HABERMAS’ POSTMETAPHYSICAL THINKING: A CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT. The term ‘metaphysics’ is used in contemporary philosophy equivocally or, more precisely, chaotically. As a consequence, uses of such derivative terms as ‘nonmetaphysical’, ‘antimetaphysical’ and ‘postmetaphysical’ are also chaotic. This article makes no attempt to bring order to this chaos. Its focus is only on Habermas’s understanding of metaphysics and of his own thinking as postmetaphysical, in his sense. It shows that he often comes close to identifying metaphysics with the modern philosophy of subjectivity or consciousness. This makes clear that the term ‘postmetaphysical,’ as Habermas uses it, means only, “beyond what Habermas calls ‘metaphysics’”— hence, most importantly, “beyond Kantian and post-Kantian philosophies of subjectivity.” It cannot mean, “beyond everything that, in the history of philosophy, has been called ‘metaphysics.’” The article first examines and criticizes in detail Habermas’s two ways of arriving at and characterizing and explaining his postmetaphysical position. The historico-philosophical path takes the form of severely truncated considerations of the history of philosophy that lead him to conclude that metaphysical thinking is utterly obsolete; these considerations almost always begin with Kant and end with Habermas himself. The thematic path consists of two fundamental and far-reaching assumptions. According to his methodological assumption, reason and/or rationality has a purely procedural character. His contentual assumption is that the dimension of social interaction and communicative practices, the human lifeworld, is the only real subject matter for philosophy. Section 3, the most important section of the paper, presents more narrowly focused critiques of Habermas’s postmetaphysical thinking. It addresses three central problems in his philosophy, and reveals highly significant shortcomings of his postmetaphysical philosophical position. It shows extensively that his treatments of these problems put him on paths that he cannot follow to their ends because of the narrow limits of his postmetaphysical approach. The first problem is the lack of a concept of World (with a capital “W”) as the unity of the dimension of truth and the dimension of world-as-the-totality-of-objects; the second problem is his weak naturalism and his unclarified distinction between the natural world and the lifeworld; the third problem is his ambiguous and incoherent conjunction of the rejection of metaphysics and the (re)evaluation of religion. These three problems involve dichotomies Habermas leaves unexplained. Explaining them would require him to elaborate non-restricted concepts of reason/rationality and

1 This article uses citations of two types. Works that are cited only rarely or occasionally are identified in footnotes, with a full bibliographic reference for the first citation. Pages from frequently cited works are identified not in footnotes, but in the main text, via appropriate abbreviations. Only the two books by J. Habermas that are most relevant to the topic of the article belong to this second category. They are:

theory, and to thematize the World, i.e., the dimension encompassing both poles of the dichotomies. Such elaboration and thematization would yield a theory that would be, in traditional terms, metaphysical.

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0 Introduction

The central argument of this article can be summarized as follows: when Jürgen Habermas, having first committed himself to thinking “postmetaphysically,” addresses what he calls “two fundamental questions of theoretical philosophy,” namely, “the ontological question of naturalism” and “the epistemological question of realism,” and when he in more recent years intensively treats a third question, the question of the relationship between religion and postmetaphysical thinking, he steps onto paths that his commitment to postmetaphysical thinking prevents him from following to their ends. A consequence is that his responses to these three questions are radically truncated—radically incomplete—and therefore radically inadequate. For just this reason, these responses fail to rectify what Habermas himself describes as “a certain one-sidedness” of the “theoretical strategy” he had relied on before writing the essays included in Truth and Justification (TJ:2).

It is important to emphasize at the outset that the term ‘metaphysics’ is used in contemporary philosophy equivocally or, more precisely, chaotically. As a consequence, uses of such derivative terms as “nonmetaphysical,” “antimetaphysical,” and “postmetaphysical” are also chaotic. This article makes no attempt to bring order to either chaos. Its focus is on Habermas’s understandings of metaphysics and of his own thinking as postmetaphysical.

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The article is divided into four parts. Part 1 examines and presents a brief critique of Habermas’s understanding and characterization of metaphysics. Part 2 presents general features of Habermas’s “postmetaphysical” thinking. Part 3 reveals three specific cases (the three just-mentioned question) in which Habermas steps onto paths whose ends he could reach only by ceasing to think “postmetaphysically.” Part 4 provides a brief conclusion.

1 Habermas on metaphysics

1.1 Habermas’s understanding and characterization of metaphysics

The starting point for Habermas’s postmetaphysical thinking is his contention that currently defensible philosophical thinking must break radically free from the philosophical tradition. He identifies four aspects of the thinking that follows this break: it must be postmetaphysical, it must take the linguistic turn, it must specifically situate reason—that is, it must include reason among the practices of the lifeworld, thereby historicizing it—and it must overcome logocentrism, in significant part by subordinating theory to practice. Taking the linguistic turn and subordinating theory to practice are the central positive aspects of his postmetaphysical thinking.

[1] In order to understand what Habermas calls postmetaphysical thinking it is of crucial importance to clarify how he understands “metaphysics.” In Habermas’s numerous writings there is no clear-cut characterization of “metaphysics,” there are instead only frequent descriptive and critical references to metaphysics. The best of these are in his book Postmetaphysical Thinking (PT). As Part 2 of this article shows, Habermas restricts his consideration almost exclusively to “metaphysics after Kant” (the title of chapter 2 of PT). He refers to metaphysics before Kant only incidentally, generally when he provides a very general division of epochs of philosophical thinking in terms of being, consciousness, and language, distinguishing the corresponding modes of thought as, respectively, ontology, philosophy of consciousness or subjectivity, and philosophy of language (e.g., PT 12). About being and ontology, he has almost nothing to say.

Of particular importance for the purpose of this article is a passage in the book Postmetaphysical Thinking in which he presents a kind of concise characterization of his understanding of metaphysics, distinguishing four “aspects of metaphysical thinking.” The first aspect is “identity thinking,” by which he means a mode of thinking that aims at articulating a view of the whole, of the unity of the one and the many:

[T]he one and the many, abstractly conceived as the relationship of identity and difference, is the fundamental relation that metaphysical thinking comprehends both as logical and as ontological: the one is both axiom and essential ground, principle and origin. From it the many is derived in the sense both of grounding and of originating. And, thanks to this origin, the many is reproduced as an ordered multiplicity. (PT: 30)

In order to characterize the second aspect he ambiguously introduces the term “idealism,”
which he explains with reference to Plato's "Ideas," and not to any philosophical school known as idealistic (such as German idealism):

The history of metaphysics derives its inner dynamic both from the tension ingrained in the doctrine of Ideas between two forms of knowledge—the discursive, which is empirically based, and the anamnestic, which aims at intellectual intuition—and from the paradoxical opposition of Idea and appearance, form and matter. (PT: 31)

According to him the Ideas contain within themselves

the promise of universal unity because they taper toward the apex of the hierarchically ordered conceptual pyramid and internally refer to this apex: to the Idea of the good, which comprises in itself all others. From the conceptual nature of the ideal, being derives the further attributes of universality, necessity, and supratemporality. (Ibid.)

Habermas boldly asserts that such an idealism fell prey from the outset to self-deception "about the fact that the Ideas or formae rerum had themselves always contained and merely duplicated what they were supposed to exclude as matter and as non-being per se" (ibid.). In his view this "contradiction within the starting point of metaphysics" was exposed by nominalism and empiricism, two philosophical positions that result as radical conclusions drawn from this seminal contradiction.

At this point Habermas introduces the third aspect of metaphysical thinking. He asserts that idealistic philosophy (now in the modern sense) tried to renew the identity theory of (Platonic) idealism by accomplishing a paradigm shift from ontology to mentalism, thereby laying the foundations for (theories of) subjectivity and (self-)consciousness. Taken in this sense, modern idealism is prima philosophia as theory of consciousness. It "takes up the legacy of metaphysics to the extent that it secures the precedence of identity over difference and that of ideas over matter" (32). And Habermas—again boldly—states that even Hegel's Logic, which according to him is such a theory of subjectivity, "cannot but confirm the idealistic predominance of the one, the universal, and the necessary" (ibid.)

The fourth aspect of metaphysical thinking Habermas calls the strong concept of theory. The original version of this concept, originating in ancient Greece, has three distinctive features; its modern counterpart retains only one of these. Greek theory was, first, linked to the sacred because the bios theoretikos, which was devoted to it, was presented as a path to salvation. It was, second, an elitist endeavor, beyond the reach of the many. Third, it demanded “a renunciation of the natural attitude toward the world and promises contact with the extra-ordinary.”

In the modern period, according to Habermas, the concept of theory becomes free from the link to the dimension of the sacred and ceases to be only for the elite, but retains the renunciation of the natural attitude:

What remains is the idealistic interpretation placed on distancing the everyday network of experience and interests. The methodic attitude ought to shield the scientist or scholar from
local prejudices. (...) In the contempt for materialism and pragmatism there survives something of the absolutistic understanding of theory, which is not only elevated above experience and the specialized scientific disciplines but is also “pure” in the sense of having been purged cathartically of all traces of its earthly origin. Therein is completed the circuit of an identity thinking that self-referentially incorporates itself within the totality it grasps, and that wants in this way to satisfy the demand for justifying all premises from within itself. The modern philosophy of consciousness sublimates the independence of the theoretical mode of life into a theory that is absolute and self-justifying. (PT: 33)

According to Habermas, metaphysical thinking—as he characterizes it—retained its force through. He generally proceeds on the assumption that Post-Hegelian philosophy, at least any such philosophy that is worth considering, is postmetaphysical.²

1.2 A brief critique of Habermas’s understanding of metaphysics

Providing a clear and well-founded assessment of Habermas’s understanding of metaphysics requires noting that, although Habermas speaks of metaphysics as a central philosophical concern from the time of ancient Greece to that of Hegel, his considerations of pre-Kantian metaphysics are only global and marginal. Indeed, he often comes close to identifying metaphysics with the philosophy of subjectivity or consciousness; this is, in any case, the version of metaphysics to which he pays the most attention.

Of the many aspects of metaphysics that Habermas fails to consider in anything approaching adequate detail, the most significant is the grand tradition of philosophy of being/Being. Here one has to distinguish two aspects. First, Habermas almost completely ignores the ancient and the medieval philosophy of Being, simply assuming that it has a purely objective character in the sense that it does not take subjectivity or language into account. Second, Habermas does not do justice to Heidegger, who tried to renew the question of Being starting from a transcendental-phenomenological basis, thereby radically taking into account the modern turn to subjectivity.

