahrt, sondern das ihn erträgt und in ihm sich erhält, ist das Leben des Geistes. Er gewinnt seine Wahrheit nur, indem er in der absoluten Zerrissenheit sich selbst findet. Diese Macht ist er nicht als das Positive, welches von dem

¹⁵⁸ Similar objections against Hegel's approach has been put forward by Bernstein in Bernstein 1991, pp. 8-9.

Negativen wegsieht, wie wenn wir von etwas sagen, dies ist nichts oder falsch, und nun, damit fertig, davon weg zu irgend etwas anderem übergehen; sondern er ist diese Macht nur, indem er dem Negativen ins Angesicht schaut, bei ihm verweilt (Hegel 1807a, p. 27).

This notion of the life of the Spirit as a taking the heterogeneity of the world serious, is an important aspect of my concept of critique. Only, I do not – given the embeddedness-insights – find it tenable to describe this as a “sich selbst finden”. Because the “sich selbst” is not an entity that is given once and for all – independently of changes in normative outlooks.

The point with this Hegelian digression has been to demonstrate an important consequence of understanding normativity as founded through norms of relevance – norms that are not settled once and for all. Even if (1) it is granted that normativity is directed towards reality, (2) it is granted that from an absolute perspective there are no tensions (in the concrete, the apparent variety is not a problem), and (3) our understanding of reality happens through norms of consistency; it does not follow that the aim towards reality and consistency are in such an accordance that we are actually coming to an unforced understanding of how the unproblematic co-existence of the multiple aspects of the concrete is actually possible. And if, on the other hand, it is granted (1) that we are embedded in certain contingent factors that inevitably shape our approach towards the world, (2) reality is open to various focusses that make it possible to categorize it in multiple (mutually overlapping) ways, and (3) that there is no robust stance from where to judge which focus to use in trying to unify these various perspectives; then it is clear that we cannot account for such a happy (unified) move towards completion.

c. A Fallibilist Reconstructive Notion of Improvement.

I will nevertheless argue that it is possible, even if the embeddedness-insights of the 19th and 20th centuries are accepted, to defend a notion of improvement that can (drawing on Kauppinen’s distinctions above, pp. 100ff) be characterized as fallibilist-reconstructive. By this I want to situate myself between the weak and strong internal reconstructive approaches, and show that it is possible on the one hand to subscribe to universal standards of improvement (a view defended by Honneth), without this on the other hand meaning that criticism is being blocked in certain respects (a point made by Foucault). I will not hereby claim that this is the only relevant notion of improvement that can be at play in critique (since I – as noted above (p. 104) – acknowledge that it is also possible to have external, weak-ethnocentric and internal, simple critique), but I will argue that it is “the most” we can get in relation to universality and robustness of the notion. A robust universal notion of improvement cannot be attained through a strong reconstructive approach.

Since (1) critique is a pointing out of tensions between a prevailing normativity and reality, the character of such tensions determine the account of improvement in critique. Since (2) normativity is (as I have argued in subsection (III,1,a)) on the one hand an attempt to institute¹⁵⁹ a certain systematism and focus in a certain field of reality, and on the other hand is committed towards an externality (normativity is not absolutely internalistically oriented, it points towards “something” that is systematized), the relationship between normativity and reality is thus both mutually illuminating, but also tensed in the sense that normativity reduces reality, and reality constitutes (among other things) the fallibility of normativity. And it will (other relevant things being equal) be an improvement to dissolve tensions in the relation. Since, furthermore, (3) the notions of normativity and reality are interdependent (even though still irreducible) and critique is – as situated among linguistic practices – itself situated in a constellation of a normativity/reality relation, the critique raised is itself a possible object of critique, and the norms of relevance that shape it are open to discussion. The implied notion of improvement in a critique is therefore also criticizable. This would suggest that a notion of universal improvement would always be misplaced.

I will, however, claim that the story does not end here. Even though it may be granted that universal norms for improvement can always be criticized, the question is how this can be done? As demonstrated above (pp. 78ff) I think that critical theory should not merely claim universal norms to be impossible, but also acknowledge that in order to refute universal norms, it is necessary to rely on (other) universal norms. So there is no clear argument that can refute universal norms generally,¹⁶⁰ and this also goes for norms of improvement. It is possible for norms of improvement to be held universally – but this can at most be done (legitimately) in an acknowledgment of the fallibility of the universal validity. This is a withdrawal in relation to earlier critical theories that sought to achieve a robust, absolutely universal starting point. At the same time, however, it removes an obstacle in relation to critique: a universality that is considered to be fallible is not (in the same sense as a robust, absolute universality) *blocking* in relation to critique, because the universality has to prove its worth in systematizing the reality and the practices of which it is incited and towards which it is directed. The relationship between

¹⁵⁹ Once again: this is certainly strictly *analytically* speaking. To say that normativity “institutes” a systematism does not mean that it is possible to think of a (preceding) situation in which there was no systematism.

¹⁶⁰ It could be objected that I have actually done so during this thesis, by proving every universal claim to be fallible. But to ascribe such weight to the arguments of this thesis, it would be necessary to claim that the very starting point of the thesis – that the embeddedness-arguments of the 19th and 20th century philosophy are convincing – is unquestionable, i.e. infallible. I would not dare to make such a heavy claim. I merely claim that it presently is not possible to think of arguments that would convincingly refute them.

normativity and reality is always mutually defining – so even though the universal norm defines how to understand reality, reality also determines whether the universal norm is fruitful, correct, true, etc. No normative claim can be absolutely blocking because every norm is founded on two aims of normativity that may point in different directions: the aims towards internal systematicity and external adequacy. The Foucaultian uneasiness as to universal norms is thus not relevant if universalism is taken in the sense defended in this thesis.

The question is, however, whether the defenders of more robust norms of progress would be satisfied with this kind of universalism. In Honneth's contribution to a symposium on his notion of recognition¹⁶¹ in *Inquiry* 45¹⁶² Honneth claimed that in order for critique to be possible, it is necessary to presuppose a notion of progress. He furthermore claimed that this notion of progress has to be robust,

Consequently, the relativism that accompanies the 'response' or 'receptivity' model [which is – according to Honneth – defended by Laitinen] would be indistinguishable from the 'attribution' model [which is – according to Honneth – defended by Ikäheimo] [...] With regard to the receptivity model defended by Laitinen, I believe that this difficulty can be overcome only by equipping this moderate value realism with a more robust conception of progress. That would basically mean hypothesizing, with regard to the cultural transformations of valuable human qualities, a developmental path that would allow for justified judgments regarding the transhistorical validity of a specific culture of recognition (Honneth 2002, pp. 508-9).

Honneth arrives at this point (that a robust notion of progress – with transhistorical validity – is necessary in order to avoid relativism) in a discussion of whether one should think of cognitive structures as either attributive or receptive. The problem is that both an attributive and a receptive interpretation of these structures tend towards a relativism that would make reflections on cognitive structures incapable of having critical weight, because the relativism would make it impossible to reach a common ground between the critic and the addressee. It is only possible to criticize someone, if it is possible to convince the addressee that the indicated problem is actually a problem, and that a dissolution of this problem would consequently be an improvement (other relevant things being equal).

This view is interesting in relation to the problematics of this thesis, since Honneth arrives at a quest for a notion of robust progress through a contemplation of a pair of concepts that resemble

¹⁶¹ "Recognition" is a rather inadequate translation of Honneth's key-term *Annerkennung* – cf. esp. Ikäheimo's contribution to the symposium, Ikäheimo 2002. Thomas Schwarz Wentzer has in a presentation at the Annual Meeting in *The Danish Philosophical Society*, February 20 2004 suggested that "acknowledgement" would be a better translation (since it is etymologically closer to the German term). I think that this would indeed be a better translation, but since "recognition" is being used in all codified translations of Honneth's works and in most international discussions of it, I will use that translation too. Recognition should in the following be understood as what happens between acting agents when they – in a broad sense – recognize each other as of a certain worth.

¹⁶² Consisting of Heidegren 2002; Ikäheimo 2002; Laitinen 2002; Kauppinen 2002; Honneth 2002.

my reflectivity/receptivity-distinction in section (IV,3) – i.e. the distinction between an attributive vs. a receptive interpretation of the cognitive structures.¹⁶³ Honneth argues that if one were to choose the attributive approach it would lead to relativism, because in a purely attributive approach

we would no longer have an internal criterion for judging the rightness or appropriateness of such ascriptions; instead, the variability of recognition would then have no boundaries, since anything could end up having to count as a capacity or status, as long as it comes about through an act of attribution (Honneth 2002, p. 507).

Attribution without restrictions opens up for infinite relativism and, accordingly, the dissolution of the possibility of critique. A purely receptive approach is also open to relativism, because the *articulation* of reasonable response or receptivity has to be founded on values that “represent lifeworld certitudes whose character can undergo historical change” – i.e. the responses depend on lifeworld-embeddedness (Honneth 2002, p. 508). This again opens for relativism, since the lifeworlds are culture-specific – apparently with no continuity between them (as long as they are understood in purely receptive terms).

I concur to Honneth’s analysis that if we have to choose between an attributive (reflective) and a receptive approach, it is hard to avoid relativism without a robust notion of progress. But I think that it is a false alternative. And I think that the quest for robust norms of progress is only a transcendental necessity for critique if one considers this to be mutually exclusive approaches to critique.¹⁶⁴ I think, on the contrary, that they should rather be understood as mutually interdependent: attributions are directed towards something that is receptively given, and the receptively given is only intelligible through the outlook that is constituted through the attributions. Both approaches are, if understood in abstraction from each other, empty.

I am furthermore sceptical as to the possibility of extracting robust norms of progress.¹⁶⁵ Relativity is therefore not to be avoided, but it is an indefinable extent of relativity rather than an infinite relativity: there are several normative outlooks that are applicable in relation to fields of

¹⁶³ Attribution and reflectivity are certainly not identical terms. For the sake of brevity I will, though, take it that the aim with Ikäheimo/Laitinen/Honneth’s distinction is rather close to the distinction I have articulated in section (IV,3).

¹⁶⁴ Neither Ikäheimo nor Laitinen actually claims in their reflections on Honneth’s writings that this is a necessary choice. They both acknowledge that attribution and response should not be isolated from each other (Laitinen 2002, pp. 468+474; Ikäheimo 2002, p. 450).

¹⁶⁵ Honneth acknowledges that the burden of proof is rather heavy when trying to articulate such robust norms in the contemporary philosophical landscape. I have discussed Honneth’s actual attempts of lifting this burden in Hansen 2005c. Here I demonstrate that Honneth has not been successful in lifting this burden. I furthermore argue that he does not need to do so, in order for his general approach to be of value.

reality, but not *every* normative outlook is fruitful. The directedness towards reality together with the quest for systematism determines that some outlooks are more fruitful than others. It can be granted that it is *possible*, to a rather high degree, to avoid criticism by ascribing oneself to alternative normative outlooks (and hereby avoid the critique through relativizations), and still claim that there may be reasons for this possibility not to be desirable for the addressee. The point is that normative relativizations have consequences in what one will have to claim about other parts of reality (because it is a norm for normativity to be able to give an account of a systematic reality), and sometimes these consequences may be less desirable than granting the posed critique.

The attributive approach only leads to a radical relativism if it is understood in isolation: it is certainly possible to attribute whatever one can think of, but attributions without any connection with some kind of reality can, at most, merely be understood as some private intellectual or emotional game. Attributions without relations to reality do not play any role in argumentative practices, because they *cannot* do so: such attributions are simply not accessible to mutual discussion and assessment. Similarly, it can be argued about the problem with the receptive approach leading to relativism: this is also only a problem if receptively received views are understood in abstraction from each other. Even though it is true that interpretations of the receptively given has to happen through a lifeworld-perspective, and thus are culture-dependent, it does not follow that the culture-dependence isolates what is claimed inside one perspective against what is claimed from another perspective. That is the point that I developed above (pp. 82ff): even though a certain view is embedded inside a local horizon, it does not follow that the claims raised inside this horizon only have local significance. Locally founded norms point, on the contrary, always beyond the local embeddedness and claim validity in relation to “something” that is – even though *shaped* by it – not itself a *product* (absolutely) of this horizon. It is therefore a problem if it is demonstrated that the (locally founded) outlooks *fail* to reach the object towards which they are directed – i.e. if the coherency, adequacy, relevance, etc. of a view is questioned. Even though the life-world relativity of receptively oriented critique makes it difficult to predict what the result of critique will and should be, it does not mean that it makes critique impossible, because the lifeworld relativity is not isolationist. Every (locally founded) claim always carries a pretension of being coherent, adequate and relevant in relation to a reality that is also available to others.

In the article Honneth certifies Kauppinen’s reading of Honneth’s work as an example of the internal, reconstructive, strong critical approach (on Kauppinen’s distinctions, see above, pp. 100ff) – i.e. that Honneth wants to reveal standards that are *necessarily* avowed by the addressee (implicitly). Honneth’s approach to this project has been to demonstrate that an ethical life is

intimately related to a positive relation to oneself, and this positive self-relation universally presupposes certain recognitive structures that can be divided into three subclasses: emotional support (love, friendship), cognitive respect (rights), social esteem (solidarity) (Honneth 1992, ch. 5+pp. 278-80). This is not to say that the ethical life and the self are exhausted by the recognitive structures. Recognitive structures are necessary but not sufficient in order for the ethical life and positive self-relations to be possible. But for critical purposes “necessity” is enough, because if it has been proven that these recognitive structures are necessary conditions for ethical life and social structures to be possible, it is also proven that any attempt to defend an understanding of social structures, that violates the conditions for these structures to be possible, will be self-contradictory and hence (universally) criticizable.

To my mind, the approach is convincing, but I do not think that it can serve as a basis for universal robust norms of progress; neither that it presupposes such norms. The reason for this is that in order for the analysis to be universally valid, the indicated structures have to be thought of as open to various (culturally and historically variable) normative outlooks. Even though it is granted that these structures are universally at play in social relations, this does not mean that they – per se – constitute a point in which critics can contest the validity of the views held by the addressee. Even though it is not possible to claim that a society should be structured independently of recognitive structures, it is possible to claim that certain actual and robust notions of recognition should always be a part of society. Cf. the distinction above (pp. 30ff): the recognitive structures sketched out by Honneth may serve as fallible universal reference points for critique – rather than robust universal starting points. That is, they can serve as points to turn towards in cases of disagreement in order to *locate* disagreement, whereby it is possible to begin a critical discussion. It is not enough to claim that the addressee does not comply with certain recognitive structures. The task of the critic is rather to find out how the addressee thinks about (e.g.) social esteem, and then engage in a discussion of whether this view is reasonable (due to other views held by the addressee, and due to the possibility to account for relevant aspects of reality).

The question is of course what has then been gained through Honneth’s analyses? An important point that has been demonstrated is that it has certain consequences to subscribe to certain structures of recognition that do not merely affect how one treats and thinks of other people, but that this treatment and these thoughts reflect back upon the recognizer. It has severe consequences to subscribe to or reject norms of recognition. It may be possible to subscribe to all kinds of recognitive structures (or rather: it is not possible to say once and for all, which kinds of recognitive structures that it is impossible to subscribe to) but it has consequences to do so, and

these consequences point back towards what you can think of yourself as a person, and in what sense one can think of one's participation in a social community.

Critique may therefore very well be possible without a *robust* and universal norm of progress, because a critical discussion can happen as a pointing out of consequences that follow from the views that are defended by the addressee, but which the critic may expect the addressee not to be willing to accept – as being a member of the same social community in which the critic partakes. It is, however, true that without the robust notion of progress it is well possible that a critical discussion *may* end in a cul-de-sac, but this merely demonstrates that not all problems and disagreements can be solved through critical discussion – something that I take to conform well with actual critical practices. Sometimes the views of the addressee of critical objections are based on claims that are immunized towards objections and it is therefore not possible to reach a shared view on the subject matter. This is often done by referring to subjective and religious preferences and opinions (more on this below, subsection V,2,b). But philosophers like Habermas, Honneth, Taylor, Putnam, Wellmer, a.o.¹⁶⁶ demonstrate possible strategies to object against such immunizations by showing that if one subscribes to *one* interpretation of, say, subjectivity then this has consequences for views about, say, society and intersubjective relations that one should (if one wants to be coherent in views of reality) also subscribe to.

My point is that to understand these strategies as founded on universally valid robust norms of progress, it becomes too easy to reject them as utopian, and their real gains are lost from sight. Furthermore, universal robust norms of progress would (if not considered to be fallible) themselves actually constitute immunizations against critique. This would of course be all right if they actually *are* universally valid in the robust sense, but the problem is that universal validity can (cf. above, pp. 83ff) only be proven on local grounds. Universal validity is therefore always continuously challenged in local situations. Radical immunizations are therefore never well-founded, and to my mind it would thus be a rather uncritically based critique that, in claiming the critiques to be universally valid, would presuppose them.