Habermas interprets Heidegger as being himself a postmetaphysical thinker, one who rejected metaphysics and attempted to overcome it. Here, he is mistaken in that he fails to see that Heidegger speaks not only of an “overcoming of metaphysics (Überwindung der Metaphysik),” but also of “the transformational recovering (Verwindung) of metaphysics”:

[... ] the transformational recovering of metaphysics initially appears to be an overcoming [Überwindung] that merely leaves exclusively metaphysical representation behind it, so as to lead thinking into the free realm attained by a transformational recovering of the essence of metaphysics. But in this transformational recovering, the enduring truth of the metaphysics that has seemingly been rejected returns explicitly as the now appropriated essence of metaphysics.³

² He occasionally deals with attempts by German philosophers to renew metaphysics, although the renewals are of classical German philosophy, especially Kant and Hegel. Most interesting and significant is the debate between Habermas and Dieter Henrich (see PT 10–14, 18–19, 22–23).
In a different argumentative context, Part 2 returns to Habermas's interpretation and critique of Heidegger's thinking.

The preceding considerations should make clear that the term “postmetaphysical,” as Habermas uses it, means only, “beyond what Habermas calls ‘metaphysics’”—hence, most importantly, beyond Kantian and post-Kantian philosophies of subjectivity.” It cannot mean, “beyond all that, in the history of philosophy, has been called ‘metaphysics’.”

2 Habermas’s two ways of arriving at and characterizing and explaining his postmetaphysical position

Two paths, not wholly independent, lead Habermas to his postmetaphysical position; one is historico-philosophical, the other, thematic.

2.1 The historico-philosophical path

The historico-philosophical path to Habermas’s postmetaphysical thinking takes the form of severely truncated considerations of the history of philosophy that led him to conclude that metaphysical thinking is utterly obsolete. These considerations almost always begin with Kant and end with himself. Particularly important is the book *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. Twelve Articles*, which provides detailed accounts of *four developments* from this period. Habermas’s most fundamental way of explaining and justifying his postmetaphysical position is presenting as responding to these developments.

[1] The first historical development was the emergence of what Habermas calls *procedural rationality*. It emerged in the seventeenth century with the empirical methods of the natural sciences. This new species of requirements for justification “shattered the cognitive privilege of philosophy” (PT: 33) thereby rendering putatively “totalizing” metaphysical thinking “dubious.” But Habermas remarks that the reorientation of knowledge from material to procedural rationality “need not by any means completely surrender the relationship to the whole that had distinguished metaphysics” (PT: 38). This lack of surrender, however, does not, according to Habermas, involve the reintroduction of any modified version of metaphysics. The *whole* he introduces here is not the whole of any historical version of metaphysics; instead, it is simply identified with the human *lifeworld*.

The term/concept *lifeworld* has been central to Habermas’s philosophy throughout his long development. He characterizes it as follows:

[T]he lifeworld is always already intuitively present to all of us as a totality that is unproblematized, nonobjectified, and pretheoretical—as the sphere of that which is daily taken for granted, the sphere of common sense. [...] And yet, through the subversive power of reflection and of illuminating, critical, and dissecting analysis, philosophy is completely opposed to common sense. By virtue of this intimate yet fractured relation to the lifeworld, philosophy is also well suited for a role on this side of the scientific system for the role of an interpreter mediating between the expert cultures of science, technology, law, and morality on the one hand, and everyday communicative practices on the other hand.... Of course, the lifeworld with which philosophy maintains a type of nonobjectifying contact is
not to be confused with the totality of the universal one, of which metaphysics wished to provide an image or, more precisely, a worldview. Postmetaphysical thinking operates with a different concept of the world. (PT: 38-39)

Considered below is the question whether Habermas’s concepts of whole and/or world—which are central to his philosophy—are coherent and defensible.

[2] The second historical factor or development Habermas calls “situating reason.” This development was brought about by the historico-hermeneutical sciences (the humanities) that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century; the historical consciousness on which they relied and that they articulated was the result of and at the same time provoked new experiences of time and contingency within an ever more complex society. This “intrusion of historical consciousness rendered the dimension of finiteness more convincing in comparison to an unsituated reason that had been idealistically apotheosized. A detranscendentalization of inherited basic concepts was thereby set in motion.” (PT: 34)

[3] The third factor or development is the linguistic turn. According to Habermas this was the result of the critique of the philosophy of subject. He points first to Wilhelm von Humboldt, then to Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein and others, to whom he attributes an abstract semanticism. The next step was the introduction of pragmatic elements into the analysis of language. This step is of the most fundamental importance to Habermas. During a long period of time he was influenced by many pragmatic analytic philosophers, including the late Wittgenstein, John Searle, and especially Robert Brandom. Of this more below.

[4] The last factor or development is the most important one as regards the topic of this article. Habermas calls it “Deflationierung des Außeralltäglichen”. [William Mark Hohengarten provides the inaccurate translation “Deflating the Extra-Ordinary”; “Deflating the Extra-Everyday” is better.] Habermas explains this factor by using concepts he used excessively in his Marxist days: the concepts theory and practice:

[T]he classical precedence of theory over practice could no longer hold up against the mutual dependencies that were emerging ever more clearly. The embedding of theoretical accomplishments in the practical contexts of their genesis and employment gave rise to an awareness of the relevance of everyday contexts of action and communication. These contexts attain a philosophical status in, for example, the concept of a lifeworld background. (PT: 34)

For Habermas this means that the classical precedence of theory over practice is undermined and reversed. But what does “practice” mean in this context? The concepts of theory and practice have been used by the Neo-Hegelians, by Karl Marx, and by various Marxists in confused and extremely broad senses. Habermas himself has written much about this, attempting a gradual
deflation of these concepts. He continues to assert the fundamental primacy of practice over theory, but now he explains both concepts differently and more clearly than he had earlier in his career. Most importantly, he no longer understands “theory” on the basis of any limited—more precisely, one-dimensional—understanding of reason. Habermas mentions three such limited concepts of reason: a purely ontological one, a purely epistemological one, and a purely linguistic-analytic one. These are, for him, three forms of *logocentrism*.

To these limited concepts Habermas opposes his concepts of theory and reason, which directly imply the concept of practice. He describes his position as follows: philosophy liberates itself from logocentrism when it is not completely absorbed by the self-reflection of the sciences, when its gaze is not fixated on the scientific system, when it reverses this perspective and looks back upon the thicket of the lifeworld. It then discovers a reason that is already operating in everyday communicative practice. True, claims to propositional truth, normative rightness, and subjective truthfulness intersect here within a concrete, linguistically disclosed world horizon; yet, as criticizable claims they also transcend the various contexts in which they are formulated and gain acceptance. In the validity spectrum of the everyday practice of reaching understanding, there comes to light a communicative rationality opening onto several dimensions; at the same time, this communicative rationality provides a standard for evaluating systematically distorted forms of communication and of life that result when the potential for reason that became available with the transition to modernity is selectively utilized.

In its role as interpreter, in which it mediates between expert knowledge and everyday practices in need of orientation, philosophy can make use of that knowledge and contribute to making us conscious of the deformations of the lifeworld. But it can do so only as a critical agency, for it is no longer in possession of an affirmative theory of the good life. *After* metaphysics, the nonobjective whole of a concrete lifeworld, which is now present only as horizon and background, evades the grasp of theoretical objectification. Marx’s saying about the realization of philosophy can also be understood in this way: what has, following the disintegration of metaphysical and religious worldviews, been divided up on the level of cultural systems under various aspects of validity, can now be put together and also put right only in the experiential context of lifeworld practices. (PT: 50–51)

The following quotation from *Truth and Justification* exactly articulates Habermas’s most central philosophical thesis: “[…] the lifeworld forms the horizon for a practice of reaching mutual understanding where subjects acting communicatively try to deal with their everyday problems together” (TJ 285).

[5] As indicated above, the conclusion to which Habermas’s historico-philosophical path leads him is that history has shown that metaphysical thinking is obsolete, that it belongs to the past, that it no longer can claim validity today. As also indicated above, this way of thinking and justifying is

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4 See the final Chapter (Chapter 7) of his book *Truth and Justification* under the title “The Relationship between Theory and Practice Revisited” (TJ 277-292) (Cambridge/Ma: The MIT Press, 2003)
essential to Habermas's philosophy.

Sometimes the reader must have the impression that Habermas simply considers the description of the most important philosophical positions since Kant to be the justification of his own position. This would amount to saying: earlier positions are obsolete, they must be given up. If that were indeed Habermas's position, it would fall prey to an objection some philosophers have raised against him: postmodern philosophers have asserted that modernity has been already overcome, in that, they say, we live in a postmodern era. A modern rational mode of thinking that Habermas has tried to rehabilitate is therefore obsolete. But this objection does not do justice to Habermas' highly complex mode of thinking. To be sure, he no doubt often describes the development of philosophy since Kant, but in doing so he also presents critical analyses: he shows unclarities, incoherencies, deficiencies of many sorts etc. In a word, his presenting the history of philosophy is in no way a "pure" description; Habermas' relevant writings—at least often—go hand in hand with argumentative considerations. Habermas seeks to be postmetaphysical but not postmodern.

2.2 The thematic path: two basic assumptions

At this point a problem arises: In order to argumentatively assess a philosophical development one needs criteria. What are Habermas's criteria, and what is their source—or what are their sources?

To answer these questions we have to turn to Habermas's second path to his postmetaphysical position, a path that, like the first, he takes both to explain and to justify that position. Following this path he makes two fundamental and far-reaching assumptions, one that is methodological and one that is contentual or thematic; he proceeds along the path by drawing from them comprehensive philosophical conclusions. The last of these conclusions is that philosophy must now be postmetaphysical, in his sense.

[1] The methodological assumption concerns the concept of reason and/or rationality. As indicated above, this concept is no longer understood by Habermas in any ontological, transcendental or linguistic-analytic framework, but rather exclusively in the context of communication. Communicative reason/rationality is Habermas's most central operational concept. As noted above, he also dubs it procedural reason/rationality. Reason/rationality is a form of public justification. According to Habermas reason/rationality is inherent in communication, it is a constituent of the inner structure of communication. This constituent becomes manifest in the behavior of subjects who engage in speech and action. They rely on intuitively mastered rules in presenting arguments and reading understandings. Because communication uses language, Habermas develops a purely pragmatic theory of language centered on the concept of validity claims raised by subjects as speakers. Communicative rationality is accomplished when validity claims are argumentatively and discursively vindicated.

[2] Habermas's purely procedural methodological concept of communicative reason/rationality has an immediate consequence concerning the subject matter or the thematic dimension to which it is or
can be applied: this is the dimension Habermas calls *the human lifeworld*. This is understandable in that communication occurs precisely in the human lifeworld, the world of human practices. *According to Habermas, the only real subject matter for philosophy is the dimension of social interaction and communicative practices.* Philosophy has the task of analyzing and articulating the rationality inherent in the validity basis of everyday speech. This means that reason and rationality are restricted to everyday practices of modern individuals, and philosophy to the clarification of procedures and norms upon which our public deliberation depends. What matters—and this must be understood in an exclusive sense—are the modes of justification we use in our moral and political deliberations, and the ways we determine which claims of others are valid. This is the role that Habermas attributes to communicative reason when he formulates methods that are appropriate to our conducting our moral and political discourse.

This far-reaching thematic restriction of philosophy has as a consequence that philosophy must be conceived as *nonmetaphysical* or, more exactly, *postmetaphysical* thinking. Habermas's shortest and most adequate characterization of this status of postmetaphysical philosophical thinking can be seen in the programmatic expression quoted above: “Deflating the Extra-Everyday—*Deflationierung des Ausseralltäglichen*”. The everyday—Alltägliches is, for Habermas, the dimension of communication.

3 Habermas's rejection of metaphysics and the fundamental shortcomings of his postmetaphysical philosophical stance

As is well known, Habermas' oeuvre is immense. Moreover, various of his positions have changed significantly during his long academic career. It is therefore impossible to do justice to all aspects of his thinking within a single article. This article considers only points that are required in order to assess his postmetaphysical thinking.

This part of the article (3) contains two sections. The first (3.1) presents a global or comprehensive critique of the two fundamental Habermasian assumptions introduced in the preceding section (2.2). The second section (3.2) shows that when Habermas addresses the three fundamental questions mentioned at the beginning of the article, namely, the ontological question of naturalism and the epistemological question of realism, and the question of the relationship between religion and postmetaphysical thinking, he steps onto paths that his commitment to postmetaphysical thinking prevents him from following to their ends.

3.1 A global, comprehensive critique

3.1.1 A confused fundamental methodological assumption

As shown above, the concept and the topic of communicative rationality are at the center of Habermas's postmetaphysical thinking. For this reason, assessment of this thinking must begin with
clarification of the relationship between this concept of rationality and two other concepts: Habermas’s concepts of knowledge and of theory.

Habermas explicitly treats knowledge in several writings, and most extensively in his influential book *Knowledge and Human Interests*. But he has never presented any significant analysis of his concept of theory. Shown below is that this is of fundamental importance.

[1] Habermas asserts that there is a strong connection between knowledge and interests. Consequently, the best way to introduce his opposition to purely objectivist views of knowledge is to introduce and to comment upon his theory of cognitive interests. He holds that all knowledge is rooted in a vital anthropological interest structure directed toward the basic orientations of human life. Knowledge-constitutive interests mediate the natural history of the human species with its self-formative process. He distinguishes three knowledge-constitutive interests: the empirical-analytic sciences are guided by a technical/instrumental interest in acquiring mastery over nature, the historical-hermeneutic sciences are rooted in a practical/ethical interest in intersubjective communication, and the critically oriented sciences entail an interest in emancipation from internal and external constraints.

Although, as indicated above, various of Habermas’s positions have changed during his career, he never fully liberated himself from some fundamental assumptions generally attributed to the so-called Left-Hegelians, to Marxists, and to the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. The most important of these is the assumption that there is an intimate connection between or even unity of theory and practice. The theory of the knowledge-constitutive interests is a version of this assumption. According to Habermas's tripartite division of sciences, philosophy would be the critically oriented science *par excellence*, and hence would be guided by an emancipatory interest.

The following section shows that the thesis that interests restrict sciences (and thus also philosophy) is a mistaken one whose acceptance has extensive consequences. Acceptance of the thesis results from failure to understand the status of science (and, thus, also of philosophy).

[2] Science is theory. Among the sciences is philosophy, as a strictly theoretical undertaking. As such it consists of indicative and, thus, theoretical sentences. But what is the status of theoretical sentences?

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The most general characterization of theoretical sentences is the following: a theoretical sentence is an *indicative sentence* whose status is made explicit when they appear as arguments of a specific operator. In his *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein articulates this operator, thereby clarifying the status of theoretical sentences. He does so as follows (4.5): “The general form of the [indicative] sentence is: It is the case that such-and-such (es verhält sich so und so).” What he says is made more precise by the explicit introduction of a theoretical operator. Every sentence that is indicative and, thus, theoretical has the following structure: it is—either explicitly or (as is usual) implicitly—preceded by the operator “It is the case that...” \[\phi \] can symbolize this operator. Adding the Greek letter \(\phi\) as a sentence-constant or -variable, the form or structure of the theoretical sentence becomes: “\[\phi\]” An example of an instantiation of this form or structure is the sentence “[It is the case that] the planet Earth revolves around the sun.” To be noted at this point is the absolute and radical character of the articulation it makes possible. This character is such that in so-interpreted theoretical sentences there is no reference or relation whatsoever to subject(s), speaker(s), situation(s), or any other factor external to theorization. This means that a theory as such or a theory proper has an absolute and universal status in the sense that it unrestrictedly articulates an intellectual content: “it is simpliciter the case that...” Any account that does not reach this absolute and universal level is not a theory in the genuine sense.

It is a matter of fact that scientific theories have this status. This becomes manifest by a negative factor: scientific theories proper do not include any reference to subjects, situations, or the like. They articulate states of affairs *simpliciter*. (They do not contain such pragmatic vocabulary items as I/we believe and I/we know). A second matter of fact is that most accounts presented as philosophical theories do not have this status, and thus fail to be genuine theories.

What prevents accounts presented as theories from being genuine theories is their reliance on restrictions on the theoretical operator \[\phi\]. Such restrictions can be indicated by an index appended to \[\phi\]. For example, the entire transcendental philosophy initiated by Kant is characterized by the fact that all its sentences must be understood and “read” transcendentally, i.e., as sentences that include—almost always only implicitly—a *transcendental operator*. The transcendental operator is the following: “From the perspective of transcendental subjectivity (it is the case that \(\phi\)). This can be formalized thus: \[\phi_{TS}\] (the index “TS” is to be read as: “from the perspective of transcendental subjectivity [it is the case that...]” . An example: “From the perspective of transcendental subjectivity it is the case that the sun warms the stone.” The transcendental operator restricts its arguments to a wholly determinate form of subjectivity, i.e., transcendental subjectivity.

The identification of the theoretical operator makes unmistakably clear an absolutely decisive point: theories *as such* are essentially independent of any attitude or factor external to them. For an appropriate conception of philosophy (and science), the significance of this point can scarcely be overestimated—strange though the point may sound to those accustomed to “theoretical” accounts

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that rely extensively on pragmatic vocabulary items such as “I/we believe that..” and “I/we know that..”, and the like, and that refer to various factors alleged to influence knowledge and theories.

As a strictly theoretical enterprise, philosophy is not essentially associated with any interests or factors of whatever sort other that knowledge or truth for its own sake. Of course, nothing prohibits philosophy from becoming associated with external factors, for instance with the emancipatory interest. But this presupposes that philosophy is understood and recognized as being in the first place and fundamentally an activity that is unique in that it is developed for its own sake. To be sure, philosophical theories may be motivated by and, once developed, may serve various other interests, including emancipatory interests. But such interests remain external to the theories as theories.

The status of Habermas’s thinking can now be shown. His thinking, based on the methodological principle of communicative reason and rationality, is a thinking that articulates itself in sentences governed by a narrowly restricted theoretical operator, namely the operator: “from the perspective of communicative reason/rationality it is the case that ....” Formalized: $\Phi_{CR\Psi} (“CR” for: “from the perspective of communicative reason/rationality”). Habermas, therefore, cannot present or defend genuinely universal thinking. (Theoretical) thinking is not reducible to communicative thinking.

To clarify the entire issue, an important distinction must be introduced: the distinction between theoretical activity and the theories that are the results or products of this activity. To clarify this distinction, two kinds of factors must be distinguished. First, factors that explain why a given theoretician engages in theoretical activity; these include the personal situation of the theoretician and the historical situation in which he develops his activity, and many, many other factors that are present in the process of the production of the theory, and the like. Second, factors that presuppose the produced theory and purpose to determine it further in some sense. To those factors belongs most especially the uses to which the theory can be put—or, in Habermasian terms, the interests it can serve. To be sure, among the factors that explain why a given theoretician engages in theoretical factors may be the hope that specific interests will be served, but the question whether any interests are served, and if so which are served, can be answered only after the theory has been made available.

What Habermas calls “interests” seems to refer, perhaps not exclusively, but in any case mostly, to both types of external factors; but he takes those factors to be essentially associated with knowledge, with theoretical activity and, thus, with theories. Thus, he says that empirical sciences are—one should add: essentially—guided by the technical/instrumental interest in acquiring mastery over nature and that the critically oriented sciences—one should add: essentially—entail an emancipatory interest from internal and external constraints.

This view can easily be refuted. First of all, of course there are factors of the first type, those that precede and in some way or other condition the theorizing process. But those factors are purely external both to the theoretical activity as such and to the generated theory as such. A given theoretician may aim to produce a theory concluding “Drug x cures prostate cancer,” and may do aiming in addition either (for example) to make money or to aid humankind, but the aim of the
theory as such is nothing other than to identify the such-and-such. The reason is that theoretical activity results only in the articulation of theoretical sentences and that such sentences, as is shown above, have the structure: “it is the case that φ.” This articulation does not deny or exclude those “contingent factors,” but it transcends them in such a way that it does not have any explicit essential relation to them. What is articulated within what can suitably be called the theoretical dimension is something unique: what is articulated there is what is the case simpliciter.

As for the uses to which theories, when available, may be put—in Habermasian terms, the interests they may serve—those, too, are external to theorizing and to theories. To return the example just introduced: it may be in the financial interest of the synthesizer of drug x that it be the case that drug x cures cancer and in that of the researcher whose employer produces a drug slowing the progression of prostate cancer that it be the case that drug x does not cure cancer, but if these individuals investigate the issue as theoreticians, they will seek to determine only what is indeed the case.

From this it follows that Habermas commits a serious and far-reaching error in essentially connecting the empirical sciences (and in general all the natural sciences) with the technical/instrumental interest in acquiring mastery over nature and in asserting that critically oriented sciences (and, thus, philosophy) essentially entail an emancipatory interest. Neither natural science as such nor philosophy as such essentially have such interests. If one wants to attribute any interest to science as such and to philosophy as such, one should say that the interest guiding the theoretical-scientific and the philosophical activity and the corresponding theory is an “immanent” one: the pursuit of knowledge or truth for its own sake.

[4] There is no point in raising the following objection against this thesis: As a matter of fact, scientists in general engage in theoretical activity and elaborate theories having in view the technical/instrumental application or exploitation of the theoretical achievements, and likewise it is a matter of fact that many philosophers, in practicing philosophy, do have in view what Habermas calls the emancipatory interest. There is no point because although what the objection introduces as a matter of fact is indeed a matter of fact, it is likewise a matter of fact that these interests are not knowledge-constituting interests in Habermas’s sense, i.e., defining elements of theoretical activity or immanent structural moments of the theories developed by those scientists and philosophers; instead, this “having in view” of technical/instrumental applications or of emancipation is an external aim that is added to the immanent structure of theorizing and of theories as such. The main reason for this is that a scientific theory can be applied, can have a technical/instrumental significance only if it is a real or genuine theory in the first place, and an account is a real or genuine theory only if it is the result of the pursuit of knowledge or truth for its own sake.7 Likewise, it makes sense to attach (externally) to a philosophical theory an emancipatory aim or interest only if this theory is a real or

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7 It is easy to produce counterexamples of a different sort. To introduce only one: scientists work to develop grand physical-cosmological theories, theories of everything, but it would be nonsensical to assert that they are pursuing a technical/instrumental interest in acquiring mastery over nature. They are instead attempting to determine, for instance, what was the case immediately following the big bang.
genuine philosophical theory; it can be a real or genuine theory only it is the result of the pursuit of knowledge or truth for its own sake. Ignorance of this fundamental point is one of the greatest philosophical mistakes, and it is made by many philosophers throughout the history of philosophy and at present. For those who make it, philosophy degenerates into ideology and/or into some kind of fight.