As to the distinction between a strong and a weak notion of the internal reconstructive critique, I want to situate the view in this thesis between the two options: on the one hand the strong option is too problematic because there are no robust norms that are necessarily presupposed by

¹⁶⁶ Actually I would also argue that Foucault with his point that it always “could have been otherwise” – i.e. that human practices and theories always are products of freedom – demonstrates a critical tool that can be used universally in problematizing immunisations, because every such immunization can thus be demonstrated not to be universally valid. But this point belongs either to a footnote or to a book-length argument, since Foucault is himself so reluctant towards universal strategies and often denies any universal implication of his writings.

addressees. Perhaps it is possible to point out that we necessarily presuppose some notion of (e.g.) recognition, but in order for this to have necessary critical impact it would be necessary to articulate the critique in concrete (i.e. locally shaped) substantial concepts. And the critique would therefore not itself be reconstructive in the strong sense. But this is not to say that we are merely left with the weak approach – i.e. that we only can direct the reconstructive critique towards certain *actually* avowed normative implications of the addressee. The reflections on recognition in Honneth's writings do (until these reflections are proven wrong) demonstrate that it is useful, when criticizing, to find a common ground for discussion by turning towards the implied notions of recognition, because (if Honneth is right) these recognitive structures signify how the disputants think of personality, sociality, ethical life, etc. It is (again: if Honneth is right) impossible to be *without* such notions – but the actual shape of these notions is not given in advance. But in order for these universal reference-points to be fruitful *critical* tools they have to be locally substantialized. It is thus important (in order to avoid dogmatism) to acknowledge that they are fallible: first of all because every concrete articulation is founded on local grounds; secondly, because it *may* ultimately happen (due to certain aspects of reality) that the notion of recognition in the end proves unfruitful as a reference-point.

Summing up, norms of improvement are inevitable in critique, because it is always (relevant things being equal) an improvement to dissolve tensions between normativity and reality. But it is not given in advance *how* a tension should be solved. Furthermore it is not even given in advance what it would mean to dissolve the tension.

In critical discussions that take a reconstructive strategy it *is* possible to base the critique on universal norms of improvement. But in order for this not to evolve into self-immunization against critical counter-moves, it is important to realize that these norms are fallible – i.e. that they are only valid because they have proven to be fruitful in shaping certain practices. They are thus continuously challenged in actual, concrete situations: it is necessary that the critic can convince the addressee that she actually do presuppose these norms, if she rejects them. And this has to be done in a language that is locally shaped. The universal norms – that are at the outset rather abstract – must be able to prove their validity in concrete situations. And ultimately it *is* possible that we end in a situation in which these norms prove not to be able to both obtain a certain systematism and account in relevant and adequate ways for reality. In that case they may ultimately be renounced upon. But what such a renunciation would amount to is not immediately thinkable from within the horizon of those who take them as universal reference-points. And it would furthermore presuppose that there are other norms that are held to be even more universally valid.

This position does not lead to a kind of relativism in which critique is impossible, because even though normative relativizations are (at least abstractly speaking) possible, it is still a point that they also have consequences (in what it is possible to claim about reality). The prime gain to be reached from many of the transcendental analyses of the late 20th century critical theorists is that they have demonstrated certain structures that it would (universally) have severe consequences to deny – because they point out relations between aspects of reality that on the immediate level seem rather separate.

d. Improvement in Critique and Descriptions.

I have argued (above, pp. 186ff), that critique and description should be thought of in a much closer relationship than is often done, because descriptions also have argumentative implications. But one could object that there is an important difference between critique and description – namely the difference in whether a claim of improvement has to be implied. One could say that descriptions differ (in an essential way) from critique in not wanting to change anything, and that descriptions do hence not have to imply a notion of improvement (since “improvement” is a characterization of what follows from changes).

A quick response to that objection could be to point out that no linguistic action – and consequently no description either – *actually* leaves the world as it is. That every linguistic action to some extent changes the world (at the very least it affects the relationship between the speaker and the addressee). This response could, however, be refuted just as quickly by drawing attention to the fact that even though descriptions *actually* change the world, there is still a difference in that a descriptor does not *intend* to change anything – but merely to present the world as it is; that the actual changes are merely (unintended) side-effects. It does not follow from the fact that descriptions change the world, that they claim this change to be an improvement in itself. It is furthermore very well possible to think of a descriptor that is rather satisfied with the prevailing states of affairs (because she takes great advantage of it), but who realizes that the description that she presents will ultimately entail changes in the state of affairs. So, just because descriptions entail change, it does not follow that they entail improvement.

I will, though, claim that even at this point the difference between critique and description is not fundamental. Before doing this, it should be noted that I do not want to argue that there is *no* difference between what we normally characterize as descriptions and critique respectively. I merely argue that the relationship between the two is so close that it is not possible to seek refuge

in a descriptivist approach in order to avoid the problems surrounding critique – because there is no description that has no critical implications whatsoever.

Since critical implications presuppose norms of improvement, it follows that I will have to claim that there is no description that is not based on norms of improvement. To substantiate this claim I will return to the point that every description (qua being a linguistic act) is based on norms of relevance (cf. above, pp. 45ff). This point makes it evident that descriptions at least sometimes entail norms of improvement – that is, in cases in which there are (at least) two competing descriptive approaches towards a field of reality. In that case, the implied norms of relevance (but not necessarily what is stated through them) contradict each other. So, when on the one hand a widower describes his late wife, and on the other hand a lecturer in Medicine describes the same woman (whose dead body has been donated to scientific purposes) in a class in anatomy, their descriptions will not (at least necessarily) actually contradict each other, but the implied norms of what is relevant to say about this woman in the present situation will (most probably) contradict each other. So, using certain norms of relevance, implies that in the prevailing situation *this* is the better outlook to apply.¹⁶⁷

The argument is based on the claim (that, admittedly, is more intuitively than argumentatively based) that every reality is open to several differing descriptions (because of varying focus). Often we are not aware that this is so, because one normative outlook has been so successful that it is hard to imagine what a relevant alternative could look like (the downgraded aspects have been so downgraded that they have become invisible), but a receptively based critique will in such cases potentially be able to demonstrate that it *is* possible (if perhaps not desirable). Every description is thus a product of a choice (in an abstract sense, certainly) of which focus to apply upon a certain field of reality, and the act of putting forward the description entails that the descriptor takes *this* focus to be the relevant in the prevailing situation. And if the description is not merely superfluous then this entails that to accept the presented norm of relevance would be an improvement in relation to the norms that could be implied in alternative descriptions.

¹⁶⁷ The example actually opens up for an objection that illustrates that in concrete situations things easily become more complex than philosophers would like them to be: because it is possible to think of a lecturer that might very well grant that if the widower were to stand in his position, it would be understandable if he described his wife through norms of affection, love, sorrow, etc. So the lecturer does not have to think that the widower would make a *better* description by applying the technical outlook. But I will claim that this is because the “prevailing situation” would be wholly different if the students were confronted with the widower. They would not expect to be taught anatomy. To have a more clear-cut (but also dull!) case of improvement-claims in relation to implied norms of relevance, one should probably think of a situation in which different scientific traditions dispute about what is the better description of a certain field of reality.

This is not to say that there is no difference at all between descriptions and critique in relation to the role of improvement. In critical statements the norms of improvement are more explicit than in the descriptive statements. My point is merely to say that the difference is not absolute and that there are critical implications in every description. That is, linguistic practices that pretend to be “merely” descriptive in opposition to being critically oriented, are misconceived. It is thus not possible to avoid the problematic implications of the embeddedness-insights by taking a purely descriptivist strategy (as opposed to a normative or critical strategy). So, when scientists, philosophers, politicians, journalists, etc. claim to be merely describing things (and not changing or judging them) or when they claim that it is “plain common sense that...” this is at best misconceived. More seriously it will in many cases furthermore be a strategy taken to *hide* the questionability of the normative and critical implications, so that they need not to be assessed themselves.

In such cases the descriptive attitude actually evolves into the opposite of what it pretends to be: ideological. It is true, that one of the insights evolving from this thesis is that it is not possible to avoid being ideological, and it is therefore not per se an objection towards a certain stance that it is so. But it *is* an objection towards a stance that the very claim of descriptivism (in order to avoid making *ideologically* founded criticism) is itself furthering ideology – because there is a tension between the norm and the reality. This tension can of course be accepted (e.g. if the possible alternatives lead to what is taken to be more severe tensions), but it should be done openly, so that the addressees have the opportunity to assess whether or not also to accept it. I will return to this point in the following chapter. For now, it suffice to conclude that descriptions that pretend not to be founded on certain notions of improvement at all, are (at best) misconceived, (at worse) ideological, or (at worst) dangerous (if the descriptivism furthers a non-critical development towards certain absolutist structures in society and the world more generally) – I will return to an example of this point in subsection (V,2,a).

5. Results of the Analyses.

I will now (a) turn to a summary of the results of this chapter in order to prepare an articulation of the consequences and perspectives in chapter (V). I will furthermore (b) reflect upon the aspects of critique that have been left out, and try to justify these exclusions.

a. Summary.

The reference-point for my analyses of critique has been that it is reasonable to characterize critique as a pointing out of a tension between a prevailing normativity and reality. Accepting, furthermore, that it is a result of the preceding 150 (approximately) years of philosophy that any claim of knowledge, morality, rightness, legality, social justice, usefulness, value, etc. is embedded in certain factors that are on the one hand inevitable, but on the other hand also contingent, it has to be accepted that there is no robust norm of improvement that can serve as a robust starting point for every act of criticism.

The relativism that is an inevitable consequence of this does not, however, preclude the possibility of critique. On the contrary, I argue that critique becomes *inevitable*. This is clear as soon as one realizes the dialectics between universality and locality that is a consequence of this situation: on the one hand claims are founded on local grounds, and these grounds shape what can possibly be claimed. On the other hand, the normative shaping that is part of the conceptualization of the locally gained insights presupposes a certain generalization or universalization, because the normative structures are only possible if certain patterns are revealed in reality, and patterns are not possible on a purely particularized level. Claims are therefore locally based, but reaches towards generality and/or universality. That is what is implied in *learning* something from what we are presented with: what we get to know locally might very well be relevant in other contexts as well. But certainly, this expansion is *fallible*. At some moment reality may demonstrate the generalization to be misconceived. It may happen that the generalization either has problems with accounting for all (relevant) aspects of reality, or it may happen that reality turns out to be complex in ways that prevent a systematic unity in the prevailing approach towards it. This is where critique comes in.

The point is thus that there is *always* a tension between normativity and reality, because the normative understanding introduces (through norms of relevance) a focus on certain aspects of reality at the cost of others. This is so because a normatively based approach – in order to draw out *general* aspects of reality, i.e. *similarities* between various particulars¹⁶⁸ – has to exclude those aspects on which the objects in focus differ.

¹⁶⁸ This is Adorno's critique of (among others) Hegel (cf. Adorno 1966, pp. 13-66 – actually Adorno speaks of *Identitätsphilosophie*, and not about philosophy of *similarities*, but the point is the same). As should be clear by now, I think that it is a legitimate critique of Hegel because the similarity-approach is absolutized. But it is not a possible alternative to call for a philosophy that avoids similarity-thought in toto.

This means that no normative outlook is good enough – there is always a deficit. The pointing out of such tensions is therefore not in itself enough in order to claim that the current states of affairs should be changed. But it *is* a problematization because it demonstrates a problem between normativity on the one hand being directed towards reality, but on the other hand failing to do so adequately. But in order to avoid the tension that has been pointed out, a new tension will have to be set, and the decision of whether or not to accept the prevailing tension will therefore have to be based on an assessment of the severity of the demonstrated tension in relation to the alternatives that one can think of.

The act of drawing attention to such tensions can in itself be a rather complicated affair. This is so, because the excluded aspects tend to become invisible, due to the point that the *focus* lies elsewhere. The act of critique has therefore to be an act of transcending the common or ordinary outlook taken by the addressee. This transcendence can happen reflectively or receptively. The reflective strategy is an active assessment of the systematic coherence of the addressee, whereas the receptive approach seeks to draw the attention of the addressee towards new aspects of reality that are not taken into account in her outlook – but (and this will often need further elaboration from the critic) *should* be so: either because the addressee professes to do so, or because it can be demonstrated that the new aspects are relevant to her in the prevailing situation.

This situation admittedly leaves critical theory in a rather floating situation, and it has been objected whether critique is possible at all, if there are no robust norms that it can hinge upon. I have argued that it is very well possible, but that it is at the same time necessary to admit that the critique itself is open towards counter-critique from the addressee. In posing a critique, the critic herself has to presuppose a particular relation between normativity and reality, and in so doing she makes herself – and the critique – vulnerable towards a counter-critique. This is in fact a very common defence against critique. It is therefore not given in advance where the critique will lead neither the addressee nor the critic.

This also counts for the notion of improvement that is necessarily implied in critique. Even though a notion of improvement is necessary, the notion of improvement might very well be contested by the addressee. But this does not mean that it is without consequences to do so. As demonstrated in chapter (III), to subscribe to a particular normative outlook determines that there are certain views that one must necessarily subscribe to too – in order to meet the norm of internal systematicity and external (relevant) adequacy. Thus, even though relativity is not to be avoided, and it is not possible once and for all to delineate its extension, we do not end up in a relativism in which critique is not possible at all. In cases in which it seems nevertheless to be impossible to find a common meeting point from where to engage in a critical discussion, one can turn to the

reference points that philosophers like Habermas, Honneth, Taylor, Putnam, etc. have revealed as being universally at play. Not in order to use these reference points as robust norms for a critique, but rather to localize how the disputants differ on these notions, and taking this difference as a starting point for a critical discussion.

b. What has been left Out.

Defending the view that every articulation of matters in the world entail a tension between normativity and reality, because every normative outlook focusses on certain aspects at the cost of others, it would certainly be odd to claim that the articulation in this thesis is without such exclusions. So, even though I have (hopefully) succeeded in showing that the view presented in this thesis is a reasonable account of the reality of critical practices, I will have to concede that the narrative only has been successful because certain aspects of reality have been left out. Even though it is in the nature of this point that these aspects to a certain extent are invisible to the articulator, I will in this subsection nevertheless seek to point out some of the rather apparent exclusions that have been necessary in order for the narrative to be possible.

(1) One of the (to my mind) most obvious exclusions made in this thesis is the way in which critical practices are different when the normative “category” changes. That is, the critique that is directed towards a tension between a reality and certain avowed rules, concepts, sentences, values, moral norms, rights, laws, etc. is in certain respects different, just as these various categories sometimes affect each other. So, if (for example) a critic criticizes someone for walking over the street even though the light is red, this is at the explicit level a critique of someone breaking the law (a legal critique: there is a tension between the law and reality). But this tension is very different in character from the tension that would be pointed out if the addressee responded that “No, the light was not red” (an epistemic critique: there is a tension between reality and the concepts used, the way of having achieved the knowledge, or the norms of reliability that the original critic subscribes to). One important difference between these various kinds of critique concerns which possibilities that are open to the addressee, if she accepts the critique as relevant. In the first case she can try to change the law (through political activities) without being committed to change anything else. In the latter case, a change in the criticized norm could easily entail that one would have to change the view on what to count as knowledge at all.

It has furthermore not been discussed in what sense differing fields of reality are open to different kinds of critique. The reality of subjectivity is not (at least immediately) open to a

critique based on norms of objectivity. The geological reality is not open to a morally based critique. The political reality is not open to a critique based on mechanistically conceived norms.

Still, though, the various categories of normativity and fields of reality are intimately connected. When criticizing a norm of legal justice, it may very well be due to a certain norm of morality (if one acknowledges a distinction between justice and morality¹⁶⁹) that is thus taken to constitute the appropriate norm of relevance: “the universal proprietary rights do not account for the property of ones own labour” is only a critique if it is implied that “ones own labour” is thought of as inside the relevant field of objects for the proprietary rights. And an argument in favour of this could very well be based on the view that it is immoral to secure rights for dead things but not rights for something as personal as “ones own labour”. Furthermore the objective realities that are studied inside neuropsychology (neurologic processes in the brain) and the social realities that are studied inside socio-psychological research (general behaviour of the person speaking) do in some sense affect our assessment of what is said about some subjective realities.

So on the one hand there are distinct fields of critique that I have not been considering. On the other hand there are also interrelations between these fields that could have been taken into account as well. So, the critical practices are certainly much more complex than I have been able to account for in this chapter. In order to be able to articulate a narrative on these practices, certain exclusions have been necessary. On the one hand this is necessary out of practical reasons: the thesis would swell up into excessive proportions if these aspects were to be taken into account. On the other hand, if the complexity of the practices were to be taken fully into account, the very notion of “critical practices” would threaten to dissolve into mere particularity. This is not to say that analyses of these complexities are not called for at all. The point is rather that the full complexity cannot be accounted for in one thesis. The task of the writer is therefore to demonstrate that the objective chosen in the present context illuminates the investigated subject in (new) fruitful ways. This is what I will undertake in the succeeding chapter.