[5] Every theoretician who is guided by a restricted theoretical operator in the sense explained above nevertheless always presupposes the unrestricted theoretical operator; sentences characterizing any such restricted positions are intelligible only as arguments of the unrestricted theoretical operator, although they don’t explicitly use the operator. This important point is easily demonstrated in the exemplary cases of Kant and Habermas. Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason contains two very distinct kinds of theoretical sentences. The first kind are the genuine transcendental sentences, i.e., sentences governed by the transcendental operator that is a restricted form of the theoretical operator. To this kind belong all the sentences that are genuine components of Kant’s transcendental philosophy in the strict sense. An example is the famous sentence: “The I think must be able to accompany all my representations...”9. This sentence has the structure: $\mathbf{\text{TR}} \phi$: From the perspective of transcendental subjectivity it is the case that the $\text{I think}$ must be able to accompany all my representations.” But the Critique contains another kind of sentences, a quite different one: sentences situated at a meta-transcendental level. These are the sentences that articulate, explain, or justify the transcendental character of Kant’s transcendental philosophy and, thus, of the sentences that constitute this philosophy. The meta-transcendental sentences are preceded by a very distinct theoretical operator, namely by an unrestricted, absolutely universal operator. When Kant speaks on the meta-transcendental level about the transcendental sentence just quoted, then his sentence has the structure: “It is the case that from the perspective of transcendental subjectivity it is the case that the $\text{I think}$ must be able to accompany all my representations.” Formalized: $\mathbf{\text{CR}}(\mathbf{\text{TR}} \phi)$.

Something analogous happens in Habermas’s philosophy. Most of his sentences are implicitly preceded by the restricted theoretical operator $\mathbf{\text{CR}} \phi$. But his sentences that clarify, describe, and justify his philosophical stance as such are intelligible only as implicitly governed by the unrestricted, hence absolutely universal theoretical operator $\mathbf{\text{CR}}(\mathbf{\text{CR}} \phi)$. What this shows is that philosophical theory and theorization cannot possibly avoid at least implicit reliance on the unrestricted theoretical operator. That this is so has far-reaching consequences for Habermas’s philosophical stance, in the first place for his self-imposed restriction to allegedly postmetaphysical thinking.

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8 B 131 (transl. by P. Guyer and A. W. Wood).

3.1.2 A misguided fundamental thematic assumption

The preceding section shows that from his fundamental “methodological” assumption, namely his concept of communicative reason and rationality, Habermas derives a drastic thematic consequence, namely the restriction of the subject matter of philosophy to the dimension of the lifeworld. This restriction determines the core of his anti- and postmetaphysical stance. The main consequence of the considerations presented so far is this: because Habermas's fundamental methodological assumption is not sustainable, its major consequence, i.e., the restriction of the subject matter of philosophy to the lifeworld, the world of communication and practice, is also unsustainable. His allegedly postmetaphysical thinking is the result of a fundamental mistake.

Genuine philosophical discourse has an absolutely unrestricted, universal status. It is governed by an absolutely unrestricted universal theoretical operator. Concerning the subject matter of philosophy this has a striking consequence: that subject matter is the absolutely unrestricted universal dimension: all questions human mind can ask and must address.\(^{10}\)

10 In order to avoid misunderstandings, this statement must be further clarified. All genuine scientific (and, thus, also genuine philosophical) discourse is governed by the unrestricted theoretical operator. Relating to this three cases must be distinguished and explained. 1) At the central of the structural-systematic philosophy (SSPh) is the concept of theoretical framework. No scientific/philosophical theory can dispense with such a framework. But, SSPh recognizes a plurality of philosophical theoretical frameworks. (Science, taken globally, also must admit a plurality of scientific theoretical frameworks. But the case of science in general is not further considered here.) From this it follows that the unrestricted universal theoretical operator never occurs or is applied without the specification of the theoretical framework presupposed. It is to be noted here that this specification is no restriction of the universality of the theoretical operator. SSPh as the theory of the universal or most general structures of the universe of discourse is governed by the unrestricted universal theoretical operator and has only always the specification of the presupposed (also universal) systematic-structural theoretical framework “U-SS”. Therefore, SSPh presupposes that the unrestricted universal theoretical operator \(\Upsilon\) is always to be understood as specified as \(\Upsilon^{U-SS}\) (to be read as: “unrestricted Universal theoretical operator” specified or articulated by the Structural-Systematic theoretical framework “U-SS.” Normally, this specification need not to be explicitly annotated. One can introduce the following convention about notation relating to this topic: The index in an upper position (superscript) appended to \(\Upsilon\) indicates a theoretical framework: \(\Upsilon^{U-SS}\), the index in a lower position appended to \(\Upsilon\) indicates a restriction of the theoretical operator, for instance: \(\Upsilon_{CR}\) (“CR” for: “from the perspective of communicative reason/rationality”).

2) The particular sciences are governed both by the unrestricted theoretical operator and a particular theoretical framework characteristic of the particular science in question. The particular theoretical framework can be generally notated as “P-Sc.” Accordingly, the status of the theoretical sentences of the (particular) sciences can be formalized thus: \(\Upsilon (\Upsilon^{P-Sc})\) or, simplified, \(\Upsilon^{P-Sc}\). An example: It is (unrestrictedly) the case that according to the theoretical framework of contemporary chemistry water molecules consist of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom.

3) Philosophies consisting of sentences having an inadequate theoretical status are those that restrict the theoretical operator itself. These sentences are governed by a form of restricted theoretical operator. In this article two examples of such examples have been treated and characterized: Kant’s transcendental philosophy and Habermas’ pragmatic-communicative philosophy \(\Upsilon_{TS}\) [the index “TS” is to be read as: “from the perspective of transcendental subjectivity it is the case that...”] and \(\Upsilon_{CR}\) [the index “CR” is to be read as: “from the perspective of Communicative Rationality”), respectively. If such philosophies treat all philosophical topics, they will do so only from the perspective of the restricted theoretical operator that governs their discourse. It is then all too consequential that they will develop a
We can now identify the major and fundamental flaw in Habermas’s postmetaphysical thinking: his pragmatic approach, consisting in his considering the structures and practices of communication of the human lifeworld to be the ultimate, unique, and decisive basis for philosophical thinking. This includes privileging natural language in its integrality, and developing a pragmatic conception of language: “a pragmatics that takes into account the linguistic structure of the lifeworld as a whole and takes the various functions of language equally into consideration need not be antitheoretical” (TJ: 5). This is true, but a pragmatically articulated theoreticity is a narrowly restricted theoreticity because it is the result of the application of a narrowly restricted theoretical operator, namely the pragmatic theoretical operator.

Habermas distinguishes between the expository (Darstellung)\(^{11}\) and the communicative (Kommunikation) functions of natural language and asserts that they “mutually presuppose one another, in other words, that they are equiprimordial.” (TJ: 9) In fact, however, Habermas decisively privileges the pragmatic dimension of language. There is a coherence in this conception. He privileges natural language, but natural language is a language of communication, not (exclusively or primarily) a language of exposition (Darstellungssprache). A language of communication is a language whose structures are fundamentally shaped by pragmatic factors, pragmatic vocabulary, and pragmatic rules and aims. Natural language as a language of communication has a small segment that is devoted to exposition, and is, thus, theoretical. But this segment is so totally integrated in the dimension of communication that it cannot be taken as a solid basis for science and philosophy.

\(^{11}\) The translator Barbara Fultner of Truth and commits a major error translating “Darstellung” as “representation” (see 111). In Habermas’ text the two terms “Darstellung” and “Vorstellung” occur and Habermas carefully distinguishes their two very different meanings. Fultner simply translates both expressions as “representation.” “Darstellung” means exposition and “Vorstellung” means representation. This is a far-reaching confusion. “Darstellung-exposition” presupposes a linguistic relation between mind and world, whereas “Vorstellung-representation” presuppose a mental relation. See below, subsection 3.3.2.2 [2], the clarification of the difference between “representing/picturing” and “expressing.” Another inexactitude is the translation of “Satz” as “proposition”. “Satz” means sentence.
Moreover, the expository/indicative/theoretical segment of natural language has as its point of reference “the world.” But this “world” is according to Habermas the lifeworld, a world shaped according to the needs and to the everyday ideas of humans beings. To make this point thoroughly clear: the indicative/theoretical sentences of the natural language are sentences preceded by a theoretical operator, but this theoretical operator is an extremely restricted theoretical operator. This restriction can be characterized thus: “From the perspective of the needs and Vorstellungen of human subjects in their lifeworld it is the case that…φ”; \([LW\phi] = \text{“From the perspective of the needs and Vorstellungen of human subjects in their lifeworld”}\). This is not the absolute universal theoretical operator, the theoretical operator simpliciter, that must be presupposed and applied by science(s) and philosophy. The fundamental criterion for using the theoretical operator simpliciter is not communication with all the factors belonging to it, like search for agreement, consensus, and the like, it is intelligibility and coherence.

3.2 Three significant paths whose ends Habermas cannot reach

This section presents more narrowly focused critiques of Habermas's postmetaphysical thinking. It addresses three central topics in his philosophy, and reveals highly significant shortcomings of his postmetaphysical philosophical position. Habermas feels compelled to treat the three topics, but his treatments of them are incomplete because of the narrow limits of his postmetaphysical approach.

3.2.1 A preliminary note on the ambiguity of “practical philosophy”

In the introduction to his book *Truth and Justification* (1999), under the title “Realism after the Linguistic Term,” Habermas says that the book deals with issues in theoretical philosophy he had neglected since the publication of *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968). But he explains that the formal pragmatics he had developed at that time cannot adequately account for the fundamental concepts of truth and objectivity, reality and reference, validity and rationality. And he adds that he has not—before writing the essays included in *Truth and Justification*—dealt with

these themes from the perspective of theoretical philosophy. I have pursued neither a metaphysical interest in the Being of being [Sein des Seienden] nor an epistemological interest in the knowledge of objects or facts, nor even the semantic interest in the form of assertoric sentences expressing propositions. (TJ: 1; translation modified)\(^{12}\)

Habermas recognizes “a certain one-sidedness of [his] theoretical strategy” (ibid.). How Habermas speaks of theoretical and practical philosophy, is striking. He writes that between 1968 and 1995 he treated all issues exclusively from the perspective of practical philosophy. But there is a clear incoherence in his usage and characterization of the terms “theoretical philosophy” and

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\(^{12}\) The English translation wrongly renders “Sein des Seienden” as “being of Being”.