(2) Another exclusion that might be questioned is that I only analyse critique as a linguistic practice. I have tried to justify above this exclusion in the introduction to section (IV,1) and the succeeding subsection (a). The exclusion is not actually a product of my initial approach (it is possible to point out tensions between an avowed normativity and reality through bodily expressions, political activism, artworks, etc.) but rather an exclusion stemming from a wish to investigate a *particular* kind of critique – the critique that is based on validity-claims, and thus itself open to critical counter-claims. The gain in this choice is that many of the mechanisms

¹⁶⁹ Wellmer criticizes Habermas for conflating these two notions – in Wellmer 1986, pp. 114-22.

become more explicit when being articulated linguistically. It may well be that I on the other hand lose sight of some diversity of the practices. I cannot, however, help but feeling that even the non-linguistic critical practices are intimately linked with a *possibility* of being linguistically articulated; that the “spitting in disgust” mainly is characterized as critique, because it can be articulated as “Not-ok!!!” – i.e. “The state of affairs is not as they should be”; that the political activists and the artists are considered to be critics, because they draw our attention to certain aspects of reality that are not (normally) taken into account in our normative outlook; and that these practices are critical in a decisively different way than if the spitting was replaced with an exercise of excessive violence or the activist demonstrations were replaced with a military coup. Because the former acts can be understood as *validity*-claims whereas the latter acts are to be understood as displays of power.

I do not claim that these kinds of critique (or critique in general) are exhausted by their linguistic character. It may very well be that some of the mechanisms of critique are only intelligible if one takes the emotive aspects (that are more visible in the non-linguistic kinds of critique) into account. But I do claim that the linguistically formulated validity-claims reveal decisive and necessary aspects of critique. And as noted above (pp. 92ff) even though one talks about something in its linguistic terms, this does not mean that they are reduced to linguistic concepts. The linguistic practices are characterized by not being internally constituted. Language is characterized by pointing towards something that is not itself language. My exclusion does therefore not absolutely prevent the analyses from being relevant for non-linguistic kinds of critique.

(3) The outlook of this thesis balances between being normative and descriptive. On the one hand I have articulated my account of critique in the hope that it covers most of the actual critical practices. On the other hand, my articulation comes to determine what is to be counted as critique. This duality is in concord with the main point of the thesis: that descriptive and normative outlooks cannot be fully separated. But the question is of course how the account gains authority? How come that certain practices are separated out to be normative in assessing the criticality of other practices? In order to understand this it is necessary to bear in mind that normativity in this context not necessarily relates to “should”-claims. The normativity of my account is not a norm in the sense that agents *should* act according to it. It is rather a normativity in the sense that it constitutes a reference-point for categorization: if one does not act according to the account, one does not do the same as if one *were* acting according to it. Being a tautology, this should not be a claim that needs much backing.

The *relevance* of the account will, however, need some backing. I have pointed out (above, p. 94) that a particular practice (i.e. purely positive assessments of artworks) that is often termed as critique, is not critical according to my outlook. So in relation to that practice, my account is revisionist. In order for this revision to gain authority, it will need some backing. I will consequently have to claim that there are certain gains in making a distinction between critical practices and (at least certain) assessments of artworks. My main reason for making the distinction is that an inclusion of purely positive assessments of artworks would preclude the problematizing aspect of critique: purely positive assessment of artworks do not contain any problematization. There is, consequently, no notion of improvement implied either: everything is evaluated to be purely as it should be. I will not claim that there is *no* relation between such practices and critique at all. It makes sense to characterize the assessments of artworks as investigations into whether or not there is anything criticizable in the artworks, and sometimes these assessments end up in critical objections – and critique is in such cases an integral part of the initial assessment. But sometimes they do not. One could of course have chosen to broaden the account even further and have defined critique thus,

Critique means to *evaluate* the relation between an avowed normativity and a
reality.

The problem with this widening of the reach of the account is that it would threaten to lose significance: one of the aims with critical theory is to demonstrate how it is possible to transcend the outlook of oneself and others. And this is actually not done in purely affirmative assessments – because the assessor assesses that it is not necessary.

One could then object that the problem between having an account that both covers every relevant practice and still obtains significance demonstrates a Wittgensteinian point against definitions: it is not for certain that every group of practices can (or should) be characterized through a certain core-element that can be articulated in a robust definition.¹⁷⁰ Perhaps it would be better to approach the critical practices as a group that is connected through family-resemblance.

The family-resemblance approach is helpful in articulating how it comes that various practices are understood as species of one idea, even though they are apparently rather different. It is thus helpful in understanding practices in their diversity. In this case, this approach could thus perhaps be useful in explaining how it comes that we *actually* characterize assessments of artworks as

¹⁷⁰ This is the famous Wittgensteinian picture of practices (or *Spiele*) being related through *Familienähnlichkeiten* and *Spinnen eines Fadens Faser an Faser* (Wittgenstein 1953, §67).

critique. But it would not help in relation to the problem of loss of significance: the family-resemblance approach makes it possible to articulate *that* practices belong to the same group, but *why* they belong together has to be explained in relation to *each* of the practices. If this particularization is brought to its limits the *why*-aspect (the normative outlook) is actually dissolved. So the approach of family-resemblance actually only avoids the problem between exhaustiveness and significance by leaving out the latter part of the problem. The approach of family-resemblance is thus well in accordance with Wittgenstein's descriptive inclination – i.e. the inclination of merely describing practices as they are, and leaving them as such (cf. above, p. 18). It would not solve the present problem that the notion of critique would (to my mind) become philosophical uninteresting if it were to embrace purely affirming practices as well.

V. Consequences and Perspectives.

If I have been successful in the preceding chapters, it may be that the reader is left with a feeling that I have only presented plain common sense. If the aim is to analyse and describe practices that are well-known to most people, this is a lot that is difficult to avoid. In order for the preceding reading not to be a vast of time, it remains therefore to be demonstrated in what sense the results of the analyses have significant implications in relation both to other approaches of critical theory and to actual critical practices. In this chapter I will articulate in what sense I take the results of the preceding chapters to be significant in relation to certain ongoing discussions. On the one hand I will (1) articulate in what sense the preceding analyses make it possible for me to relate in a better way to critique than some of the antecedents in critical theories. On the other hand, I will (2) give an account of how the analyses leave us in relation to situations in which critique seems called for, but in which it – for various reasons – also seems to be only problematically applicable. Hereby I want to demonstrate the extensions and limits of the articulated concept in relation to some of the borderline cases.

1. Improvements of Critical Theory.

I will in this section show in what way the sketched approach in the thesis leaves critical theory differently than alternative critical theories in relation to the problems of embeddedness and descriptivism. My point is that even though embeddedness is granted, this does not mean that we are *trapped* in a certain outlook that *determines* what it is possible to state about the states of affairs. Even though statements are shaped by the normative outlook through which they have been established, and their validity consequently hinges on an acceptance of this normative outlook, it is nevertheless so that statements reach beyond the normative foundations, and claim to be valid about something that is not exhausted by normativity – statements reach towards reality. Even though the normative outlook to some extent determines what can be counted as reality, reality is still defined as some kind of otherness, alterity, *différance*. This is, as it were, the very function of normativity.

Embeddedness does thus not lead to mere internalism (i.e. that validity-claims are only valid inside a very local and narrowly defined outlook). It rather leads to a situation in which the validity-claims are always criticizable, because the reaching-outside is only *absolutely* valid as long as the normative ground from which it is made, is accepted by the addressee – and, due to the differing embeddedness, this acceptance can never be accounted for in advance. The crucial point here is that validity-claims on the one hand cannot be restricted to merely local validity. On the other hand, they cannot achieve absolute validity outside the local field. This is in a certain sense a paradox, but only as long as one does not distinguish between absolute and fallible (or criticizable) validity: it is one thing to recognize that no claim can have validity independently of a normative outlook. It is another thing to say that the validity is (absolutely) restricted to the areas in which this normative outlook is accepted. This would only be so, if the *reasonability* of the normative outlook was determined by the outlook itself – i.e. that the outlook was (from an external view) merely accidental.

Contrary to this point, it is the point of this thesis that the reasonability of normative outlooks is linked to their endeavour to articulate something in reality. This is the reason why an avowed approach is challenged if met by alternative approaches towards reality that reveal different aspects of reality, and this is also the reason why there is no such thing as *mere* descriptivism. The possibility of accounting for (and demonstrating the relevance of) new aspects of reality is inevitably a challenge to any normative outlook. This is so, because it potentially reveals the inadequacies of the outlook (because aspects that are not taken into account may show to be relevant), and it is consequently necessary for the agents that represent the challenged outlook either to demonstrate in what sense the exclusions that it entails are fruitful, or to revise the outlook so that the new aspects are taken into account.

The analyses that have been presented in the preceding chapters are to a large extent a product of an *auseinandersetzung* with Habermas, Foucault, Rorty, Putnam, Honneth and Taylor in the sense that I am on the one hand greatly inspired by their writings. On the other hand, however, I am also critical towards some aspects of them. Rorty is, to my mind, a genuine exemplar of the tendency in contemporary philosophy that I argue to be failed: that embeddedness leads to a turn towards radical descriptivism. Putnam articulates the point in which Rorty's pragmatism goes wrong – by demonstrating that it even from a pragmatic point of view is possible to maintain that there is something significant to be said about the role of reality in linguistic practices. The discussion between Rorty and Putnam reveals in what sense it is a wrong notion of pragmatism that is an important source to the descriptivism of 20th century: it is a pragmatism that only focusses on the doing-aspect of pragmatic situations. Putnam demonstrates that the undergoing-

aspect should be taken into account as well. But Putnam's notion of reality is itself inadequate, since he takes it mainly to be a hold against relativism. He is therefore not actually a critical theorist. As Foucault demonstrates, it is also a significant aspect of reality that it may *call for* relativization. This constitutes the basis for a receptive notion of critique. Taylor's notion of *articulation*¹⁷¹ supplements Foucault in the sense that whereas Foucault focusses on what is being hidden in discourses, Taylor points out that the discursive articulations at the same time are what makes it *possible* to reflect upon the hiddenness. Habermas and Honneth explicate certain conditions that are necessary for the linguistic and social practices to be possible, and how this reveals certain norms that it is universally sensible to turn to when criticizing. Both Habermas, Honneth and Taylor focus on the aspect of continuity that is necessary for critique (the norm of systematicity), whereas Foucault focusses on how critique reveals certain reductions, i.e. how normatively shaped views are inadequate (the norm of external adequacy). The reciprocal reluctancy towards the other side in this schism reveals (I take it) a narrowness in the defended view, since both aspects are important.¹⁷²

One can say that the two sides of the discussion differ in their emphasis on the normativity and reality aspects of the critical problematizations. Habermas, Honneth and Taylor's emphasis on unity between agents, having a basis in a shared life-world, that raise truth-claims by presupposing a potential acceptance by every other relevant agent, is connected with the view that critique mainly is a pointing out of the lack of systematicity.¹⁷³ Critique is in this approach mainly *social* critique, because it is the social reality that is most open towards changes. It would be rather awkward (e.g.) to criticize an electron for not acting according to our theories of electrons (even though potentially it *could* be possible – due to certain systematic problems – to justify that

¹⁷¹ I have only touched superficially upon this notion – above, p. 34f.

¹⁷² Honneth is probably the one who most persistently tries to bridge the gap between the two approaches. Thus, he opens his opus magnum with the claim that his aim is to *unite* the Foucaultian approach, with the communicatively based approach defended by Habermas (Honneth 1992, p. 7). And he has repeatedly published articles on how critical theory can benefit from the Foucaultian approach (Honneth 1986a (ch. 4); 1986b; 1990; 2000a; 2003a; 2003b). But despite of this ongoing interest, it would still be fair to characterize Honneth as rather hesitant about the critical gains of Foucault's *methodological* work. I have discussed an aspect of Honneth's assessment of Foucault above, pp. 102ff.

¹⁷³ It could be objected that Habermas' notion of the ideal speech situation as a *critical* ideal – i.e. an idea that is never actually realized – shows that he is aware of diversity as an unavoidable fact. But still, diversity is something that is to be *avoided*: the aim of argumentation is to reach the point that everybody potentially can subscribe to, and that is open to every possible counter-argument. Whereas I accept this as articulating *one* side of linguistic practices (the aim towards systematic unity) it is important that it is supplemented with the other – conflicting – side of these practices (the aim external adequacy – to account for the diversity of reality).

we should drop the notion of a reality “electron”, or at least revise the presently held understanding of it).

Foucault and other representatives of world-disclosing critique want to demonstrate how reality demonstrates the avowed normativity to be inadequate. This makes it evident for them to focus on the reality side of the tension. Critique means to show how reality “criticizes” normativity. In world-disclosing (i.e. receptively oriented) critique the aim is to demonstrate inadequacies in normative outlooks. Critique is therefore not an effort to establish a normativity in new theories, but rather a move *away* from – previously held – theories. Critique means to demonstrate how even normative outlooks that apparently have meant great progress in certain respects (e.g. health care, human sciences, prison, etc.) have brought with them certain side-effects that most people would hesitate to characterize as positive. Critique is an *êthos* away from normativity – rather than a *nomos* (a naming, sustaining) towards new fixed views.

Foucaultian critique is also mainly social critique (e.g. the practices that shape the institutions of psychiatry, health care, humanistic sciences, punishment, sexuality). In this case, however, it is less obvious that it *should* be so. Receptive critique might just as well be established in relation to epistemic, moral, subjective and perhaps even religious¹⁷⁴ fields. Certainly a response towards receptively based critique (that has been accepted as valid) would have to imply a certain reflectivity, and as such point towards a revision of a socially shaped normativity. But the critique itself may be based on what is conceived primarily as mere physical, moral, subjective and religious fields.

I have articulated these two approaches to critique as reflective and receptive and I have accentuated that every genuine statement (and hence also critique) entails the possibility of answering questions from both approaches. So, one can say that insofar as Habermas turns down the Foucaultian approach to critique (cf. Habermas 1985, ch. X) and Foucault turns down the Habermasian approach to critique (Foucault 1990, p. 47; 1982a, p. 249; 1984g, p. 1546) they may both be right: they point out an aspect of which the other lacks attention – an aspect in critique of which they are themselves highly aware. Neither Habermas nor Foucault succeeds in articulating an adequate account of critique, but they both articulate necessary aspects of it.

The difference between Habermas and Foucault’s approaches is, in a nutshell, that whereas Habermas seeks to extract a normativity that (in a certain sense) is universally valid and evaluate reality in the light of this normativity (systematize reality), Foucault on the contrary seeks to reveal the actual state of affairs and how normativity has emerged from this (the unifying normativity as a product of diverse sources). He demonstrates hereby their sources, which again

¹⁷⁴ Insofar as religious/transcendent problematics are considered to be possible objects of critique – cf. pp. 66ff and 235ff.

are taken to be crucial for their validity. As argued in section (III,2) the validity of universal claims is dependent on how well they answer problematics that arise in local situations, and local situations are defined and (to some extent) determined by universal outlooks. The Habermasian approach is therefore only fruitful as long as it can also account for in what sense it is reasonable in relation to actually existing problematics (i.e. as long as the abstract universal notions make sense when they are concretized in actual situations); and the Foucaultian approach is only fruitful as long as it is inscribed in a narrative that can be shared and understood by several agents – and that can be argued to be *relevant*.

All the philosophers that have been discussed in this thesis go wrong on this point: the reason why critique is such an important issue for philosophical investigations is that linguistic practices are constituted by two aims (towards systematicity and adequacy) that do not necessarily point in the same direction. The embeddedness-insights do not threaten the relevance of critique. They make it more complicated to establish a successful critique, but since no systematizing norm can be taken to be universally adequate and relevant (at least in a non-fallible sense) no view is actually immune against critique. This is so because neither the normative nor the realist side of the prevailing states of affairs can serve as a firm basis for assessment – there is no relationship between normativity and reality in which there are no tensions. If the illuminating aspects of the linguistic practices are shown faulty¹⁷⁵, there is no reason to sustain them. Such demonstrations therefore *do* have critical effects upon the addressees.

Due to the dual aims of linguistic practices and the embeddedness-insights there is no *repose* for these practices. As soon as the one aim is being taken care of, it happens at the risk of violating the other aim. If we want to have linguistic practices that take reality in its absolute diversity into account, it happens at the risk of losing the systematic unity – whereby the comprehensive overview is lost. If we on the other hand try to secure absolute unity in our linguistic practices, we risk to lose sight of relevant aspects of reality. Every linguistic practice does therefore have to be situated in this tension, and the stance is always disputable. No linguistic practice can claim to be non-interfering. There is no such thing as *mere* description – as soon as someone claims to be merely describing, it indicates that she is unaware of her normative outlook; in worse cases it indicates that she is trying to carry out an ideological move that is sought covered up by the claim of non-interference.

In the following section I will demonstrate how the awareness of *both* aspects is sometimes the key to carry critical discussions further.

¹⁷⁵ Or even more generally: if the norms of practices in general do not achieve their goals in relation to the reality that they have been incited by, and towards which they are directed, there is no reason to sustain these practices.