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“practical philosophy.” He appears to assume that philosophy is fundamentally divided into theoretical and practical philosophy as two disjunct dimensions. This division goes back to Aristotle and was made more concrete by Kant. In Habermas’s philosophy it plays the role of a fundamental systematic coordinate. But is it coherent? It is easy to show that it is not. Are conceptions about topics that belong to the dimension of practice not theoretical conceptions? Every articulated conception is articulated linguistically—more specifically, by means of indicative (and, thus, theoretical) sentences. So, such conceptions are theories. It is highly significant that Habermas himself gave to his main work about practical philosophy a title in which the main term is—astonishingly—“theory”: A *Theory of Communicative Action*. So: Is his conception of communicative action a part of theoretical or practical philosophy? As a *theory*, it must be a part of theoretical philosophy. Its subject matter is communicative action, which is, according to Habermas, central to the practical domain. That a theory is about practice does not make it practical.

The real problem is a fundamental confusion that has been a constant during the entire history of philosophy. It originates with Aristotle, who never used the expression “practical philosophy.” But he characterized ethics in terms that led to the general distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy as this distinction has been understood ever since. In the *Nichomachean Ethics* he says: “Our present inquiry does not aim, as others do, at theory (θεωρία, study); for the purpose of our examination is not to know what virtue is, but to become good.” and: “the aim is not knowledge, but practice.” Aristotle identifies two factors that characterize the status of philosophical investigations: their subject matter and their aim. Aristotle asserts that all philosophical investigations, with the exception of the investigation of the practical dimension, are pursued “for the sake of theory (θεωρίας ἕνεκά),” whereas the examination of the practical dimension is developed “in order to become good.” In the history of philosophy this has been interpreted as meaning that “practical philosophy” fundamentally differs from theoretical philosophy, i.e., practical philosophy is not theoretical philosophy. As is shown above, it is possible to associate any factor whatsoever—including, of course, becoming good—with any theoretical endeavor, hence also with philosophical theorization that has as its subject matter the practical domain. But such factors are purely external ones that presupposes the purely theoretical status of the discipline to which they are external, whether or not that discipline focuses on the world of human practice.

The astonishingly ambiguous formulation “practical philosophy” requires disambiguation. The adjective “practical” designates only the subject matter: practical philosophy is philosophy that treats the practical, just as political philosophy is philosophy that treats the political. But Habermas all along his career spoke of “philosophy with a practical intent (*Philosophie in praktischer Absicht*).” This ambiguity pervades all of his writings.

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13 1103 b 25 f.: Ἐπεὶ οὖν ἡ παρούσα παραμετέχει ὀυθεωρίας ἕνεκά ἐστιν ὃςπερ αἱ ἄλλαι (οὐ γὰρ ἵνα εἰδόμεν τί ἐστιν ἡ ἀρετή σκεπτόμεθα, ἀλλ’ ἓγαθοι γινόμεθα).

14 1095 a 5 f.: τὸ τέλος ἐστὶν οὐ γνώσις ἄλλα πράξις.

15 It’s interesting—and perhaps more than interesting (perhaps revealing)—that we use adjective-plus-noun only with subject matters in the practical domain: practical philosophy, social philosophy, moral philosophy, political philosophy.
Instead of saying that he had neglected “issues in theoretical philosophy,” Habermas should have said—correctly—that he had neglected issues that do not belong to the dimension of human practice. The following subsections (3.2.2-3.2.4) critically examine Habermas’ treatment of three such issues: the concept of truth in connection with the question of realism, his “weak naturalism,” and his rediscovery and reevaluation of religion.

3.2.2 The first path Habermas cannot follow to its end: the path relating truth to reality/world/objectivity

In Habermas’s relevant writings, the term ‘world’ occurs with extraordinary frequency. When the expression occurs in isolation—as “world,” “the world,” or “the world itself”—exactly what it is supposed to mean is almost always unclear. When it occurs in combination with other qualifying words—as in “objective world,” “world of objects,” “mind-independent world,” “one and the same world,” and “lifeworld”—it is easier to identify a determinate meaning. Patient analysis shows that the term “(the) world,” when it appears without any qualification, has two importantly different meanings: world as the totality of objects and world as evolutionary nature (as physical-biological evolutionary process or cosmos). In different contexts, Habermas opposes each of these to the lifeworld.

World as the mind-independent totality of objects is an implication of Habermas’s pragmatic-realist conception of truth. This complex topic is dealt with in this section (3.2.2), starting with Habermas’s conception of truth (3.2.2.1) and then examining its main implication: realism and the realistic concept of mind-independent world as the totality of objects (3.2.2.2). The final subsection (3.2.2.3) addresses a question that Habermas, as a postmetaphysical thinker, does not ask and would simply refuse to ask: How can or should the entwinement/connection of the dimension of truth and the world as the totality of objects be thematized and articulated theoretically? The answer is that one should thematize the high, more exactly: the highest dimension encompassing the (sub-)dimension of truth and the (sub-)dimension of world of objects. This encompassing dimension can adequately be called (the) World (with capital “W”).

3.2.2.1 Unexplained truth

Early in his career, Habermas presented a theory of truth he dubbed the consensus theory of truth.¹⁶

Unless I’m forgetting something, in all other cases, we use noun-of-noun phrases: philosophy of mathematics, of mind, of language, of science…. If someone used “mathematical philosophy,” that would be taken to mean something like “philosophy relying on mathematics” or “mathematically structured philosophy,” or some such. We do of course speak of analytic and continental philosophy, but the adjectives don’t designate the subject matters. One can suspect that this really does contribute to the confusion; “philosophy of politics,” “philosophy of the social” would be readily (or at least more readily) taken to be theoretical enterprises.

What is true, according to this theory, is whatever there would be a universal and rational consensus about following conversation in an ideal speech situation. However, Habermas soon saw the difficulties with this conception—most importantly, its inability to explain why even the most thoroughly justified assertions can be false. Having abandoned the consensus theory, Habermas now embraces a pragmatically oriented realist conception of truth that implies what he calls a pragmatic epistemological realism.

Habermas’s main steps in presenting and explaining his new pragmatic-realist conception of truth are the following:

[1] The starting point are truth claims made in the lifeworld: “Obviously we take ‘truth’ to be a property of sentences expressing propositions (Aussagen) and that the property cannot be ‘lost’” (TJ: 250; trans. modified). This Habermas calls the unconditional character of truth.

[2] Truth is conceptually (not epistemologically) disconnected from justification. Truth is therefore justification-transcendent.


[4] Truth articulates the connection between the sentence/proposition qualified as true and the world.

[1] Of truth claims Habermas writes the following:

Pragmatism makes us aware that everyday practice rules out, in principle, suspending claims to truth. The network of routine practices relies on more or less implicit beliefs that, against a broad background of intersubjectively shared or sufficiently overlapping beliefs, we take to be true. (TJ: 252; trans. modified)

Habermas considers the truth concept to be Janus-faced:

[T]hese validity claims have a Janus face: As claims, they transcend any local context; at the same time, they have to be raised here and now and be de facto recognized if they are going to bear the agreement of interaction participants that is needed for effective cooperation. [...] Hence a moment of unconditionality is built into factual processes of mutual understanding...”

Thus, according to Habermas, an unconditional holding-to-be-true is always operative in the dimension of practice and communicative action. Taken as describing a phenomenon of everyday life, a matter of fact, these statements are unproblematic. The entire question is to determine how they can be correctly and adequately analyzed.

To the question how the unconditional character of truth claims is to be understood Habermas’s writings contain two answers (or two aspects of an answer). One is explicit, negative, and adequate [2]; the other is partially explicit, positive, but completely insufficient [3]. A third answer, one both positive and adequate, is requisite, but nowhere does Habermas provide it [4].

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17 The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity (see footnote 5), 322.
The negative explicit answer is the following: unconditionality of truth means that truth is justification-transcendent, that it is independent of all the evidence available to us. This is a negative statement: truth is conceptually disconnected from justification (although Habermas asserts that connecting truth and justification is epistemically unavoidable at the level of discourse). Examination of this important point is not directly pertinent to the topic of this article.

The positive answer that is only partially explicit is of great importance for the assessment of Habermas’s conception in relation to his postmetaphysical stance. He summarizes thus: “Actors rely on the certainties of action in their practical dealings with an objective world, which they presuppose to be independent and the same for everyone.” (TJ: 39; emphasis added) Clearly, Habermas is trying to show that every course of action and discourse in the lifeworld presupposes a basis or a horizon that, for this reason, is prior to the course of actions and discourse. It is what is held to be unconditionally true, true without any epistemic index. It is unconditioned because it conditions or determines every course of action and every discourse. This is an extraordinarily important statement because it shows that Habermas arrives at a point he addresses only more or less marginally and whose far-reaching consequences Habermas doesn’t explore. Here it can be made unmistakably clear that he doesn't explore this point because of the philosophical constraints his postmetaphysical stance imposes on him. This will become evident when we ask whether and, if so, how Habermas explains this presupposed dimension.

At first glance Habermas appears to present only doxastic considerations, i.e., considerations relating to beliefs: certainties are then beliefs that are taken to be absolutely true. Closer consideration reveals, however, that he goes significantly further, without being aware that he does so. Indeed, he states that truth articulates the connection between the sentence/proposition qualified as true and the world. But he has almost nothing to say about this connection or entwinement. He starts by assuming that “today, there is broad consensus that language and reality are inextricably entwined.” (TJ: 249) If so, he should acknowledge that this entwinement or connection is expressible and, therefore, not only can, but should be made explicit—otherwise talk of it would be empty and self-contradictory. But is this something Habermas would or should accept? As a matter of fact, Habermas does not present any relevant explication of the dimension of connection or entwinement and this must be taken as the result of his postmetaphysical stance. In order to show that two aspects should be distinguished and made explicit.