2. Practical relevance and Significance of the Points Made.

Until now I have mostly articulated my points on an abstract level. In this section I will demonstrate what this means in relation to actual critical practices. The significance of this section is not merely to be an “add-on” that demonstrates that the reflections in this thesis have some applicability. The point is not that I have in the preceding chapters given a fully developed account of critique that *merely* needs to be applied in reality. In the thesis I have substituted certain normative focusses by an alternative focus (the focus on the tensed relationship between normativity and reality). I hope to have demonstrated that this focus makes sense as a coherent view. But it needs to be shown that this view can shed new light on actual ongoing critical discussions. The very fact that the insights in this thesis are applicable in a reasonable way is a necessary condition for accepting the validity of them.

There are (at least) two challenges that face the above analyses, and I will in this section try to address them by relating the analyses to concrete problems: (a) Has it become too easy to be a critic? (b) Has critique become toothless in relation to the problems that it was initially supposed to address?

a. Critique as a Rhetorical Means.

In the thesis I have argued that critique is not only possible – it is also unavoidable. But if there are critical implications in every linguistic statement, does it then not become too easy to be a critic? The reason why critique has been a decisive notion of analysis inside especially social sciences is that it has been connoted with positive implications of emancipation. But since every change in social structures have both positive and negative effects, it becomes difficult to find a criteria to distinguish between, on the one hand, critique as something that happens, as it were, automatically in every linguistic statement and, on the other hand, *brave* or *courageous* critique – i.e. critique that happens because one really want to change the states of affairs into the *better*. This is a problematic that is very clear in what can be seen as a strain inside Danish¹⁷⁶ politics:

¹⁷⁶ My guess would be that this strain can be found in many countries. I will however restrict the following to the example that I know best.

the rhetorical battle of being the critical and forward-looking part – as opposed to the dogmatic, antiquated, stagnant part.

Drawing on positive connotations of being “the critical”, critique is used in order to gain power – not because of the arguments that were entailed in the critique, but because critique is considered to be something positive in itself. This strategy I will talk about as *rhetorical critique*: the affiliation with critical practices is made as a rhetorical means to reach certain aims. Even though I acknowledge that there can be a critical sting in such movements, I will nevertheless in the following argue that in certain cases this critique is founded on descriptivist reductions whereby the field of critique is actually limited. My point is mainly that they show an unfortunate blindness of the nature of critique – a blindness that my thesis has sought to explicate, hereby giving some tools for how to deal with it.

In the following I will talk about a movement that I will call *neoconservative*. This is a movement that has been very influential in the last decade (at least) of Danish politics – and the government that was elected in November 2001 is an important representative of it. Some will agree to this characterization, others will disagree. This thesis would lose focus if I were to substantiate it further, so I will leave it at that. If the reader disagrees on the analysis of present-day Danish politics it is, however, not crucial. The following argument will mainly draw on what I take to be an *exemplar* of the movement, and this exemplar has in itself had such an important impact on present day discussions that it in itself could justify a philosophical reflection. What I in the following want to show is how this exemplar on the one hand tries to establish itself as a critical approach, but that it on the other hand is based on suppositions that make this problematic, and that it in relation to applied politics turns out to be more affirmative and rarefying than actually critical.

The exemplar that I will discuss is the approach presented by Bjørn Lomborg. This approach was most thoroughly presented in his book *Verdens sande tilstand* (1998).¹⁷⁷ This book has been

¹⁷⁷ Throughout the thesis I have referred to literature in the original languages. This I will also do with this book. The reason why I have written the thesis in English is, however, that I want to be able to reach readers who do not understand Danish. I will therefore supplement my references to this book with {page-numbers} that refer to the English translation: *The skeptical environmentalist: measuring the real state of the world*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Danish quotes will be supplemented with the English equivalent in footnotes. Notice, however, that the English version of the book is not an exact translation of the Danish. It has been slightly altered in order to engage with an international readership.

highly discussed inside both scientific and political fields.¹⁷⁸ The affiliation with neoconservative politics was never made more explicit than when Lomborg (February 2002) was selected by the new (neoconservative) government as the first director of *Denmark's National Environmental Assessment Institute* which was established in the aftermath of the abolishment of several existing environmental councils and boards. In 2004 he was furthermore one of the main organizers of the *Copenhagen Consensus 2004*-project. In April 2004 he was named one of the world's 100 most influential people by *Time Magazine* (*Time Magazine*, April 26, 2004, vol. 163,17).

In the following I will not go into details about whether or not Lomborg is scientifically dishonest, whether or not the claims posed in the book are true, whether he was qualified as a director of the *Environmental Assessment Institute*, whether the prioritizations reached in the *Copenhagen Consensus*-project are the best. The above summary is only meant to demonstrate that Lomborg and his work is centrally placed in Danish (and to a certain extent also international) discussions about environmental politics. The point in the following is that Lomborg illuminates that it is not always easy to distinguish between critics and affirmists: on the one hand Lomborg has critical stings that hit many of the established institutions of environmental care. On the other hand, however, many of the points that Lomborg has made, have been used (rightfully or not) as an excuse of reducing the public expenditures on environmental problems – because he points out that things are not as bad as people think they are. This makes it relevant to ask whether it is possible in actual situations to discern critical from affirming or conservative practices. The question is whether Lomborg demonstrates that it has become too *easy* to be critical. I.e. that critique has now become a strategy of affirming ongoing practices. In the following I will discuss how to characterize Lomborg's approach as critical by relating to his book and to the concept of *Copenhagen Consensus*.

The main point of *Verdens sande Tilstand* (1998) is that the litany of the traditional environmental movements and institutions – that the world is going towards its end due to lack

¹⁷⁸ This debate is well documented in influential journals like (list not complete!) *Scientific American* 286,1 (2002): 61-71; 286,5 (2002): 14-5; *Nature* vols. 414; 416; 419; 421; 423; 428; 431 (2001-4); *Economist* 360,8238; 361,8253; 362,8258. The book was furthermore accused for scientific dishonesty, something that was partially confirmed by *The Danish Committees on Scientific Dishonesty* ("Objectively speaking, the publication of the work under consideration is deemed to fall within the concept of scientific dishonesty. In view of the subjective requirements made in terms of intent or gross negligence, however, Bjørn Lomborg's publication cannot fall within the bounds of this characterization. Conversely, the publication is deemed clearly contrary to the standards of good scientific practice." – January 7, 2003). This decision was, however, repudiated by The Danish Ministry of Science in December 17, 2003, and the case has not been reconsidered since then. The DSCD's verdict has therefore been remitted. The political interference in the work of the DCSD is quite remarkable and indicates that the status of Lomborg's work is rather important for this government.

of resources, increasing (and irreversible) pollution, the starving of people in poor countries, etc. – is not in accordance with the real or true state of the world. Lomborg reflects in the opening on the term “true” (“real” in the English translation),

Hvis vi tænker ordet ‘sandt’, som om det betyder ‘dækkende alle områder af alle menneskelige aktiviteter,’ kan det naturligvis ikke lade sig gøre [...] I stedet bruger jeg ordet ‘sand’ i den betydning, at beskrivelsen skal dække de *væsentlige* områder af verdens tilstand, og at beskrivelsen skal være *i overensstemmelse med sandheden* (Lomborg 1998, p. 17).¹⁷⁹

The point is that the picture Lomborg wants to paint is not true in the sense that it is adequate, but in the sense that it – due to statistics that are claimed to transcend the purely subjective opinions – describes how things are getting better (not necessarily *good enough*, though) when looking on practically every measurable indicator (Lomborg 1998, p. 18 {4}). Since it can be shown that things (at least in relation to the fundamental and relevant aspects) are going better, we can conclude that we are on the right track (p. 18 {5}). Lomborg has rather thought provoking reflections on the sources for the litany. Thus, he argues that the scientific quest to show results, the interests of NGO-organizations to invoke a feeling of a need for change, and the interests of mass-media to present people with scary stories (pp. 31-9 {34-42}) point in this direction. Lomborg argues that since we cannot solve every environmental problem (at least absolutely) it is important to prioritize how our (economic) resources are spend best (pp. 254-64 {333-52}). Since it is impossible to make the world *good enough*, our aim should be to make it *better*. And this is done most efficiently by using our economic resources optimally.

Even though I am (as a philosopher) not able to assess the details in Lomborg’s arguments, I think that this is a very thought-provoking book. On the one hand, I think that he reveals certain mechanisms, structures and interests that tend to shape our view on the state of the world in a negative direction. And this indicates that we should be cautious about always merely accepting the negative narratives. I also think that he demonstrates that at least some of the prophecies of doom should be taken with a grain of salt. Finally, the concluding argument of prioritizing our economic resources has (at least on the surface) a self-evident appeal. In that sense, the book serves as a perfect example of critical analysis: it demonstrates a tension between our normative outlook (in a broad sense: how we measure the world) and reality. So, granting (for the sake of the argument) that most of the figures in the book are correct, Lomborg succeeds in pointing out

¹⁷⁹ “Thus, this book attempts to measure the real state of the world. Of course, it is not possible to write a book (or even lots and lots of books for that matter) which measures the entire state of the world [...] Instead, I wish to gauge the most important characteristics of our state of the world – the *fundamentals*. And these should be assessed not on myths but on the best available facts. Hence, the *real* state of the world” (Lomborg 2001, p. 3).

an outside of the traditional discussion of environmental care. There *are* critical elements in the approach.

There is a problem in Lomborg's approach, however, and this becomes even more apparent when looking at another of his projects: the *Copenhagen Consensus 2004*. The project of *Copenhagen Consensus 2004* (CC) was described in the following way,

The basic idea was to improve prioritization of the numerous problems the world faces, by gathering some of the world's greatest economists to a meeting where some of the biggest challenges in the world would be assessed. The unique approach was to use an expert panel to make a ranking of various economic estimates of opportunities that would meet these challenges.¹⁸⁰

and,

The conclusions from the roundtable are expected to be an eye-opener for policy-makers [...] The expert panel will present a ranking of the opportunities, based on an assessment of the costs and benefits of the various opportunities. This ranking and estimation will be marginal, in essence giving a prioritized answer to the question: If the world would come together and be willing to spend, say, \$50 billion over the next five years on improving the world, which projects would yield the greatest net benefits?¹⁸¹

So the project with the CC-meeting was to find out how the greatest environmental benefits could be gained given that there was a fixed amount of money (\$50 billion) available – as an “eye-opener for policy-makers”.

The aim of the project is critical: the aim is to open the eyes of the politicians so that they realize a new way of approaching the “biggest challenges facing the world”. I will, though, argue that this project accentuates certain respects in relation to which it is problematic to characterize Lomborg's approach as critical.¹⁸² This is clear in the “Methodological Overview” (MO – cf. footnote 181). It is claimed to be an eye-opener, but taking a closer look, it is evident that it is rather an eye-closer. The very starting-point is to “reduce the number of challenges to be considered” and “to ensure that the *relevant* challenges are identified” (MO, p. 2 – my emphasis). As argued in this thesis, critique always have to be based on norms of relevance. But it is furthermore a point that these norms of relevance are themselves criticizable. In this case, the criticizability becomes very obvious on the succeeding page,

¹⁸⁰ Cf. the projects homepage: <http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/Default.asp?ID=161> (“The Basic Idea”).

¹⁸¹ http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/Files/Filer/CC/Papers/Copenhagen_Consensus_Methodological_Overview.pdf (“Methodological Overview”)

¹⁸² I realize that the *Copenhagen Consensus* is not solely a project of Lomborg's. But being one of the head-organizers of it, I presuppose that he affiliates with its methodological starting point (from “The Basic Idea”: “The inspiration behind the Copenhagen Consensus project originated from a staff group headed by the former Director of Environmental Assessment Institute Bjorn Lomborg in late 2002”).

When selecting the six challenges, the experts kept in mind that: (a) Feasible opportunities should be identifiable, (b) Feasible opportunities should be more than regional in scope, and (c) Opportunities meeting a challenge should have potential at a reasonable cost (MO, p. 3).

These considerations are listed in order to secure that the board does not “miss the most important challenges”. So, according to this paper, the most important challenges facing the world are best to be identified in relation to whether or not they have identifiable opportunities, that are not purely regional in scope, and can be met with a reasonable cost. The “reasonable cost” is at the outset defined as a share of the \$50 billion which is fixed as the starting point of the consensus-project.

It should be clear by now that the aim of the CC is primarily to reduce the complexity of the challenges that face the world. The challenges are narrowly defined in relation to a relationship between cost and benefit. As a tool for political decision making this may be fruitful, because consensus is (at least in a democratic society) a necessary condition for decisions to be made. But even though consensus may be an important notion in critical reflections too (as argued above, pp. 54ff and 81ff) there are two respects in relation to which the CC-notion of consensus is not *critical*: (i) the consensus in CC is not thought of as a *critical* regulative idea (that is unrealizable), but rather as something that has to be accomplished when concluding the conference; (ii) *mere* consensus is not in itself of critical relevance – it has furthermore to be demonstrated that the consensus is *reasonable*. And this can only be demonstrated by showing that all *potential* (and not merely the *actual*) participants would or should ascribe to the views under investigation.

Consensus as a critical tool is mainly used to reflect upon whether actually achieved consensus are reasonable – i.e. to *question* such consensus that may be reached in fora like the CC-project. The aim of critique is to problematize consensus by revealing the inadequacies of outlooks. The establishment of consensus is not in itself criticizable. What is criticizable about realized consensus is that they are based upon reductions – in the CC-case (and Lomborg’s approach generally) the reductions are shaped by a focus upon the economic cost/benefits-relations.

The critical ideal of consensus is thus less convenient in the process of political decision-making than the consensus of CC. In relation to political decision-making, critique is most appropriate in the process of realizing the urge of making new decisions – rather than in the final decision-makings.

In the approach of CC, the reductive moves are presented as an intellectual experiment (“*If* the world would come together and be willing to spend, *say*, \$50 billion over the next five years...”).

My objection against the approach is that what on the surface presents itself as a critical approach, on further scrutiny turns out merely to confirm practices that are already dominant – and the reductive moves are left completely out of contemplation. There is no contemplation of whether it is a good starting point to fixate the available expenditure on the problems on \$50 billion or whether the three norms of selection of the most important challenges are reasonable themselves. Furthermore, there is no contemplation of the importance of what has been left out of sight due to the reducing moves. And this is a problem, since the initial outlook (relationship between cost-benefit) turns out also to define what is to be considered *important* – i.e. only if there is a “reasonable” relationship between cost-benefit, the challenge under investigation is assessed as important. In the terms of this thesis: the focus on cost-benefit is taken to be so absolutely valid that what lies outside its illumination is not considered (*at the outset*) to be important. Critical receptivity, on the contrary, seeks to demonstrate that the “outside” of certain outlooks should not be forgotten. Lomborg’s approach thus demonstrates a lack of critical receptivity.

The problem with the approach (both of *Verdens sande tilstand* and CC) is that it takes a seemingly unquestionable limitation as its starting point: there is a limited amount of economic resources available. This is used in the arguments of how to structure the environmental enterprise. This is, however, problematic out of (at least) two reasons: (1) it is not for certain that we only have limited economic resources; (2) even *if* it is granted that we only have limited economic resources, it is not a foregone conclusion that this should be the only or primary focus of the structuring of environmental enterprise. I will elaborate on this:

(1) The most obvious objection against the presupposition of limited economic resources is that even granted that the resources are limited, the limitation is not given once and for all. This is so, because it is a matter of human prioritization *how much* we spend on the problems. It *could be* that \$50 billion is how much we want to spend on environmental problems – *for the moment* – but if new problems come up that inevitably *have* to be solved (no matter what are the costs) the economic promptitude would most probably increase. It is therefore a rather artificial arrangement to discuss which environmental problems would be chosen as important if a fixed amount of economic resources was available (and to define the importance of problems through how “reasonable” their costs would be). The economic promptitude is a product of the severity of the problems – not conversely.

Actually, Lomborg himself delivers an argument that could be used against his own starting point (Lomborg 1998, part 3): one of the head-arguments of traditional environmental movements has been that there are only limited resources of the raw materials on which Western societies are based (fossil fuel, minerals, etc.). Due to historic statistic figures, Lomborg demonstrates that the

reach of “known resources” of important materials actually has *increased* in the preceding years. This he takes to indicate that it is not for certain that the supplies are limited. He substantiates this with the following argument (pp. 113-5 {125-6}): (i) “Known resources” is not a finite entity. We do not *know* about all the resources that exist, because it is expensive to search for them. So, if the known sources dry out, prices will increase and it will be more profitable to take a better look. (ii) We become better at exploiting the resources. So even though the presently known resources may only seem to last for (say) 30 years they will actually last longer, because our use of them will become more efficient. (iii) If the resources should nevertheless seem to dry out, it will be possible to substitute them with other sources.

The only limited resource in Lomborg’s outlook seems to be the economic resources! Even though the above conclusion seems contra-intuitive, I think that it reveals an important point: one should be careful about accepting points about “limited resources”. The question is, though, whether the argument could not have been used on the economic resources as well: (i) The quantity of “known economic resources” is, as already argued, not determined once and for all. It depends on how serious the problems are assessed to be. (ii) It is furthermore reasonable to argue that even though certain problems seem to have a certain cost, it could be that during the process of taking care of them, we developed our technical skills on the field, whereby it would be less expensive than we thought at the outset – perhaps we could sometimes even gain from the efforts (because in the long run, the alternatives turn out to be cheaper than the initial problem-makers).¹⁸³ (iii) It is, finally, not for certain that the biggest challenges only can be solved through economic expenditures. Some challenges could perhaps be met through non-economic enterprises. This leads to my second main objection against Lomborg’s approach.

(2) Even *if* it could be argued that the economic resources are limited in a significant way, it is not necessarily determinate that this should be our prime and only focus in structuring our environmental enterprise. The translation of a notion of qualitative importance into quantitative redemption is not innocent. Not even Lomborg would claim it to be. But the methodological overview of CC demonstrates that it is easy to be *misled* by a methodological starting-point. The consensus reached by this project involves that attention is focussed on ten challenges that have been ranked as the most important. They have been chosen because of a reasonable relationship between cost/benefit. But what about challenges in which the relationship between cost/benefit is unfavourable? The easy answer certainly is that there is no reason to invest a lot of costs, if

¹⁸³ The Danish windmill-industry is an example of how a public investment in alternatives to oil- and coal-based production of electricity turned out to become an actual revenue for both the country and a flourishing private industry, because the technology is now demanded in other countries.

there are no benefits to be gained. And this is true. But the question is what is to be accepted as a reasonable benefit? In the methodological overview it is clear that we are talking about “the *monetary* value of the costs and benefits” (MO, p. 5 – my emphasis). So the economic starting point becomes determining for the purpose/means-relationship.¹⁸⁴ And this is reductive – a challenge that has a very disadvantageous rate of success-probability could not find its way to the list – even if it, due to other criteria, seemed to be very relevant. The question is, however, whether the economic limitations are always determining for whether or not problems could be solved. It *could* be that some challenges could be met through non-economic means (through, for example, massive altruistic, non-economic, contributions or unexpected human ingenuity).

The point is that in order to substantiate these objections against Lomborg, it would take a critique that combines a reflective and receptive assessment of the methodological starting point and the reached consensus. The view presents a suggestion of how to think coherently and adequately about certain challenges. Lomborg’s “critique” only aims towards a *systematic* unity of our environmental efforts – but lacks a critical receptivity. To my mind, the view is coherent, but it is very well questionable whether it is also adequate in a relevant way. It is coherent because the points that I have sketched out above are simply eliminated by the norms of relevance on which it is based. A critique of the approach would therefore have to accentuate Lomborg’s lack of receptivity – i.e. to demonstrate that certain aspects, that can be shown to be relevant, are eliminated in the starting point (certain important challenges that *should* have been considered in the project). But a critique of Lomborg would also have to be reflective in the sense that it should demonstrate how these aspects could be unified with what is left of the criticized view (by showing that it is possible to unite the new and the remaining old aspects in a new systematic unity). A purely reflectively conceived notion of critique would not be able to articulate any critique, because the views presented *do* constitute a coherent unity. A purely receptively conceived notion of critique would also have problems in establishing a critique because it would be unable to articulate why the excluded aspects are important and relevant.

It is, though, one thing to demonstrate the view of Lomborg as criticizable. This does not in itself determine the view as non-critical. As pointed out several times, every critique is itself criticizable. The reason why I nevertheless find it reasonable to talk about Lomborg as merely rhetorically critical is the starting point of the approach: Lomborg opens with a starting point that

¹⁸⁴ In Lomborg 1998 the aim is set as human well-fare (p. 22 {11-2}), which is at the outset less economically shaped. But in the final chapters it becomes evident that Lomborg also thinks of this in economic terms (the cost of saving human lives – pp. 258-62 {338-48}).

is, apparently, certain: the limited economic resources. This is in itself not problematic in relation to a critical approach (at least if the starting point *was* certain). The problem is that the starting point is used to determine the *outside* as unimportant.

Given my understanding of critique, it is true that I cannot characterize Lomborg's approach as wholly non-critical – since I claim that every linguistic act potentially has critical implications. My objection towards Lomborg's approach is rather that it – contrary to its appearance – represents the descriptivist approach in disguise: it takes the limited economic resources as a starting point which is taken to be beyond possible critique, and from this unquestionability it is argued that it should be our prime guideline for how to structure the environmental efforts – and this guideline is presented as self-evident. But as I have demonstrated in this thesis, descriptivism is, due to the embeddedness-insights, never an option. Claims of mere descriptivism is therefore mostly an attempt to *hide* the criticizability and critical implications of the view presented.

Taken in abstraction descriptivist approaches may sometimes be seen as examples of world-disclosing critique (cf. the example of Foucault). In this case, however, nothing is actually *disclosed* that has not already been revealed. Traditional environmentalist institutions interact already at the outset with a political establishment, in which the economic starting point is codified as non-questionable. In relation to this battle between environmentalist NGOs and the political establishment, Lomborg's approach tends merely to confirm the establishment – whereby the critical points of the NGOs are weakened. Lomborg's approach therefore turns out merely to confirm an already existing political approach. And this confirmation turns out to be very efficient due to its critical appearance: if Lomborg succeeds in winning the battle of being the *real* critic (in criticizing the critics) then the former critics (the NGO-organisations) lose their legitimacy (that is founded on their critical points), and the result is a less plural forum of discussion in relation to environmental problems.¹⁸⁵ Even though it is true that Lomborg questions the limiting consequences of a certain outlook – the traditional environmentalist institutions – this is mainly done by confirming the view that was initially questioned by the traditional environmentalist institutions.

The strategy of avoiding critique by establishing a counter-critique is not in itself objectionable. The point where this strategy becomes objectionable – according to the view

¹⁸⁵ This is confirmed by the actual political occurrences in Denmark in 2002 and 2003: Lomborg was elected as the first director of *Denmark's National Environmental Assessment Institute* which replaced several existing environmental councils and boards in which the NGO-organisations were represented. In return the same government (represented by the Minister of Science) interfered in the case of scientific dishonesty and abolished the verdict that was disadvantageous for Lomborg.

presented in this thesis – is when the premises of the critique are taken to be beyond possible critique themselves. Then the posed view (the rhetorical critique) is actually mainly used to *silence* other critical views. The rhetorical critique represents what I have (above p. 125) labelled absolute staticism (since it promotes certain aspects of reality to be of absolute relevance – in this case the limited economic resources), which is, due to the embeddedness-insights, not an option of a critical approach.¹⁸⁶

This is, to my mind, the main objection against the neoconservative movements as a critical movement: in taking a starting point that is understood as absolutely certain (the limited economic resources), they outdo alternative approaches because they are claimed to be inferior in relevance. In the sense that this is a problematization of other views this *does* have critical implications: economic limitations should *also* be taken into account. But no one would probably deny that economic limitations have some kind of relevance in relation to the problems of the world. The *actual* implications of neoconservative movements is therefore rather that this should be the *prime* factor in our approach to the problems. And this is not a critical point. I admit that it may be a legitimate and relevant *political* point. It is a legitimate point when the aim is to make the final decisions on what to do about the problems. How to solve the problems. Critique is, however (I claim), not about *solving* problems, but about *articulating* and *demonstrating* problems (pointing out tensions). A critique that takes the moderate relativism serious arouses our curiosity about the outside of the norms of relevance on which normative outlooks are founded – critique does not mean to declare the outside to be irrelevant.

Ultimately one can say that Lomborg's approach demonstrates what goes wrong if one only focusses on the reflective side of critique. The focus on the *achievement* of consensus makes it necessary for him to reduce the diversity of the analysed problems. As stated above, I recognize that he presents a view that is systematically coherent. But it is done at the cost of a receptive awareness of the diversity of the investigated problems. The coherency of the view is won by reducing the problems so that they are describable in pure cost/benefit-terms. This is done by taking out one aspect of reality (the limited economic resources) and promote this as the absolute relevant aspect. This is done in order to achieve a coherent view. But Lomborg overlooks or tones down that the aim of coherency is in a dialectical relationship with the aim of adequacy in relation to the diversity of reality. His views therefore turn out to be terribly one-sided – and the critical implications are outdone by the affirmative implications. *If* it is granted that Lomborg defends

¹⁸⁶ It is not certain that Lomborg himself at the outset wanted to *silence* the traditional environmentalist organisations, but the succeeding events on the political scene demonstrated that this was the actual effect of his approach – and Lomborg himself took an active part in this.

a critical approach, it is a good example of what is problematic about critique that is merely reflective.

To sum up: generally neoconservative movements may have important critical implications. I think that they (at least generally) represent a view that is more limited than what they criticize, but at the same time they force their opponents to keep their dogmas alive – i.e. to keep on reflecting upon *why* it is important to maintain their dogmas. The neoconservative movements are important for critical discussions because they represent alternative outlooks that have some kind of plausibility. And this forces their opponents to articulate why (and in what sense) they represent a more feasible view. If this is not possible (which I, as indicated above, think it is), they should be revised.

These critical gains of neoconservative movements are, however, counterbalanced by critical losses if the unquestioned starting point of the movements are used to term the outside of the outlook as unimportant. This aspect points in a dogmatizing, rather than a criticizing, direction. And it is unfeasible because it presupposes an untenable absolute staticism that is a product of a one-sided focus upon the reflective aspect of critique. The receptive aspect is toned down, whereby the diversity of reality is lost out of sight.

b. Which Kinds of Problems can be Solved through Critique?

The centrality of critique in philosophical reflections is not a mere coincidence. The view has been that if only the real foundations and methodology of critique were revealed, it would be possible, once and for all, to solve important problems. In the writings of Kant critique was to solve epistemological, practical and judgmental problems (Kant 1781/7, pp. Axii-xxii+Bxxii-xxxvii+B883-4; 1788, pp. 3-32; 1790, pp. iii-x), Hegel wanted to avoid the exclusions that stem from abstractions and show how everything can be understood through reason (Hegel 1802; 1807b), Marx and representatives of the so-called Frankfurt school wanted to reveal ideological problems that led to inequalities and injustices in society (e.g. Marx 1844; 1932a; 1845; 1848, pp. 490-1; Horkheimer 1937).

In the wake of the embeddedness-insights the critical approaches have gradually become less focussed, and the general gains of critical philosophy have been formulated in less specific terms. In the wake of these insights it has become increasingly clear that every critic has to accept that critique can always be met by a counter-critique in which the starting point of the critic is questioned. It has therefore become unclear whether critique can be used in solving serious problems that involve what seems to be radically conflicting interests. In this subsection I will

reflect upon in what sense and to what extent the presented notion of critique may still be fruitful in such situations.

In doing this, I will relate to an example of such conflicting interests that for centuries seems to be insoluble: the conflict between Jews, Muslims and Christians about who should control Jerusalem. Before doing this, it is, though, necessary with some preliminary comments on the character of this subsection. At the outset it should be noted that I do not know more about this conflict than most people who read and watch the daily news. The facts on which I base the following reflections may therefore very well be objectionable. This could to some extent have been avoided if the reflections had been preceded by thorough studies in the conflict. There are three reasons why I have not based the following on such studies: (1) Limitations in time and space have prevented it: the sources are so enormous and pointing in different directions that an overview would be a life-project. And even *if* these studies had been made, the thesis would have to be extended severely in order for the work to be implemented. (2) It is in the nature of things that there is not agreement (let alone, knowledge) about *what are* the real facts on which the conflict is based. (3) The lack of substantial facts about the conflict is excusable (I hope) by the point that I merely want to use this conflict as an *archetype* of a conflict that is seemingly insoluble. This I base on the fact that the city has been an object of conflict since at least 701 BC (the siege of the Assyrians) and the conflict between Jews, Muslims and Christians has been ongoing since (approximately) the 12th century AD.

It is probably not controversial to claim that one of the reasons why the conflict is so persistent is that it is closely related to the protection of religious relics and interests. This is a problem because at the outset religious interests are not committed to consider the interests of other religions, because these other religions are, at the outset, considered to be wrong.¹⁸⁷ Even though Jews, Muslims and Christians believe in the same god, they also believe that the others misinterprets the will of this god. Even though they agree that it is a duty to help other people, they also agree that the best help that could be given to the disbelievers would be to help them achieve the best possible understanding of God – i.e. to change religion. In the light of the persistent conflict (perhaps also independently of it) it has become difficult for many representatives of the religions to trust representatives of the other religions. I realize that there are many moderate actors in the conflict that actually *do* trust representatives of the other groups, and who are therefore willing to engage in mutual critical discussions. I will, however, not consider them in the following, since I want to discuss the borderlands of critique. The following

¹⁸⁷ This may be less true for moderate religious interests than for fundamentalist religious interests. It will, however, be the latter kind of interests that I will consider in the following.

is mainly to be understood as an exemplification of how critique can be established in a situation where the actors subscribe severely to religious immunizations. That is, to my mind, the most difficult challenge to critical practices.

In recent years the conflict has been most markedly between the Jewish and Muslim religions (the Israelis vs. the Palestinians). The military actions and reactions, the suicide bombers, the settlements policy, the acts of terrorism, the anti-terrorist fence, etc. have (in addition to the mutual distrust) led to a widespread hate between representatives of these two religions.

In such a climate of discussion, critique has very bad conditions. There are many reasons for this, some of them being: (1) discussions that take an explicitly religious starting point are easily immunized against critique (because they may draw on transcendent entities of which only chosen persons have access, and the claims raised with such foundation are consequently not committed to a rationality that is accessible to their opponents. (2) The climate of hate may very well cause that the prime aim of (at least some of) the groups becomes to annihilate the other group. (3) Even for those who do want to do what is good for everybody, this may be hindered by a severe disagreement about what *is* good for everybody (due to incompatible religious foundations of the values). In short: in such a climate critical discussions have bad conditions because communication as such is impeded. It is not for certain that it is possible to find the minimal common ground that is necessary for speakers to meet.

Critical exchanges are difficult to maintain if at least one part finds her stance on something that is inaccessible to the other part. Cases could be where the one part acts out of purely emotional, subjective or religious “reasons”.¹⁸⁸ The problem is that in such cases the view of the other is not taken to be relevant, and critical assessments from irrelevant people is not relevant. In such cases, critique may very well be impotent. At least in the radical cases in which (at least) the one part does not even want to *listen* to the other part (for example in war-like situations, or in situations in which someone has become convinced that what the other says is plain madness or even dangerous). If this is the situation in the Jerusalem-conflict, then critique in the sense that it is presented in this thesis will definitely be impotent. But I take it that no notion of critique would be able to do anything in such a situation.¹⁸⁹

The situation changes as soon as the addressee is at least willing to listen to the critique. Even *if* the addressee takes the critic to be radically mistaken at her outset, it may be that the critic can

¹⁸⁸ The quotes indicate that I hesitate to call it *reasons*, because there is something contra-intuitive in talking about reasons that are only accessible to oneself.

¹⁸⁹ This also goes for non-linguistically conceived notions of critique: if the addressee considers the critic to be wholly irrational or even dangerous, everything the critic may do will (at best) be ignored.

establish a successful critique. This could be done in (at least) two ways: (1) if the critic succeeds in adopting the outlook of the addressee and demonstrate that the view of the addressee is criticizable according to the addressee's own standards (internal critique that points out deficiencies in the systematic unity of the views held by the addressee – *reflective* critique). In severe conflicts this approach will, however, often not be very effective: (a) it is not certain that the addressee actually claims to be systematically coherent. It may very well be that she claims that the “will of God” is more important than systematic unity, or that she is in a situation where it cannot be demanded of her that she suppresses her emotional anger or hate in order to be systematically coherent. (b) The reflective critique may furthermore be impeded by the difference in outlooks between the critic and the addressee, so that it will be impossible for the critic to adopt the outlook of the addressee adequately, and therefore the addressee may be able to avoid the critique by referring to the mistakes of the critic. (c) Finally, it may very well be that there *is* systematic coherence in the view of the addressee, in the sense that the (apparent) incoherencies are explained away by referring to the “mysterious ways” of the god that acts beyond our understanding.

In cases of severe conflicts, but in which the parties are nevertheless willing to *listen* to each other, it may therefore be a more fruitful critical approach to (2) make the addressee realize the erroneous, absurd, unfruitful of the present states of affairs in more indirect ways – that is to accentuate a receptive critique. The point in this case would be that the critic does not try to convince the addressee that there is a particular view (which is presented by the critic – i.e. the enemy) that should actually be adopted, but rather that the critic, through various kinds of redescription, illuminates the view of the addressee in new ways, whereby the wrongness, inadequacy, absurdity, unproductiveness, sterility, or the like, becomes apparent. The point with this approach is that the addressee does not have to adopt the view of the critic if she accepts the critique. This is especially important in conflicts in which no critic can claim to represent a non-involved stance. In such cases the critic therefore potentially represents the enemy. A critical approach that does not aim at convincing the addressee of the correctness of the view presented by the critic (which may very well already at the outset be evaluated as dangerous in the view of the addressee), but rather at merely making the addressee see that there is some relevant aspects of reality that are not taken into account, will be more effective.