[i] The first aspect concerns the explication of the concept of entwinement/connection. In a passage already quoted quoted above he says:

[...] philosophy [...] need not by any means completely surrender the relationship to the whole that had distinguished metaphysics. There is no point in defending this relationship without some definable claim to knowledge. But the lifeworld is always already intuitively present to all of us as a totality that is unproblematised, nonobjectified, and pretheoretical as the sphere of that which is daily taken for granted, the sphere of common sense. In an awkward way, philosophy has always been closely affiliated with the latter. Like it, philosophy moves within the vicinity of the lifeworld;
its relation to the totality of this receding horizon of everyday knowledge is similar to that of common sense. And yet, through the subversive power of reflection and of illuminating, critical, and dissecting analysis, philosophy is completely opposed to common sense. By virtue of this intimate yet fractured relation to the lifeworld, philosophy is also well suited for a role on this side of the scientific system for the role of an interpreter mediating between the expert cultures of science, technology, law, and morality on the one hand, and everyday communicative practices on the other hand, and indeed in a manner similar to that in which literary and art criticism mediate between art and life. Of course, the lifeworld with which philosophy maintains a type of nonobjectifying contact is not to be confused with the totality of the universal one, of which metaphysics wished to provide an image or, more precisely, a worldview. Postmetaphysical thinking operates with a different concept of the world. (PT: 38-39; emphases added)

Using quasi-Heideggerian terms, Habermas admits that “philosophy maintains a type of nonobjectifying contact” with the lifeworld as “a totality that is unproblematised, nonobjectified, and pretheoretical as the sphere of that which is daily taken for granted.” Does this mean that this “nonobjectifying contact” and this totality cannot be expressed, articulated? But Habermas certainly admits entwinement or connection of truth and world (objectivity): “For us, language and reality inextricably permeate one another. All experience is linguistically saturated such that no grasp of reality is possible that is not filtered through language.“ (TJ: 30)

The presupposed objectivity of the world is so deeply entwined with the intersubjectivity of reaching an understanding about something in the world that we cannot transcend this connection and escape the linguistically disclosed horizon of our intersubjectively shared lifeworld. (TJ: 100)

And he describes some aspects of this connection:

What we want to express with true sentences is that a certain state of affairs “obtains” or is “given.” And these facts in turn refer to “the world” as the totality of things about which we may state facts. This ontological way of speaking establishes a connection between truth and reference, that is, between the truth of statements and the “objectivity” of that about which something is stated. The concept of the “objective world” encompasses everything that subjects capable of speech and action do not “make themselves” irrespective of their interventions and inventions. This enables them to refer to things that can be identified as the same under different descriptions. (TJ: 254)

Habermas does not tackle the real point, the dimension of connection/entwinement itself, the totality itself he explicitly mentions and describes. Instead he performs a surprising turn from quasi-Heideggerian formulations to a typical analytic issue, namely an argument many analytic philosophers usually adduce to reject the traditional correspondence theory of truth, as if this theory were the only relevant attempt to explain the connection/entwinement. Habermas takes recourse to approaches that draw the conclusion from the linguistic turn that language and reality are for us inextricably entwined. We can explain what is real only through recourse to what is true. And because the truth of beliefs and sentences can be justified or repudiated only by
means of other beliefs and sentences, we cannot step out of the magic circle of our language. Pragmatism makes a virtue out of this necessity by bidding farewell to notions of correspondence and by analyzing “what is true” in terms of the performative attitude of someone who “treats (something) as true. (TJ: 143; emphasis added)

Habermas’s argument is a line of reasoning to be found in many writings of analytic philosophers on the theory of truth. But the argument is faulty. This can be shown by presenting two counterarguments.

First, why should it be necessary to “step out of the magic circle of our language” in order to articulate the connection or entwinement of truth and world? Such a claim presupposes that language/truth and world are two incommensurable and absolut disjunct items that could be put in relation to each other only from a superior point of view absolutely distinct of both Relata, language and world. But this is a naive presupposition, a kind of “bad metaphysics.” In reality, language is always “directed toward the world” and world is always expressible in language. The connection or entwinement of both is so inherent in each of both: it is the unity of “world-directedness” of language/truth and expressibility of the world by language. Both Relata are what they are within an encompassing dimension. It is not necessary and even not possible to “step out of the magic circle of our language” in order to thematize the relationship between language/truth and the world; “we,” using language, are always embedded in this dimension as the unity of of “world-directedness” of language/truth and expressibility of the world by language.

Second, to assert that we would have to “step out of the magic circle of our language” in order to articulate the connection or entwinement of truth and world is self-contradictory, because in effectively speaking of the connection or entwinement of language/truth and world we are already articulating the relationship between both.

From these considerations it follows that Habermas should recognize that the dimension of the entwinement/connection between truth and world (objectivity) is expressible and can be made explicit.

[ii] The second aspect concerns the concept of world. Habermas says: “Postmetaphysical thinking operates with a different concept of the world.” (PT: 39) Being entwined with truth, the world is, as Heidegger would say, disclosed. Using a more sober term, one can say that the world is articulated. But then the following formidable question immediately arises: what does the disclosed world look like? How to conceive of the world? We will see in the next two subsections both how fundamental this question is and that it remains completely unanswered in Habermas’s philosophy.

[5] At this point the question most naturally arises: what kind of explication or articulation should

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18 This expression is borrowed from John McDowell, Mind and World. With a New Introduction. Cambridge/MA: Harvard University Press, 1996, xv, xvii. McDowell speaks also from “thought’s directness at how things are” (xii) and quotes Wittgenstein: “When we say, and mean, that such-and-such is the case, we—and our meaning—do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: this—is–so.” (Philosophical Investigations, § 95) McDowell explains: “[...] there is no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can mean, or generally the sort of thing one can think, and the sort of thing that can be the case.” (Ibid. 27)
Habermas envisage in order to make this dimension explicit? Since articulation must be in linguistic terms and since those terms must be sentences, the articulation must be accomplished by the use of theoretical sentences, i.e., sentences whose structure is: “It is the case that (e.g., φ).” As shown above, genuinely theoretical sentences do not have any reference to subjects, situations, or the like. They are determined only by the absolutely universal theoretical operator. They are precisely the sentences that articulate what Habermas calls the unconditional (universal) character of truth.

From this it follows that the theoretical articulation of the presupposed dimension of the entwinement/connection of truth and world cannot be accomplished by Habermas’s “pragmatic discourse” or within his pragmatic theoretical framework. The required theoretical articulation is not a topic for pragmatic-argumentative discourse in Habermas’ sense, because this articulation is presupposed by any and all pragmatic-argumentative discourse.

This critique can be made more precise. The structure of Habermas’s pragmatic-theoretical sentences can be so semi-formalized: $\sf{\mathbb{T}}_{\sf{PL}}\varphi$ (“PL” for: from the perspective of the practices of the lifeworld): “From the perspective of the practices of the lifeworld it is the case that φ.” This makes clear that Habermas’s talk of unconditional truth is narrowly restricted: it is talk within the scope of a narrowly pragmatically restricted theoretical operator: “From the perspective of the practices of the lifeworld it is the case that there are truths and that they are unconditional.” This shows that, within his pragmatic-theoretical framework, Habermas is simply incapable of articulating genuinely unconditional truth.

To be sure, the articulation of this dimension does not exclude argumentative discourse, but this discourse is purely theoretical argumentative discourse, not pragmatic argumentative discourse. Purely theoretical argumentative discourse is genuinely philosophical discourse, because it is the only genuinely universal discourse.

Habermas’s restriction of philosophy to the level of pragmatic-theoretical discourse amounts to something like a decapitation of philosophy.

[6] In the present context a final question concerning Habermas's pragmatic conception of truth must be addressed: does he adequately clarify truth? In his article “Wahrheitstheorien” (first published in 1974) he defended a clear conception of the meaning of truth/true: Truth/true means the universal consensus reached in an ideal speech situation. But after having abandoned this theory he never tried again to explicate truth, let alone to define truth. Instead, he simply described some aspects of the use of the word 'truth/true', as in the following passage:

[T]he pragmatic roots of a Janus-faced everyday concept of truth that mediates between lifeworld and discourse accounts for the ontological connotations we associate with the illocutionary force of assertions. What we want to express with true sentences is that a certain state of affairs "obtains" or "is given." And these facts in turn refer to "the world" as the totality of things about which we state facts. This ontological way of speaking establishes a connection between truth and reference, that is, between the truth of statements and the "objectivity" of that about which something is stated. The concept of the "objective world" encompasses everything that subjects capable of speech and action do not "make by themselves" irrespective of their interventions and inventions. (TJ: 254; transl. modified)
This is a typical way of describing the popular use and the everyday understanding of truth/true. But Habermas has never attempted to explain—not even minimally—what “facts,” “to obtain,” “is given,” “to refer,” and the like really mean, or how those concepts fit into an elaborated conception. He rejects the traditional correspondence theory of truth, but he does not offer even a minimal explanation of what he calls the connection or entwinement of truth and world. His pragmatic realist conception remains immensely vague; it does not get beyond the level of everyday intuitions. This is considered in greater detail in the two following subsections.

3.2.2.2 Realism: “mind-independent world” as the totality of objects

At first glance, Habermas appears to have no problem in accepting and defending a realist position. He derives realism immediately from an analysis of the language used in the lifeworld. Specifically, his oeuvre contains two different analyses or arguments (more exactly: statements) on behalf of realism.

[1] The general analysis or argument or statement is guided by two kinds of considerations: about communicative relations between subjects and about the relationship that subjects, by acting, establish with “the world.” In order to develop a realist conception, Habermas elaborates a theory of communication that includes a theory of action and learning that in turn presupposes reference to an objective world given in the practices of the lifeworld.

As subjects capable of speech and action, language users must be able to "refer" "to something" in the objective world from within the horizon of their shared lifeworld if they are to reach an understanding "about something" in communicating with one another. (TJ: 89)

In negotiating practical challenges, actors have to make the same pragmatic presupposition as language users in communicating about states of affairs. They presuppose a shared objective world as the totality of objects to be dealt with and judged. (TJ: 16)

In this context Habermas criticizes metaphysical thinking, referring to Kant's critique of metaphysics:

Metaphysical thinking falls victim to the dialectical illusion of hypostatized world order because it uses this regulative idea constitutively. The reifying use of theoretical reason confuses the constructive projection of a focus imaginarius for ongoing research with the constitution of an object that is accessible to experience. (TJ: 88)

But then he himself says:

Obviously, the pragmatic presupposition of the world is not a regulative idea, but it is "constitutive" for referring to anything about which it is possible to establish facts. (TJ: 90)

And he concludes:
From this perspective, the distinction between appearance and “thing-in-itself” also becomes meaningless. Experiences and judgments are now coupled with a practice that copes with reality. (TJ: 90)

Habermas’s general analysis/argument on behalf of strong realism, i.e., the version of realism that asserts the mind-independence of the world, cannot claim conclusive evidence. To see this one can first point to a far-reaching objection Habermas raises against Robert Brandom’s “conceptual realism”:

In the end, Brandom is able to do justice to the intuitions underlying epistemological realism only at the price of a conceptual realism that obliterates the distinction between the intersubjectively shared lifeworld and the objective world. (TJ: 8)

The same objection must be raised against Habermas’s pragmatic epistemological realism, since his own analysis/argument is of the same type as Brandom’s. Indeed, Habermas arrives at what he calls the objective world only through analyses of the actions and discourses that speakers and actors perform in the communicative process. But this does not transcend the dimension of communication, i.e., the “objective world” articulated by the use of singular terms consists only of items of the lifeworld. But Habermas pretends to defend a realist conception of the world as not equated with the lifeworld, in that he characterizes it as being a world of independently existing objects.

This general consideration can be substantiated by a methodological consideration of a linguistic factor. All sentences that articulate what happens in the dimension of communication are theoretical sentences determined by a pragmatically restricted theoretical operator. Those sentences have the structure: “From the perspective of speakers and actors within the communication taking place in the lifeworld it is the case that they refer to objects....” This shows that the limits of the dimension of the lifeworld are not surpassed. In other words, in order to articulate a genuinely independent objective world, the dimension of the lifeworld must be overstepped or transgressed. This means: one must develop quite different considerations that are articulated in sentences determined by the absolutely universal theoretical operator. This cannot be done within Habermas’s pragmatic-communicative philosophical framework.