Once again, it should be stressed that my point is not that it is possible to separate the reflective and receptive approaches. Neither is my point that the above points about the receptive approach demonstrate an approach that is radically different from the points about the reflective approach. Rather my point is that in having analytically separated these two approaches to

critique, it is clear that we are not left with a critique that merely happens between two parties who try to convince each other that the other should adopt the view of oneself. There is furthermore a possible strategy in letting reality appear in (new) ways whereby new aspects are revealed that demand to have their relevance considered. Certainly, this will not happen independently of further (reflectively based) arguments that discuss how these aspect could be considered in the defended outlooks. And certainly, it will have to be articulated in a language that is intelligible both for the critic and the addressee. But the articulation does not have to be understood in the *same* way by both parties. And this is the important difference in relation to the approaches that normally defend the reflective approach: (a) even though it is necessary that the addressee comes to understand *something* out of the critique raised by the critic, it is not necessary that it is an actual *Verständigung* in the traditional sense, in which both parties agree about what is being said. (b) even though the receptively based approach *is* an activity, it is important that the crucial point is not the activity itself, but rather that the addressee is being forced (in a non-violent way, certainly!) to see reality differently. It is certainly true that the activity and the forced receptivity cannot be separated, but a theory about critique that does *merely* focus on the activity misses the ability to articulate in what sense it is not *merely* the view of the other part in the discussion that is the challenge towards an avowed view. Articulated against the Habermasian approach: at some stage in severe conflicts it may be fruitful to let the non-rational (which is not the same as the irrational) do some of the criticizing job.¹⁹⁰ Sometimes, what is called for in conflicts is not discussions, but the opening up of new fields of relevant discussion.

Notice, however, that even this kind of critique presupposes that the addressee is willing to listen to the critic. In that sense the Habermasian point, that linguistic practices presuppose a certain minimal degree of community, is still valid. The linguistic articulations only have critical effects if the addressee acknowledges that they represent claims that might in some way be relevant to the addressee. But this minimum of *Verständigung* does not mean that the disputing parties *agree* about the implications of the critique. In that sense it is not a mutual understanding that has been reached, and it may be questioned whether it represents an argumentative act. As argued in this thesis, I think that it would be better to talk about it as an *aspect* of critique, that must be supplemented with the reflective aspect in order to turn into genuine argumentative critique. It does, however, reveal a possible *starting point* of critique, and it illuminates how a

¹⁹⁰ This is also why it may have fruitful critical implications to turn towards artistic and activist strategies. Because it may reveal new aspects of reality – even though the artistic works and activist acts do not themselves represent fruitful approaches when it comes to the constructive phase of a discussion.

critique may get started even though the parties seem to be too far apart – because even though the result of the receptive critique (i.e. the view to which the addressee turns in the light of newly revealed aspects) may still be in severe disagreement with the critic, the resulting view of the addressee will nevertheless have come closer to the critic, because they share the awareness of the relevance of some aspects in reality – namely those aspects that were revealed in the first exchange.

This is not to say that it is always possible through critique to reach a fully shared view. On the contrary. One of the main points of this thesis is that we (in a certain sense) should be *suspicious* when such a view has (apparently) been reached, because no view deserves absolute agreement. In critical discussions tensions between normativity and reality is revealed. This may lead to a greater degree of agreement between the disputants – if the addressee solves the tension in a way that also is or could be suggested from the critics point of view. But this is not for certain, since the addressee might solve the tension in ways that the critic did neither expect nor sympathize with. In that case the critic can either also criticize the dissolution of the tension or she can take the (surprising) solution as a problematization of her own starting point. Critical discussions do therefore not have a firm telos that is known in advance. Raising a critique implies – qua the necessity of engaging in a dialogue – that the foundation of the critique may be challenged itself.

In the previous subsection the problem turned out to be that some critical approaches (exemplified by the neoconservative movements) showed to be founded on absolute staticism. The example in this subsection is meant to reveal the significance of the rejection of absolute relativism: absolute relativism would be the view that it is possible to change and vary the normative outlooks infinitely. That would be a serious problem for critique because we could then be left in a situation in which the disputants defended views that were both incompatible, incommensurable and incomparable – that mutual communication (and hence also critique) therefore would be impossible. My point is that it is very seldom that we are left in a situation in which no communication between opposing parties is possible at all. This is because normative outlooks are not self-reliant, but are incited by, directed towards and hence fallible according to something that is not itself (at the outset) normative – reality. It is true that ultimately it *is* possible to immunize at least certain aspects of a view against critique from others – namely if the view is being related to realities that are only accessible to oneself (e.g. purely subjective or transcendent (religious) realities). But even in such cases it may always be problematized by demonstrating how it is deficient in relation to aspects of reality to which both disputants have access (cf. above, pp. 111ff). It is not certain that such critique will be able to actually shake the addressee, because

she might claim that the realities to which she does relate are more important than everything one could come up with, but it does potentially demonstrate limitations in the view held. And, if the addressee wants to maintain that her view is adequate, it becomes necessary for her to articulate how the view held can account for the criticized points inside the outlook that she defends.

The above is based on the point that to take a normative outlook and apply it on a reality (once again: this is to be read analytically and not as a description of how normativity and reality actually are related) means to be committed to both the aim of systematicity and adequacy (coherence and correspondence¹⁹¹).

In relation to the problem of Jerusalem: I still assume that the main problem here is that the disputants subscribe to different religions and that this makes it possible for them to justify an ongoing mutual distrust. In what sense can religious outlooks immunize a view against critique from the enemy?¹⁹² It is quite clear that most religions tolerate that some aspects of the mutually shared reality become difficult to understand from the religious outlook. This can be defended (counterbalanced) by the point that other aspects are understood in a better manner. No religion can, however, stand that everything in the world becomes unintelligible. When we subscribe to religious claims it is because they in some sense help us to understand reality better. It is true that sometimes the reality in question may be a received revelation. I take it that this would be the most difficult situation for a critic. But even in this case the claims do only turn into religion if they in some sense convince others that they can lead to a better understanding of reality. To see this, one should only think of the opposite extreme: if someone claims to found her views religiously and that this leads her to raise claims that – in relation to *every* other part of reality – seems to be unreasonable (i.e. that everything else in the world becomes unintelligible and nothing reasonably can be said about it) then I find it fair to say that she has a problem. Religious claims have to (since they are raised by humans and not gods) be justified by giving a better understanding of reality. This also counts if the claims are based on subjectively received revelations: it still has to be shown that these subjectively received revelations are insistent for others than the receiver. It needs to be justified why one should believe in a god that reveals herself announcing something that does not make sense in any respects.

¹⁹¹ Just as normativity and reality cannot actually be separated, so should coherence and correspondence be thought of as mutually defining. Claims are expected to inscribe themselves in a (fallible) coherent narrative of correspondence and a coherence that corresponds to what it is incited by and directed towards.

¹⁹² In the following I reflect on religion as a *problem* in relation to critique. As should be clear from above (pp. 66ff) I do not think, however, that religions *necessarily* are bad in relation to critique. The point will rather be that religions sometimes are used as an excuse of not listening to critique.

Ultimately it *is* possible that a religion can be founded on pure trust in the reliability of a religious medium. In that case the only reality that is considered as relevant as ground for the religious beliefs is the reality represented by the religious medium. The followers base their belief on the reliability of the medium as a mediator between something real that is accessible to them and the transcendent being of the god. And indeed, this *is* a case in which critique would be in vain – simply because the addressee does not take the critic to be a relevant reality that she should relate to. Critique cannot succeed before the addressee is willing to (at least) listen to the critic – i.e. acknowledge that in some respect the critic is relevant.

This should of course not be surprising: no linguistic act is successful if one of the participants isolates herself from the others – because then no *Verständigung* will take place. Critique cannot solve all problems in the world. It should for example be rather obvious that in situations in which people meet each other with guns in their hand, knowing that the one who survives will be the one who shoots first (war), a critical contention would be rather misplaced. But I hope in this subsection to have demonstrated that it is only in very rare cases that one cannot hope for *any* effects of a critical contention.

This is so because everyone who engages in linguistic practices is committed to the dual aim of systematicity and adequacy. Different normative outlooks are not absolutely *isolated* from each other, because even though it is possible to establish a view in coherent terms that seems to be independent of other views, this isolation is dissolved as soon as one is to articulate in what sense the current view is fruitful in relation to reality. No view can account for *every* aspect of reality in a systematic way – therefore there will be certain aspects that will break with the systematicity. It is therefore part of defending a view that one articulates why it is relevant that some aspects of reality are focussed upon – at the cost of others. A critical exchange between severely differing outlooks should therefore, once again, be both reflectively and receptively based.

VI. Conclusion.

The thesis is now to be concluded. What has been gained through these analyses? What is still to be done? And why is it important that it is being done?

It has been shown that the embeddedness-insights do not entail that critique is impossible. It is true that the validity of the implied improvement-claims is relativized. At the same time, however, the embeddedness-insights accentuate that critique is *always* potentially relevant and possible – the embeddedness-insights demonstrate, as it were, that there is always something criticizable in any practice. Critical practices are, consequently, themselves open to critique – critical practices do not reveal how the relationship between normativity and reality could be without tensions. This is the reason why critical practices should not generally be understood as an indication of what should be done about tensions – but rather as a *pointing out* of tensions. The main aim with critical practices is not to *reject* current states of affairs, but to *problematize* them.

Having argued that critical practices are founded on the point that practices entail two aims – the aim of internal systematicity and the aim of external adequacy – it has been shown that whereas the embeddedness-insights do not entail that critique is *impossible*, they do, however, reveal something *paradoxical* about linguistic practices (among these the critical practices): on the one hand every linguistic practice is embedded in a local background – at the same time the linguistically articulated claims reach beyond this local embeddedness (due to the systematizing, normative (generalizing) mechanism of these practices). The aim of internal systematicity (normativity) seeks to grasp the similarities, general aspects of reality, whereas the aim of external adequacy is to grasp reality in its diversity. The aim of systematicity focus through reductive notions of relevance, whereas the aim of adequacy broaden the view through receptions of reality in its variety. Linguistic practices are thus characterized by being locally founded, applying this local foundation in relation to contexts that reach beyond the foundation.

This is on the one hand the reason why critique is always possible and relevant. On the other hand, however, this is also the reason why critique in a certain sense is never absolutely legitimate. Critical practices are locally founded, but apply this local foundation in fields that reach beyond the foundation. This is the reason why critique is itself criticizable. But this is not the same as to say that critique is impossible. That conclusion would rest on a wrong account of the character of the background-character of the linguistic foundations. If the self-transcending character of linguistic practices were seen as delegitimizing, linguistic practices would not be

possible at all – or at least not very useful: they would only be able to systematize current issues in relation to previous issues, with no possibility of applying this to future issues. This is, as I have argued, an untenable account of linguistic practices.

Since no linguistic practice is self-contained and thus absolutely isolated from other practices, critique is possible as a mutual *auseinandersetzung* between differing approaches. But the critique is not absolutely valid; it is fallibly valid – as every other linguistic practice. In the thesis I have argued that we should generally substitute accounts of absolute universal validity with accounts of fallible universal validity. The accounts of *absolute* validity are not possible – nor desirable – due to the embeddedness-insights.

The point of fallible universality is the key to avoid two anxieties in contemporary critical theory: the anxiety about relativism and the anxiety about immunizations against critique. On the one hand, absolute relativism is avoided because of the link to reality. Even though it *is* possible to avoid critique by rejecting its foundations, reality entails that this avoidance has further consequences. Since it is still necessary to be able to articulate an outlook that can account for the relevant world in systematic and adequate ways, it has severe consequences to reject claims that are held to be universal, because it affects what can consistently and adequately be said about other issues. Habermas, Taylor, Honneth, a.o. have demonstrated ways in which there are certain norms of communication, goods, structures of recognition that cannot be avoided without severe consequences as to what one would have to say, think and do in relation to oneself, others and other things. A reflectively oriented critique is often fruitful in contemplating the validity of and relation between universal claims.

On the other hand, this does not lead to immunizations against critique (points of absolute staticism that cannot be relativized), because it is not given in advance exactly *which* norms should be held on to. The universal claims are fallible, because at some point they may show to be so unfruitful in relation to the actual reality that it becomes desirable to revise the claims. I.e. the costs of revising the universal norms turn out to be less than the costs of maintaining them. “Unfruitfulness” and “cost” should certainly be understood in a broad, unfixed, sense – in various contexts there may be different criteria for unfruitfulness and costs. In an abstract sense, one could say that the claims become unfruitful or of great cost, if it turns out to be difficult to account for reality in systematic and adequate ways. Adorno, Foucault, Derrida, a.o. have demonstrated ways in which seemingly universally valid norms are reductive and unfruitful in various ways. This is done through receptively based critique.

One could argue that this has nothing to do with universality then. I have however argued that the possibility of revising or rejecting universal norms does not dissolve universality as such –

because it takes norms that are considered to be even more universally valid to justify the revision or rejection of universals.

Where does this leave us in relation to actual critical practices? I think that there are at least three significant points that can be concluded from the above: (1) Descriptivism is neither necessary, possible nor desirable. (2) It is very difficult (if not impossible) to immunize a particular view against critique. (3) Even though it is possible to relativize *indefinitely*, this does not imply that it is possible to relativize *infinitely*.

(1) The descriptivist approach is unnecessary because critique is actually possible – only the critique is itself open to further criticism. The descriptivist approach is not possible, because, due to the embeddedness-insights, it is clear that it is not possible to forward claims with no critical implications (at the very least there is a critical implication as to the norms of relevance in alternative outlooks). And the descriptivist approach is not desirable because it rests on a reductive view on linguistic practices (that the validity of linguistic practices is restricted to the same local field from which its outlook has been shaped).

(2) The self-transcending character of practices at the same time entails that they are not self-enclosed. Practices point out in the world (are incited by and directed towards reality) and this makes it possible to assess how well this is done (reality as fallibility). It is possible to evaluate whether an outlook is consistent and adequate in relation to the part of reality that it pretends to be directed towards – and whether it *should* be able to account for other relevant aspects of reality as well. This certainly has, to some extent, to be done by applying the norms of the evaluated outlook (the critic has to be loyal to the outlook in order to be understood by the addressee), but at some point the critic can claim that the outlook *as such* is unable to account systematically and/or adequately to relevant states of affairs. The only way to reach absolute immunization from critique is by founding the approach on the supposition that the only relevant reality to account for is a reality that is only accessible from within the approach. In that case critique would certainly be without any means. An addressee of this psychotic kind is certainly beyond the reach of reasonable critique.

(3) It therefore becomes clear that we should distinguish between the possibility of relativizing *indefinitely* from the possibility of relativizing *infinitely*. Just because it is not possible to determine which aspects of normative outlooks that can be relativized, this does not mean that there are no limits to relativization at all. Normativity and reality are mutually interdependent and changes in the one entails changes in the other, which again point back to the former. So, if I (for example) decide to categorize a particular human race as inferior, belonging among the non-human animals, because they are carrying a certain genetic constitution, it would entail that if

some day we came upon an exemplar of my own human race that carried the same constitution, I would have to claim this exemplar to be an inferior non-human too. Or at least give good reasons why this is not the case. The possibility of relativization is not infinite, because of the commitment to be able to account for reality (correspondence) in a systematic and plausible way (coherence).

This is the conclusion of the thesis! What needs still to be done? As with many philosophical writings, one should in a certain sense answer this question with an “everything still needs to be done”. I have merely (that is, if I have been successful) demonstrated some possibilities and necessities in relation to critical practices. And this has been on a rather abstract level. As indicated in subsection (IV,5,b) it needs to be demonstrated how the tension between normativity and reality is differently at play in various kinds of normativity (rules, concepts, sentences, values, moral claims, rights, laws, etc.) and in various kinds of reality (objective, social, subjective, aesthetic, religious, etc.) – and how these normative fields and kinds of reality interact in critical exchanges. I have articulated some of the mechanisms that I claim to be generally at play in critical discussions; it still needs to be shown ways in which various kinds of critical practices *differ* from one another.

The points in the thesis do certainly not solve every critical knot. They do not demonstrate that it is possible to reach an agreement in cases of severe differences in outlooks. They do not give straightforward tools to determine the reductive aspects of views held by oneself. Neither do they demonstrate that it is always *desirable* to criticize normative outlooks. Even though everything *can* be criticized, there may very well be instances in which it is not fruitful to do so. What they *do* demonstrate is that there are always certain critical *possibilities*. And they demonstrate some of the limitations under which these possibilities can be carried through.