Habermas defends a nominalist conception of the world: the world is the totality of spatiotemporally individuated objects” about which we can state facts. According to him, facts as such are not constituents of the world. Facts are what we state about objects. He argues that nominalism is less suspect than other ontological positions, especially those positions that attribute an ontological status to facts.

To argue on behalf of this thesis he takes recourse to singular terms (and existential quantifiers), because, so he argues, they can easily explicate what we mean by the extralinguistic existence of objects. In contrast, facts do not “exist;” rather they “obtain,” and, thus, they have only a
“veritative being,” i.e., a being essentially connected to the truth of sentences; they do not obtain independently of the language in which the statements in question are stated.\textsuperscript{19}

But this argument does't work because it rests on an incoherence. If it is said that “facts” have an essential relationship to language, the same must be said of objects. Indeed, Habermas himself states: “[N]o grasp of reality is possible that is not filtered through language” (TJ: 30). According to the version of so-called compositional semantics of natural languages Habermas endorses, true sentences express facts and singular terms denote or refer to objects. But both expressing and referring/denoting are linguistic functions; therefore, if facts are inextricably entwined with language because they can be expressed, so too are objects, because they can be referred to.

The incoherence and even naiveté of Habermas' thinking concerning this question is manifest in the following passage:

Viewed ontologically, transcendental idealism, which conceives the totality of objects of possible experience as a world “for us,” as a world of appearances, is replaced [in Habermas's thinking] by an internal realism. Accordingly, everything is “real” that can be represented in true statements, although facts are interpreted in a language that is always "ours." The world itself does not impose “its” language on us; it does not itself speak; and it “responds” only in a figurative sense. In asserting a state of affairs, we say it "obtains." However, this "veridical Being" of facts is mistakenly assimilated to the "existence" of objects once we conceive of the representation of facts as a kind of picturing of reality. (TJ: 90)

Of course, “[t]he world itself does not impose ‘its’ language on us.” But if we conceive “the world itself” as the totality of objects, we are speaking about the world itself, we are linguistically articulating it. Habermas seems to suppose that “the world itself” is “the world itself” only if it remains completely untouched (or: uncontaminated) by language, by our language. And then he falsely contends that only facts are touched or contaminated by language, not objects. But he overlooks the evident fact that in identifying objects as the elements of “the world itself,” we are talking about these supposed objects of the world itself.

Habermas falls victim to an additional confusion. He simply identifies “representation as picturing (reality)” with “expressing (reality)”. Linguistic items, especially sentences, do express reality or the world, but they do not (in any relevant sense) represent or picture it. Representation is a kind of mentalistic relation between the mind and the world, whereas “expressing” has nothing to do with mentalism, it is the linguistic articulation of the relation between mind and world. This confusion is a profound mistake that has infected many philosophical discussions of knowledge and metaphysics, especially since the appearance of Richard Rorty's book \textit{Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature}.\textsuperscript{20} As is well known, Habermas was much influenced by Rorty. That he frequently criticizes mentalism\textsuperscript{21} makes all the more surprising the fact that he completely overlooks the distinction

\textsuperscript{19} See TJ: 31, 89, 145s, 169.
\textsuperscript{20} First published 1979 by Princeton University Press.
\textsuperscript{21} See, for instance, \textit{Truth and Justification} 30, 65, 109-112, 276s., 197.
between representing and expressing and its far-reaching significance.

There is yet another striking incoherence in Habermas's analyses and explanations. He usually says that we assert facts about objects as a result of the learning process, and holds that from this it follows that facts are not constituents of the world. But Habermas misses the point here: If facts about objects have no ontological status, then we are confronted with an incoherent statement. Indeed, to have intelligible significance, “to be about an object” must be understood as “to reach” or “to attain” or “to concern” the object itself; it is nonsensical to state a fact about an object and then to contend that the fact has nothing to do with the object. If the expressed fact had nothing to do with the object, the object would remain in splendid isolation, unknown, unarticulated. The learning process that makes possible the expression of facts about objects would have no point.

Another fundamental objection against Habermas's reliance on singular terms to support his version of strong realism arises from the fact that singular terms do not automatically refer to real objects. “Pegasus” does not denote anything real in Habermas's sense. As is well known, this fact/circumstance led Quine to his famous procedure of the “elimination of singular terms.” Habermas completely ignores this formidable issue. But it is not possible not enter into details here.

3.2.2.3 The missing concept of World as the unity of the dimension of truth and the dimension of world-as-the-totality-of-objects

If there is a distinction, there is also a dimension that encompasses the distinct poles and makes their difference possible. Let us call this encompassing unity of truth and world again “World” (now with capital-W). It is then clear that world and World are not the same. This encompassing meaning of World is completely missing from Habermas's understanding of truth and world.

This becomes evident through closer examination of Habermas's idea of detranscendentalization. This idea does not accomplish an overcoming of what Heidegger calls the philosophy of subjectivity or of the idea of the transcendental; instead, it accomplishes only an alteration of this philosophy and this idea:

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22 See TJ: 10, 15, 27, 31ss, 42, 52, 54 s passim.
23 On the exact meaning and the far-reaching consequences of this procedure see the author's book Structure and Being....
Detranscendentalization alters the very concept of the transcendental. Transcendental consciousness loses the connotations of an “otherworldly” dimension rooted in the realm of the intelligible. It has come down to Earth in the form of everyday communicative practice, which is no longer sublime. (TJ: 17)

This has a significant implication: what Habermas calls “(the) world” is always simply the dimension that is the other in relation to the transcendental dimension now reinterpreted as everyday communicative practice and hence as the lifeworld. “(The) world” in this sense does not encompass everyday communicative practice or, hence, the lifeworld. The strong dichotomy between the lifeworld and “(the) world” remains untouched and unchanged.

Habermas emphasizes that “[o]bviously, the pragmatic presupposition of the world is not a regulative idea, but it is ‘constitutive’ for referring to anything about which it is possible to establish facts” (TJ: 90). And this “anything about which it is possible to establish facts” is the totality of objects. Habermas's world in this context is simply objective reality. And of this world or objective reality he writes the following:

[T]he conception of a presupposed world rests on the transcendental difference between the world and the innerworldly, which reappears in Heidegger as the ontological difference between ‘Being’ and ‘beings’. According to this supposition, the objective world that we posit is not the same kind of thing as what can occur in it as object (i.e., state of affairs, thing, event). (TJ: 89-90)

And he explicates further:

The differentiation between the world and the innerworldly that Kant defends must be preserved even if the transcendental subject loses its position outside time and space and is transformed into a multitude of subjects capable of speech and action. (TJ: 88)

As regards the topic of this article, Habermas's postmetaphysical thinking, the more important issue is the fact that his “(the) world” does not include the lifeworld. A closing clarification of this central topic can be given by briefly commenting on Habermas's comment on Heidegger quoted above: “[T]he conception of a presupposed world rests on the transcendental difference between the world and the innerworldly, which reappears in Heidegger as the ontological difference between ‘Being’ and ‘beings’.” This reference entirely misses the point of Heidegger's thinking of Being. Heidegger’s Being cannot in any way be compared with Habermas's “(the) world.” The fundamental difference is the fact that Heidegger's Being wholly encompasses also the entire dimension of subjectivity however conceived, therefore also Habermas's lifeworld, the dimension of practical communication. A brief quotation from a letter Heidegger wrote to Husserl in 1927 unmistakably clarifies the point. Criticizing Husserl's transcendental-phenomenological position, Heidegger shows that there is a dimension encompassing both the constituting transcendental-phenomenological subjectivity and the constituted dimension of the objects; he calls the encompassing dimension Being. “Therefore, the problem of Being relates universally to what constitutes and
what is constituted.” Translating this into Habermas’s conceptual scheme yields: “The problem of Being relates universally to the lifeworld and the world-as-totality-of-objects.”

3.2.3 The missing concept of World as the unity of the dimension of truth and the dimension of world-as-the-totality-of-objects

The concept world occurs in central places of Habermas’s oeuvre associated with a quite different sense—not the sense of totality of objects, but instead the sense of natural world, understood as the physical–biological evolutionary world or cosmos. Its use of this concept poses a new and equally fundamental problem for Habermas’s thinking that, as shown above, privileges the lifeworld absolutely. How does Habermas understand the relation between the natural world and the lifeworld? This question presents a formidable challenge to Habermas’s thinking that avowedly wants to be decisively postmetaphysical (and, thus, also antimetaphysical).

Habermas introduces the term “weak naturalism” to designate a theory or thesis he developed in order to come to grips with what would generally be considered to be a clearly metaphysical question; Habermas of course does not classify his thesis as metaphysical. Yet in introducing this thesis he moves—in fact, although not in intention—beyond his postmetaphysical mode of thinking.

[1] Significantly, he starts by describing “the opposition between Quine's strong naturalism and Heidegger's idealism of the history of Being” (TJ: 22), two positions that—at least implicitly—claim to be comprehensive theories in the sense that they make statements about the whole of reality. (Not only is Habermas’s “interpretation” of Heidegger's “thinking of Being” inaccurate, it is also fundamentally a distortion. This cannot be shown in this article.) In opposition to both philosophers Habermas introduces “the option of a weak naturalism that both sides ignore” (ibid.).

Habermas’s weak naturalism, too, is a thesis about the whole of reality or, as he prefers to say, of “the world,” as shown below. Habermas's weak naturalism is clearly closer to Quine than to Heidegger, because Habermas is led to introduce it by his concern with taking scientific theories seriously, especially the theory of evolution. The main reason he opposes Quine and Heidegger is his conviction that he must do so in order to do justice to the normative self-understandings of autonomous subjects who are capable of speech and action and are engaged in communicative practices. Against Quine's strong naturalism he objects that subjects cannot recognize themselves in Quine's alienating scientization of their intuitive knowledge and in his objectifying descriptions. Against Heidegger's alleged hypostatization of Being and his concept of the history of Being, Habermas objects that “subjects capable of speech and action are thus fatalistically at the mercy of the history of Being” (TJ: 25). Habermas’s weak naturalism makes no reductionist claims. Yet just

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what he means by “weak naturalism” is not easily determined.

Two general theses are decisive for his argumentative procedure. First, despite his much repeated and emphasized thesis about detranscendentalization—a thesis central to his entire philosophy—he “maintain[s] a transcendental approach without retracting [his] move toward detranscendentalization” (TJ: 24). He defends an altered concept of the transcendental by introducing “the transcendental distinction between the world and what is innerworldly that corresponds to the methodological dualism of understanding and observation” (TJ: 21). Second, he thoroughly accepts and radicalizes the pragmatists' thesis that “cognition is a process of intelligent, problem-solving behavior that makes learning processes possible, corrects errors, and defuses objections” (TJ: 26). Habermas severely criticizes what he calls the “representational model of cognition,” asserting that “the representational function of language suggests the misleading picture of a thinking that represents objects or facts only if it is severed from [the] context of action-related experiences and discursive justifications” (ibid.; translation altered). But, as is pointed out above, he completely ignores the fundamental difference between representing and expressing.