Finally, what needs to be done is to *criticize*. Those philosophers, scientists, artists, a.o. who think that they are merely describing, should realize that this is not the case. Why should we do philosophical and scientific investigations if we do not want to change things? Why are *descriptions* of certain states of affairs important? Well, certainly because the researcher hereby hope to instantiate certain improvements in the world. It is certainly true that the researcher cannot in advance determine which directions these improvements will take. But this lack of determinacy should not mislead her to the safe, easy and confident belief that she can *avoid* changing the world. This would simply be a volatilization of her responsibility that would at best make her work incurious; at worst: repressive.

This is not to say that philosophical and scientific researchers should give up being cautious, and take a stance in whatever debate is actually ongoing in the mass-media. This *may* sometimes

be called for, but it is not the *only* way philosophers and scientists can be critical. The “commitment” to partake in the discussions of the prevailing opinion, sometimes itself takes hegemonic shapes that could need some critical scrutiny. The critical practices can take many forms that are much more subtle than this. My point merely is that researchers should never claim to *opt out* of critical engagements as such.

Why is this important? With this question, I have returned to my unargued presupposition (cf. the Introduction above, p. 9f): I think that we may ultimately become morally better persons, if we have a critical attitude in the way defended in the thesis. The awareness of the necessity of limitations makes us more forgiving in relation to the limitations of other people and societies. And when it comes down to it, *this* is the necessary condition for critique being possible at all. Not in the sense that we should *accept* every limitation in the outlooks of the others, but rather in the sense that in order to criticize, it is necessary to understand *why* the prevailing tensions have been established – this being the starting point for a discussion and perhaps a revision. I have argued that we should understand critique as the pointing out of tensions between an avowed normativity and reality. But in order for the critique *actually* to be initiated, it needs furthermore that the critic in some sense *care* about the fact that these tensions are accepted by the addressee. The critic has not only come upon tensions; she also wants the addressee to be able to correct the mistake – if they are granted as such.

Why have I left this presupposition unargued? Not only unargued – I have even criticized Habermas for conflating critique and morality (cf. below, p. 123). My critique of Habermas on this point is that he, apparently, wants to infer from certain points about necessary conditions for critique, to necessary conditions for the possibility of morality. I have argued that this is an argumentative short circuit. I do not think it is possible to argue that critical practices *inevitably* lead to better states of affairs. Sometimes critical practices may very well lead to worse states of affairs. It can thus not be argued that *if we criticize, then we obtain a better world*. In order to claim that a certain kind of critical practice is morally important, various kinds of moral values have to be presupposed. This is, as it were, the blind spot of the thesis. In a certain sense, I *should* have justified the presupposition in order to demonstrate philosophical thoroughness. It would, however, probably take another thesis of the same length to do so. And it would merely reveal yet another blind spot. However, rather than taking this as an objection of the views presented in the thesis, I will claim that it demonstrates one of my key points: it is not possible to present views without blind spots. This is the reason why the critique must go on.

VII. Appendix.

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2. Summaries.

a. In Danish.

I denne afhandling vil jeg overveje betingelserne for kritik. Herved indskrives jeg mig i en filosofisk tradition, der har varet mindst 200 år. Disse overvejelser er imidlertid stadig vigtige, idet kritikens fundament til stadighed udfordres af indsigter i, hvorledes menneskelige praksisser er indlejret i forskellige faktorer, der på den ene side synes at være uundgåelige – men som på den anden side også er (i en vis forstand) kontingente. Eksempler herpå kunne være vores sprogs konfiguration, vores ideologiske indlejring, vores pragmatiske orientering, vores legemlige konstitution, osv. Disse indsigter åbner for en relativisering af vores praksissers gyldighed: hvis enhver praksis er indlejret i sådanne kontingente faktorer, så bliver det umuligt at hævde at én tilgang er absolut *bedre* end andre tilgange.

I sit ekstrem, vil relativismen umuliggøre kritik, idet det bliver umuligt at forsvare forbedringshævdelser på tværs af forskellige perspektiver. På den anden side accentuerer den relative gyldighed af ethvert perspektiv imidlertid også, at enhver tilgang er potentielt kritisabel: det er nemlig muligt at kritisere de begrænsninger, som udgør fundamentet for den kritiserede tilgang.

Indsigterne i at ethvert perspektiv er relativt gyldigt har ført til, hvad jeg vil kalde den deskriptive reaktion: hvis der ikke er nogen tilgang, der kan hævde at præsentere indsigter af en privilegeret slags, så er det ikke muligt indenfor ét perspektiv at vurdere (kritisere), hvad der foregår indenfor andre perspektiver – i hvert fald ikke på en måde, som kan have gyldighed for andre end dem, der tilslutter sig det perspektiv fra hvilket, vurderingen er udført. Med andre ord: kritik er kun gyldig for kritikeren – og ikke for adressaten. Dette har ført til en strømning indenfor filosofiske og videnskabelige arbejder, der udelader enhver kritisk vurdering. Arbejderne tillægges ingen kritisk vurdering – det hævdes, at de blot *beskriver* visse forhold i verden.

Målet med denne afhandling er at vise, at den deskriptive reaktion hverken er nødvendig, mulig, eller ønskelig. Den er ikke *nødvendig* fordi indsigterne i vores indlejrethed ikke fører til en absolut relativisme. Selvom det ikke er muligt én gang for alle at sige, hvor langt relativismen rækker, så er der alligevel et hold imod relativiteten: ethvert perspektiv er ansporet af og rettet imod det reale. Og selvom det er rigtigt at det reale varierer med det perspektiv, som det tilgås fra, så betyder dette ikke at det reale er *betydningsløst* i forhold til relativiseringens mulighed. Det reale kan variere med det normative perspektiv – men det er ikke *udtømt* af denne variation: hvis man har tilsluttet sig et bestemt perspektiv, så lægger det reale begrænsninger på, hvad der fornuftigt

kan hævdes. Jeg skelner i denne afhandling således imellem en *uendelig* relativitet i modsætning til en *ubestemmelig* relativitet – og jeg hævder at det er det sidste, der er den egentlige konsekvens af indsigterne i vores indlejrethed.

Den deskriptive tilgang er endvidere ikke *mulig*. Denne pointe retfærdiggør jeg også i relation til nogle realistiske pointer: for at etablere et normativt perspektiv, er det nødvendigt at introducere et fokus på det reale. Dette fokus etableres ved hjælp af relevans-normer. Enhver tilgang er derfor formet af sådanne relevans-normer. Disse normer er imidlertid fallible i forhold til det reale: de kan vise sig at være enten forkerte eller inadækvate. Funderingen på relevans-normer betyder, at beskrivelser bærer på kritiske implikationer. Enhver beskrivelse hævder i en vis forstand at være rigtig. En ydmyg beskriver kan nedtone dette aspekt ved at tilkendegive, at andre beskrivelser også ville kunne være rigtige – blot på en anden måde. Men som det mindste må beskriveren implicere, at den givne beskrivelse i situationen er den mest *relevante* – *modsat* andre beskrivelser. I denne forstand bærer enhver beskrivelse på kritiske implikationer.

Endelig er den deskriptive tilgang heller ikke *ønskelig*, fordi den forudsætter en isolationistisk forståelse af forholdet mellem perspektiver, hvor der ikke kan være nogen gensidig påvirkning. I denne afhandling vil jeg argumentere for, at dette er en reduktiv forståelse af forholdet mellem forskellige perspektiver. Selvom forskellige bud på det reale kan variere mellem forskellige normative perspektiver, så implicerer de alle en relation til det reale på en systematisk og adækvat måde – fordi det reale er det, som de er ansporet af og rettet imod. Bestræbelserne på at opnå intern systematik og ekstern adækvathed harmonerer ikke nødvendigvis, idet systematikken kræver enkelhed og enhed, hvorimod bestræbelsen på adækvathed søger at begribe det reale i sin diversitet. Jeg argumenterer for at det er muligt i en gensidig kritisk diskussion at artikulere de spændinger som oppebæres indenfor andre perspektiver i forhold til disse to bestræbelser – at en succesfuld artikulation heraf *vil* blive betragtet som en kritisk udfordring af adressaten.

Udfordringen for kritisk teori er, i lyset af indsigterne i vores indlejrethed, at vise i hvilken forstand, det *er* muligt at forsvare forbedrings-hævdelser på tværs af forskellige, kontingent gyldige, perspektiver. Jeg hævder, at en nøgle til at se, hvordan vi ikke er stedt i en absolut relativisme, kan være at fokusere på, hvorledes kritikken er en påpegning af en spænding mellem en gældende normativitet og det reale. Jeg hævder at sproglige praksisser er karakteriserede ved at række udover deres egen gyldighed. Det er derfor ikke *muligt* at undgå at fremsætte hævdelser, der overskrider deres fundament. Dette leder ultimativt til universelle hævdelser. Indsigterne i vores indlejrethed accentuerer imidlertid, at universelle hævdelser er *fallible*. Jeg argumenterer for, at universelle hævdelser har noget paradoksalt ved sig: de er på den ene side uundgåelige (fordi de er et udtryk for, hvordan sproglige praksisser rent faktisk fungerer), men de er på den

anden side ikke mulige (fordi de aldrig er absolut gyldige). Dette er det felt, hvor indenfor kritikken skal navigere.

Disse pointer fremfører jeg på den følgende måde:

I indledningen (kapitel I) situerer jeg mit synspunkt i det filosofiske landskab og introducerer hovedargumenterne i afhandlingen. Endvidere introducerer jeg kernebegreberne for afhandlingen.

I kapitel (II) fremstiller jeg den aktuelle situation. I afsnit (1) skitserer jeg kort de indsigter i vores indlejrethed, som jeg mener, det er vanskeligt at afvise. Jeg diskuterer endvidere den deskriptive reaktion. Jeg argumenterer for, at den deskriptive reaktion er unødvendig. Den sikrer os endvidere ikke fra den bekymring, som den udspringer af. Og endelig repræsenterer den en reduktiv forståelse af sproglige praksisser. I afsnit (2) gør jeg mig nogle metodiske overvejelser. Jeg giver et kort overblik over mulige måder at reagere på indsigterne i vores indlejrethed, og hvordan man kan forstå filosofiske undersøgelser i denne situation.

Eftersom jeg forstår kritik som en sproglig praksis, bruger jeg kapitel (III) til at præsentere nogle overvejelser over, hvordan vi må tænke om sproglige praksisser generelt. I afsnit (1) argumenterer jeg for, at det er muligt at forstå lingvistiske praksisser som et møde mellem normativitet og realitet. Jeg argumenterer for, at dette møde på den ene side kan være gensidigt belysende, og at det på den anden side kan være en spændt relation. Jeg understreger at normativitet og realitet kun kan adskilles *analytisk*. I faktiske praksisser kan man aldrig have den ene uden den anden. Selvom det er muligt at skelne mellem normativitet og realitet som to aspekter af lingvistiske praksisser er det vigtigt at være opmærksom på, at de også er gensidigt definerende. Ikke desto mindre er det, i forhold til kritik, betydningsfuldt at de ikke kan reduceres til hinanden. Jeg argumenterer for at normativitet er bestræbelsen på at systematisere, og at denne systematisering realiseres gennem normer for relevans. Samtidig retter normativiteten sig imidlertid også udover det rent normative – den er rettet mod det reale. Det reale er hvad de lingvistiske praksisser er ansporet af, rettet imod, og fallible i forhold til. I afsnit (2) overvejer jeg ideen om universalitet. Jeg argumenterer for at vi ikke kan undgå universalitet. Samtidig er universelle hævders gyldighed aldrig absolut – pga. vores indlejrethed. Derfor må vi tænke om det universelle som fallibelt: nogle aspekter anses *rent faktisk* for at være universelt gyldige – men denne gyldighed udfordres hele tiden i den lokale kontekst. Og på et tidspunkt kan de universelle hævdelser vise sig at være så ufrugtbare (i forhold til at holde sammen på den systematiske og adækvathedes-søgende bestræbelse), at man kan vælge at opgive dem.

I kapitel (IV) begynder de faktiske overvejelser over kritikken. I afsnit (1) præsenterer jeg mit syn på kritikken. Jeg fokuserer først og fremmest på den sprogligt funderede kritik. Jeg hævder at kritikken er en påpegning af spændinger mellem en gældende normativitet og det reale. Jeg

tilslutter mig det syn at vi bør tænke om kritikken som *problematiseringer* fremfor *afvisninger*. Endelig situerer jeg mit synspunkt i forhold til de aktuelle kritiske teorier. I afsnit (2) vender jeg tilbage til begrebet om spænding. Jeg demonstrerer i hvilken forstand, det giver mening at tale om normativitet og realitet som værende i spænding med hinanden – selvom de er gensidigt definerende. Her fokuserer jeg på de lingvistiske praksissers duale bestræbelse (systematik og adækvathed). I afsnit (3) argumenterer jeg for, at en skillelinie indenfor kritisk teori kan forklares ved en forskel i betoningen af to aspekter ved kritikken: det refleksive og det receptive aspekt. På den ene side kan kritik være refleksioner over vores spontane, systematiserende gøre. På den anden side kan kritikken være en receptivitet overfor, hvad vores gøre er ansporet af og rettet imod. Jeg argumenterer for at Habermas er en vigtig repræsentant for den første tilgang, hvorimod Foucault repræsenterer den anden tilgang. De demonstrerer imidlertid begge en manglende bevidsthed overfor den anden side – noget der peger tilbage på visse svagheder i deres eget synspunkt. Endelig overvejer jeg i afsnit (4) hvordan det er muligt at fastholde et begreb om forbedring i kritikken. Jeg argumenterer for, at det altid vil være en forbedring at ophæve spændinger mellem normativitet og det reale – men at man ikke kan forudsætte, at der ikke kunne være andre ting, der var mere vigtige. Det er ikke muligt at etablere et robust begreb om fremskridt i en traditionel forstand. Vi er i stedet nødt til at indse, at vores universelle referencepunkter er fallible. Dette har så til gengæld den fordel, at universelle hævdelser ikke kan optræde som *immuniseringer* imod kritik. Universelle hævdelser *er* potentielt sårbare overfor kritik; de bliver blot ikke *rent faktisk* kritiseret – for nærværende. I afsnit (5) opsummerer jeg dette kapitels resultater.

I kapitel (V) opridses jeg nogle af perspektiverne for det præsenterede synspunkt. I afsnit (1) relaterer jeg de fremførte synspunkter til de filosoffer, som har spillet en rolle i afhandlingen. I afsnit (2) demonstrerer jeg, hvordan synspunktet kan have værdi i forhold til visse problemer i kritikkens grænseland. Jeg argumenterer for at Bjørn Lomborg's skrifter og arbejde viser, hvordan noget, som præsenterer sig som kritik, viser sig ikke at være det – eller i hvert fald ikke i den forstand, som han selv hævder. Derudover overvejer jeg om Jerusalem-problemet er et muligt objekt for kritik i lyset af de relativiseringer som jeg har accepteret i afhandlingen. Jeg hævder, at det *kan være* muligt at have kritik i konflikter, hvor der er forsøg på religiøs immunisering. Religiøse hævdelser er ikke i sig selv bestemmende for om kritik er mulig – villigheden til at lytte til og lære af andre er vigtigere.

I kapitel (VI) konkluderer jeg afhandlingen. Det er mit (uargumenterede) håb, at de synspunkter, som jeg forsvarer i afhandlingen, vil kunne lede til en mere tilgivende sameksistens mellem folk, der repræsenterer forskellige perspektiver.

b. In English.

In this thesis I contemplate the conditions for critique. I hereby inscribe myself into a philosophical tradition that has endured for at least 200 years. These contemplations are still important because the foundations of critique are continuously challenged by insights into how human practices and understandings are embedded into certain factors that on the one hand are inescapable – on the other hand they are (in a certain sense) contingent. Examples of these factors are the configuration of our languages, our ideological embeddedness, our pragmatic orientations, our bodily constitution, etc. These insights open for a relativization of the validity of our approaches: since any approach is embedded in such contingent factors, it becomes impossible to claim that one approach is absolutely *better* than other approaches.

If the relativism is carried to its extreme, it would make critique impossible because it would make it impossible to maintain improvement-claims across varying outlooks. On the other hand, however, the insights into the relative validity of any outlook, accentuate that any approach is open to critique: it is possible to criticize the limitations upon which the criticized approach rests.

The insights into the relative validity of any outlook has led to what I call the descriptivist approach: if no approach can claim to present insights of a privileged kind, then it is not possible from within one outlook to assess (criticize) what happens inside other outlooks – at least not in a manner that can have validity for others than those who subscribe to the outlook from which the assessment is carried out. In other words: critique is only valid for the critic – and not for the addressee. This has led to a strain within philosophical and scientific works leaving out the critical assessments. The works are said to carry no critical assessments at all – they are only *describing* certain states of affairs.

The aim with the thesis is to demonstrate that the descriptivist reaction is neither necessary, possible nor desirable. It is not *necessary* because the embeddedness-insights do not lead to an absolute relativity. Even though it is not possible once and for all to say how far the relativizations go, there is nevertheless a hold against relativity: any outlook is incited by and directed towards reality. And even though it is true that reality varies with the outlook, this does not mean that reality is *insignificant* in relation to the possible relativizations. Our notions of reality vary with the normative outlooks – but they are not *exhausted* by this variation: having subscribed to a particular outlook, reality constrains what it is possible to argue reasonably. In the thesis I thus distinguish between an *infinite* relativity as opposed to an *indefinite* relativity – and

I argue that it is the latter notion of relativity that is the sound consequence of the embeddedness-insights.

The descriptivist approach is furthermore not *possible*. This point I also carry through in relation to certain realist points: in order to establish a certain normative outlook, it is necessary to introduce a focus in relation to reality. This focus is established through norms of relevance. Any approach is therefore shaped by these norms of relevance. These norms are, however, fallible in relation to reality: they can be shown to be either wrong or inadequate. The foundation upon norms of relevance means that differing descriptions also carry critical implications. Any description claims in some sense to be right. A humble descriptor can certainly downgrade this aspect by saying that alternative descriptions could have been right too – only in a different way. But at the very least the descriptor has to imply that the present description is the most *relevant* description in the prevailing situation – as *opposed* to other descriptions. In that sense descriptions always carry critical implications.

Neither is the descriptivist approach *desirable*, because it entails an isolationist understanding of the relationship between varying outlooks in which there could and should be no mutual influence. In the thesis I argue that this is a reductionist understanding of the relationship between varying outlooks. Even though the accounts of reality may differ between varying outlooks, they all imply to be able to relate to reality in a systematic and adequate way – because reality is what they are incited by and directed towards. The aims towards internal systematicity and external adequacy do not necessarily harmonize, because the systematicity aims towards simplicity and unity, whereas adequacy aims towards grasping reality in its diversity. I argue that it is possible in a mutual critical discussion to articulate the tensions that are carried by other outlooks in relation to these two aims – and that the success of such an articulation *will* be considered to have critical implications by the addressee.

The challenge of critical theory is, in the wake of the embeddedness insights, to demonstrate in what sense it *is* possible to maintain improvement-claims across varying, contingently valid, outlooks. I argue that a focus on how critique is a pointing out of tensions between normativity and reality can serve as a key to see how we are not left in an infinite relativism. I argue that linguistic practices are characterized by reaching beyond their validity. It is therefore not *possible* to avoid putting forward claims that exceed their foundations. Ultimately this leads to universal claims. However, the embeddedness-insights accentuate that universal claims are *fallible*. I argue that we should think of universal claims in a paradoxical way: they are on the one hand unavoidable (because this is how linguistic practices actually function), but they are on the other

hand not possible (because they are never absolutely valid). This is the field in which critique navigates.

I carry out these points in the following way:

In the introduction (chapter I) I situate myself in the philosophical landscape and introduce the main arguments of the thesis. I furthermore introduce the key-concepts of the thesis.

In chapter (II) I give an account of the present situation. In section (1) I briefly sketch out some of the insights into embeddedness that I think are difficult to reject. I furthermore discuss the descriptivist approach. I argue that the descriptivist reaction upon the embeddedness-insights is an unnecessary reaction. It does furthermore not actually save us from the worry that it is the reason for the reaction. And finally it represents a reductive understanding of linguistic practices. In section (2) I present some methodological reflections. I make a brief sketch of possible ways to handle the insights into embeddedness, and how to understand philosophical investigations in this situation.

Since I analyse critique as being a linguistic practice, chapter (III) presents some contemplations of how we can think of linguistic practices in the light of the embeddedness insights. In section (1) I argue that it is possible to understand linguistic practices as a meeting between normativity and reality. I argue that this meeting on the one hand can be mutually illuminating; on the other hand it can be a tensed relation. I emphasize that normativity and reality can only be separated analytically. In actual practices one can never have the one without the other. Even though it is possible to distinguish between normativity and reality as two aspects of linguistic practices it is important to be aware that they are also mutually defining. Nevertheless it is, in relation to critique, significant that they cannot be conflated either. I argue that normativity can be seen as the aim to systematize and that the systematization is instigated through norms of relevance. At the same time, though, normativity also aims beyond the mere normative – it aims towards reality. Reality is what the linguistic practices are incited by, directed towards, and fallible in relation to. In section (2) I contemplate the notion of universality. I argue that we cannot avoid universality. At the same time the validity of universal claims cannot be absolute – due to the embeddedness-insights. I therefore argue that we should think of universality as fallible: some aspects are *actually* considered to be universally valid – but the validity is continuously challenged in the local contexts. And at some point universal claims may show to be unfruitful (in holding together the aims toward systematicity and adequacy) and they will in that case be given up.

In chapter (IV) I begin my actual contemplations of critique. In section (1) I present my account of critique. I mainly focus upon the linguistically shaped critique. I argue that critique is

a pointing out of tensions between an avowed normativity and reality. I subscribe to the view that we should think of critique as a *problematization* rather than as a *rejection*. Finally, I situate my approach to critique in the current landscape of critical theory. In section (2) I return to the notion of tension. I demonstrate how it makes sense to talk about normativity and reality as tensed in relation to each other – even though they are mutually defining. In this I focus upon the dual aims of linguistic practices (the aims of systematicity and adequacy). In section (3) I argue that a current dividing line inside critical theory can be explained by a difference in focus on two aspects of critique: the reflective and receptive aspects. On the one hand critique can be a reflection upon our spontaneous, systematizing doings. On the other hand critique can be a receptivity as to what our doings are incited by and directed towards. I argue that Habermas is a strong representative of the former approach, whereas Foucault represents the latter approach. They both, however, demonstrate a lack of awareness towards the other side – something that points back on limitations in their own view. Finally, in section (4) I contemplate the notion of improvement in critique. I argue that it will always be an improvement to solve tensions between normativity and reality – but that it cannot be argued that there is not something that would be more important. It is not possible to establish robust notions of improvement in a traditional sense. Instead we should realize that our universal reference points in critique are fallible. This has the advantage that the universal claims are not *immunizations* against critique. They are potentially open to critique; only they are not *actually* questioned – for the time being. In section (5) I summarize the results of the analyses in this chapter.

In chapter (V) I delineate some of the perspectives of the presented view. In section (1) I relate the gained insights to the philosophers that I have been using in the thesis. In section (2) I demonstrate how the views presented can be of value in relation to certain problems in the borderland of critique. I argue that the case of Bjørn Lomborg demonstrates a case where something that is presented as a critique is not actually so – at least not in the sense that he believes it to be. I furthermore contemplate whether the problem of Jerusalem is a possible object of critique in the light of the relativizations that I have accepted. I claim that it *may be* possible to have critique even in conflicts where there are attempts of religious immunizations. Religious claims are not in themselves determining whether critique is possible – more important is the willingness to listen to the others.

In chapter (VI) I conclude the thesis. It is my unargued hope that if the views defended in the thesis are acknowledged, it will lead to a more forgiving coexistence between people of differing outlooks.

3. Exemption.

The main body of this thesis (i.e. chapter I-VI) amounts to 302,25 pages of 2400 types. As such it exceeds the new rule that a Danish PhD thesis should not exceed 300 pages of 2400 types. It has, however, been exempted from this rule. Cf the following email-exchange,

9. juni 2005 09-26-02

Meddelelse

Fra: Ejvind Hansen

Emne: Ph.d.-afhandlings længde

Til: bha@hum.au.dk

Kære Bettina

Jeg står for at skulle aflevere min ph.d.-afhandling (forhåbentlig i slutningen juni/beg. juli), og kan se at den kommer til at overstige de 300 sider (den lander nok omkring 330-50). Ifølge reglerne skulle jeg have ansøgt om dispensation herfor inden udgangen af mit 5. ph.d.-semester, men dengang var reglen ikke engang indført endnu (mit 6. semester startede i august 2004).

Vil der være mulighed for at jeg kan få en dispensation på nuværende tidspunkt, og i givet fald, hvordan vil det så skulle forløbe?

I vurderingen af velvilligheden overfor min forespørgsel, ville jeg være glad, hvis det kunne indgå, at jeg ved reglens indførsel allerede var langt i min skriveproces, og at det derfor lidt er en regel, der har taget mig "med bukserne nede" *S*

mvh

Ejvind Hansen

Filosofi

9. juni 2005 12-41-47

Meddelelse

Fra: "Bettina Holmbo Acthon" <bha@hum.au.dk>

Emne: Re: Ph.d.-afhandlings længde

Til: Ejvind Hansen

Cc: sb@hum.au.dk

peter.bugge@hum.au.dk

Hej Ejvind

Jeg skal hermed meddele dig, at fakultetet har godkendt din ansøgning om dispensation fra reglen om, at ph.d.-afhandlinger ikke må overstige 300 sider.

Med venlig hilsen

Bettina H. Acthon

overassistent

Det Humanistiske Fakultet

Aarhus Universitet

4. Solemn Declaration.

This thesis has not previously been subject to examinations towards an academic degree.

Det Humanistiske Fakultet
Aarhus Universitet

12.04

TRO- OG LOVEERKLÆRING ved indlevering af ph.d.-afhandling

Hele skemaet skal udfyldes.
Skemaet skal udfyldes på computer

Forfatteren skal endvidere oplyse, om afhandlingen helt eller delvist tidligere har været bedømt med henblik på erhvervelse af en akademisk grad i Danmark eller i udlandet samt med hvilket resultat.

NAVN Ejvind Hansen		
ADRESSE (evt. adresseændring skal meddeles til Fakultetssekretariatet) Kærbyvej 10 8200 Århus N.		
TELEFON, PRIVAT 8624 7223	TELEFON, ARBEJDE 8942 2112	E-MAIL ADRESSE fileh@hum.au.dk ejvindh@wanadoo.dk
CPR-NR. 121071-2263	ÅRSKORTNR. Intet	

AFHANDLINGENS TITEL:	
Dansk:	Situeret kritik i en spændt verden.
Engelsk:	Embedded Critique in a Tensed World.

FORFATTERERKLÆRING	
Undertegnede erklærer hermed, at min indleverede ph.d.-afhandling ikke tidligere, hverken i sin helhed eller delvist, har været underkastet bedømmelse med henblik på erhvervelse af en akademisk grad eller pris ved en højere uddannelsesinstitution i Danmark eller i udlandet.	
_____	_____
dato	underskrift

Skemaet afleveres sammen med ph.d.-afhandlingen til:

Det Humanistiske Fakultetssekretariat, Aarhus Universitet, Nobelparken, bygn. 453, Jens Chr. Skous Vej 3, 8000 Århus C

5. Other Activities during the Appointment as a PhD-student.

a. In Danish.

Deltagelse i kurser, seminarer, konferencer mv.

Dato	Tekst	Lavet oplæg	ECTS ([A] = approks.)
2-3/12-02	Deltagelse i PHIS' 1st. Graduate-Course	Ja	5 [A]
7-11/1-03	Deltagelse i kursus om teorikonstruktion v. Institut for Statskundskab; Aarhus Universitet	Ja	8
13-15/3-03	Deltagelse i konference om magt og anerkendelse (Universiteit van Utrecht)	Nej	3 [A]
13/2-28/3-03	Deltagelse i Colloquium Philosophicum; Institut for filosofi, Universiteit v. Amsterdam (5 møder)	Nej	3 [A]
37679	Theory-seminar v. ASCA, Universiteit van Amsterdam	Nej	1 [A]
9-23/5-03	Theory-seminar, minikonferencer (3 heldagsmøder)	Ja	8 [A]
7/4-30/6-03	Diverse Staff-meetings på Institut for Filosofi, UvA (5 møder)	Nej	3 [A]
13-15/11-03	Ph.d.-kursus "Subjektivitet og Transcendence"; Center for Subjektivitetsforskning	Nej	5
20-21/2-04	DFS' årsmøde 2004	Ja	5 [A]
15+29/4-04	Engelsk for ph.d.-studerende	Ja	5 [A]
38309	Konference om "Den sene Frankfurterskole og Videnssamfundet"	Nej	2 [A]
3-4/12-04	Deltagelse i PHIS' 3rd. Graduate-Course	Ja	3 [A]
	IALT		51

Ophold i andre forskermiljøer herunder udlandsophold.

1/2-30/6-03: Ophold ved Institut for Filosofi ved Universiteit van Amsterdam.

Undervisningsaktiviteter og/eller videnformidling.

Dato	Titel	Karakter/-Omfang	Sted/sammenhæng
E02	Foucault og Habermas med særligt henblik på kritik-begrebet	Seminar; 7 gange á 3 t.	Bachelor- og kandidatuddannelsen v. Afdeling for Filosofi, Aarhus Universitet
E03	Kritisk teori i det 20. århundrede	Seminar; 6 gange á 3 t.	Bachelor- og kandidatuddannelsen v. Afdeling for Filosofi, Aarhus Universitet
38037	Recognition as a reference point for a concept of progress	Forelæsning	Dansk Filosofisk Selskabs-årsmøde
38041	"Der kritische Weg ist allein noch offen"	Forelæsning	Filosofisk Studenter-Kollokvium v. Afdeling for Filosofi, Aarhus Universitet
38081	Kant som ikke-systemtænder	Forelæsning	Filosofisk Studenter-Kollokvium v. Afdeling for Filosofi, Aarhus Universitet
38237	Kritik som en påpegning af en spænding mellem en gældende normativitet og en given realitet	Oplæg	Staff-Kollokvium, Afdeling for Filosofi, Aarhus Universitet
F02-F05	Diverse vejledningsopgaver		Bachelor- og Kandidatuddannelsen v. Afdeling for Filosofi, Aarhus Universitet
F02-F05	Diverse eksaminations- og censuropgaver		Bachelor- og Kandidatuddannelsen v. Afdeling for Filosofi, Aarhus Universitet

b. In English.

Participation in courses, seminars and conferences, etc.

Date	Text	Made presentation	ECTS ([A] = approx.)
2-3/12-02	Participated in PHIS' 1st. Graduate-Course	Yes	5 [A]
7-11/1-03	Participated in course on theory-constructions at Department of Political Science; Aarhus University	Yes	8
13-15/3-03	Participated in a conference on power and recognition (Universiteit van Utrecht)	No	3 [A]
13/2-28/3-03	Participated in Colloquium Philosophicum; Department of Philosophy, Universiteit v. Amsterdam (5 meetings)	No	3 [A]
28/2-03	Theory-seminar at ASCA, Universiteit van Amsterdam	No	1 [A]
9-23/5-03	Theory-seminar, miniconferences (3 days)	Yes	8 [A]
7/4-30/6-03	Various Staff-meetings at Department of Philosophy, UvA (5 meetings)	No	3 [A]
13-15/11-03	PhD.-course "Subjektivty and Transcendence"; Centre for Subjectivityresearch	No	5
20-21/2-04	DFS' annual meeting 2004	Yes	5 [A]
15+29/4-04	English for PhD students	Yes	5 [A]
19/11-04	Conference "The late Frankfurt school and the Information Society"	No	2 [A]
3-4/12-04	Participated in PHIS' 3rd. Graduate-Course	Yes	3 [A]
	IN SUM:		51

Visiting other research-environments – including environments in foreign countries.

1/2-30/6-03: Visit at Department of Philosophy, Universiteit van Amsterdam.

Teaching activities and other presentation activities.

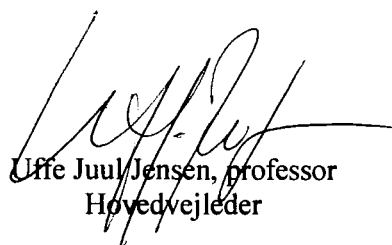
Date	Title	Character/-proportions	Where/context
E02	Foucault and Habermas with special attention to the concept of critique	Seminar; 7 times of 3 h.	Degree programmes at Department of Philosophy, Aarhus University
E03	Critical theory in the 20th. century	Seminar; 6 times of 3 h.	Degree programmes at Department of Philosophy, Aarhus University
21/2-04	Recognition as a reference point for a concept of progress	Presentation	Annual meeting in the Danish Philosophical Society
25/2-04	"Der kritische Weg ist allein noch offen"	Presentation	Philosophical Student-Colloquium at Department of Philosophy, Aarhus University
5/5-04	Kant as non-systematic thinker.	Presentation	Philosophical Student-Colloquium at Department of Philosophy, Aarhus University
8/9-04	Critique as a pointing out of tensions between an avowed normativity and a given reality	Presentation	Staff-Colloquium at Department of Philosophy, Aarhus University
F02-F05	Various kinds of supervision		Degree programmes at Department of Philosophy, Aarhus University
F02-F05	Various kinds of examination and censorship		Degree programmes at Department of Philosophy, Aarhus University

6. Statement from the Supervisor.



Vedrørende Ejvind Hansens ph.d. studium.

Jeg skal herved bekræfte, at Ejvind Hansens ph.d. studium er forløbet planmæssigt. Han har med stort engagement deltaget i relevante forsknings- og undervisningsaktiviteter, herunder ved arrangementer i forskerskoleregi.


Uffe Juul Jensen, professor
Hovedvejleder

Århus 28/6 2005.