[2] Habermas insists on the pragmatic concept of knowledge:

In the spatial dimension, knowledge is the result of working through experiences of frustration by coping intelligently with a risk-filled environment. In the social dimension, it is the result of justifying one’s ways of solving problems against the objections of other participants in argumentation. And in the temporal dimension, it is the result of learning processes fed by the revision of one’s own mistakes. If knowledge is regarded as the function of such a complex structure, it becomes clear how the passive moment of experiencing practical failure or success is entwined with the active [konstruktiver] moment of projecting, interpreting, and justifying. (TJ: 26)

And he makes a further—and truly bold—ontological statement:

From a pragmatist perspective, reality is not something to be copied; we take note of it performatively—as the totality of resistances that are processed and are to be anticipated—and it makes itself known to us solely in the constraints to which our problem-solving activities and learning processes are subject. (TJ: 27)

These two theses are at the heart of Habermas’s weak naturalism, which he describes as follows:

This conception is based on a single metatheoretical assumption: that “our” learning processes, which are possible within the framework of sociocultural forms of life, are in a sense simply the continuation of prior “evolutionary learning processes” that in turn gave rise to our forms of life. For then the structures that form the transcendental conditions of possibility for our kinds of learning processes themselves turn out to be the result of less complex, natural learning processes—and thereby themselves acquire a cognitive content.
Developing a more or less adequate philosophical assessment of Habermas’s weak naturalism is a formidable, multi-faceted task that cannot be undertaken adequately in this article. Sufficient for the purposes of this article is the presentation of two critical points centrally relevant to the article’s focus, i.e., Habermas’s postmetaphysical thinking.

[i] The first point addresses a central methodological and systematic issue. What is the sense or status of the “metatheoretical (assumption)” introduced in the passage just cited? At first glance one would say that it is an assumption introduced on a higher level of theorization, in analogy to “metalinguistic,” which means a higher level of language. But how to understand this higher level? Habermas says nothing about that. Independently of what he means exactly (if one can speak at all of exact meanings for Habermasian terms and theses), an interesting interpretation can be derived from the examination of his mode of thinking. He himself often uses such wordings as “from a [Kantian] pragmatic perspective” in order to characterize the status of his thinking. This can be clarified by making explicit the theoretical operator such wordings presuppose. Above, this theoretical operator has been characterized thus: $\mathcal{T}_{\text{CR}} \varphi$ (“CR” for: “from the perspective of communicative reason/rationality”): “From the perspective of communicative reason/rationality it is the case that $\ldots \varphi$”. Or, equivalently: “From the perspective of the needs and ideas of human subjects in their lifeworld it is the case that $\ldots \varphi$”: $\mathcal{T}_{\text{LW}} \varphi$ (“LW” = “From the perspective of the needs and ideas of human subjects in their lifeworld”). As shown shown above, this is a narrowly restricted theoretical operator.

Now, the “metatheoretical assumption” is intelligibly interpreted as meaning that in this case, the restriction(s) “CR” or “PL” imposed on the theoretical operator implicitly prefixed to the sentences that articulate Habermas’s pragmatic position has been suppressed. So interpreted, Habermas’s “metatheoretical assumption” is an absolutely universal statement that is articulated by a sentence to which the unrestricted theoretical operator is (implicitly) prefixed. This is a fundamental point.

Both weak and strong naturalism are unrestrictedly universal positions on the relationship between the lifeworld and the natural world. Strong naturalism reduces the lifeworld to the natural world, weak naturalism does not. But central to weak naturalism is the thesis that the lifeworld is a result of the evolution of the natural world; this thesis is rooted in the above-mentioned analogy between the natural evolution of species conceived as the result of “problem solving” and our own learning processes, which are possible at the level of sociocultural development.

Another characterization of “weak naturalism” relies on some other features:

A “strongly” naturalistic explanatory strategy aims to replace the conceptual analysis of practices of the lifeworld with a natural-scientific—perhaps neurological or biogenetic—explanation of the achievements of the human brain. In contrast, weak naturalism contents itself with the basic background assumption that the biological endowment and the cultural way of life of Homo sapiens have a “natural” origin and can in principle be explained in terms of evolutionary theory. (TJ: 27–28)
Significantly, Habermas states:

How precisely this "analogy" is to be understood and how far this initially metaphorical phrase "evolutionary learning" gets us are questions that cannot be decided within the framework of either of the two theories [i.e., strong and weak naturalism]—especially since their connection is established by means of this very analogy. (TJ: 28-29; transl. modified)

[ii] The second point concerns Habermas's handling of the central concept he introduces in this context: the concept of the analogy referred to in the passage just cited. It is not possible in this article to thoroughly show how immensely problematic Habermas's "analogy" is; a brief account must suffice.

In order to explain this concept, Habermas introduces a fundamental distinction that he describes as follows:

As long as we cast the issue in transcendental terms, we have to distinguish sharply between the hermeneutic approach of a rational reconstruction of the structures of the lifeworld, which we undertake from the perspective of participants, and the observation-based causal analysis of how these structures naturally evolve. (TJ: 28)

The question immediately arises: how can this distinction be understood and explained philosophically? Habermas attempts to evade the task of giving a genuinely philosophical, positive answer to this question. But his evasion only appears to be successful. He writes:

This blanket assumption of an evolutionary continuity that permeates culture, as it were, refrains from making any philosophical assumptions about the relationship of mind and body (in the sense of eliminative or reductive materialism, for example); on the contrary, it keeps us from reifying a difference between methodological approaches that are themselves ontologically neutral. (TJ: 28)

And he adds the following highly revelatory considerations:

Only the idealistic fallacy of inferring an ontological difference between mind and body (or Being and beings) from a methodological distinction misleads us into locating the transcendental conditions of objective experience in a transmundane realm of the intelligible—or of the history of Being. Conversely, the naturalistic fallacy is but the other side of the same coin; it simply assimilates transcendental conditions to empirical conditions, without considering the aporia of self-referentiality, and projects them onto a scientifically objectified realm. (Ibid.)

We are here at the core of Habermasian postmetaphysical thinking. The most important statements in these passages, therefore, require detailed examination.

[a] Habermas may be right in stating that "[a] 'strongly' naturalistic explanatory strategy aims to replace the conceptual analysis of practices of the lifeworld with a scientific neurological or biogenetic explanation of the achievements of the human brain" (TJ: 27)—but only on the condition that this statement is correctly understood. "A 'strongly' naturalistic explanatory strategy" is not at all
a genuinely scientific explanatory strategy; rather, it is a philosophical interpretation of and an extrapolation from some scientific results. The genuinely natural-scientific theoretical framework does not support the extrapolations that result in strong naturalism.

Concerning the “idealistic fallacy,” this article does not dispute the thesis that some positions to be found in the history of philosophy do—at least in very general terms—commit this fallacy. But it does reject Habermas's assumption that positions committing this fallacy provide the only alternatives to strong naturalism and to his own weak naturalism. There are many other positions. Of this, more below.

[b] Another momentous thesis Habermas introduces in the passages quoted above requires examination. He says that the blanket assumption of an evolutionary continuity “refrains from making any philosophical assumptions about the relationship of mind and body” and, one should add, of lifeworld and “the world.” Making assumptions in this area according to Habermas would amount to “reifying a difference between methodological approaches”; this would be completely wrong, according him, because those approaches (the hermeneutic approach of a rational reconstruction of the structures of the lifeworld and the observation-based causal analysis) “are themselves ontologically neutral.” Therefore, both the idealistic position and the strong naturalistic position commit a fallacy by not heeding the ontologically neutral status of both approaches.

These are strange assertions. It is difficult to make sense of the statement that the approaches are ontological neutral. What are they then all about? Are the structures of the lifeworld and are the structures of the “natural” world not real—and thus: ontological—structures? Denying that they are, reduces the approaches to some kind of purely subjective (conceptual) game or work of pure (conceptual) phantasy. Habermas's statement is a clear case of an attempt to conjure away the formidable problem posed by the concept of ontological neutrality. This is a typical example of the postmetaphysical posture of ignoring or trying to make disappear philosophical questions that traditionally would be considered metaphysical.

[4] The brief constructive considerations presented in this subsection indicate what would have to be done to overcome the obscurities, incoherences, aporias, limitations, and omissions that plague Habermas's postmetaphysical conception of the “world.” The problem arises from the distinction and hence relation Habermas introduces between the lifeworld and “the (natural) world.”

[i] What the considerations presented in this article so far show is this: they make manifest Habermas’s lack of a comprehensive concept of the World (with capital “W”) as the dimension that encompasses both the so-called natural world and the so-called lifeworld. Weak naturalism is correct in insisting that “the vocabulary of learning, the precise meaning of which is initially determined from ‘our’ participant perspective [...] must not be simply reinterpreted in neo-Darwinist terms.” (TJ: 29) But this is only a negative statement.

Regarding the other alternative Habermas considers, namely Heidegger's thinking of Being, Habermas offers a faulty interpretation of it. The author has shown in several writings that especially the younger Heidegger deserves recognition for having shown the necessity of overcoming the philosophy of subjectivity or consciousness—a point Habermas appears to acknowledge, when he
speaks of detranscendentalization.

Heidegger’s overcoming of subjectivity or consciousness can also be called a kind of detranscendentalization. Although in some sense the starting points of the detranscendentalization moves performed by Heidegger and Habermas are the same or at least similar, the two authors differ radically concerning the purpose and the endpoints of this move: the endpoints are diametrically opposed in that they are situated at opposite ends of what can be called the spectrum of philosophical thinking. Heidegger reaches the dimension that is absolutely universal because it encompasses both sides of the subject-object relation; he calls it the dimension of Being. This detranscendentalization is required to correct an immensely serious philosophical error. This is the case despite the fact that the later Heidegger's mode of thinking of Being is deeply flawed.

In radical opposition to Heidegger, the move performed by Habermas leads to the dimension of the lifeworld:

Detranscendentalization alters the very concept of the transcendental. Transcendental consciousness loses the connotations of an “otherworldly” dimension rooted in the realm of the intelligible. It has come down to Earth in the form of everyday communicative practice, which is no longer sublime. (TJ: 17)

Habermas’s move may be interesting in several respects, but it misses the central point, i.e., it introduces a new distinction, the distinction between (natural) world and lifeworld, without offering an adequate and intelligible account of the relation between or the unity of the two distinguished poles. [ii] Following his introduction of weak naturalism, Habermas understands “world” mainly as the evolutionarily developing physical-biological cosmos. The human lifeworld emerged within the natural evolution of species as a result of “problem solving,” and has led to increasingly complex stages of development at higher levels of learning.

Such scientific statements presented in philosophical writing can only be understood as having being thoroughly endorsed by the philosopher Habermas. Here it is clear that Habermas is using an unrestricted theoretical operator: he is not presupposing and using the restricted pragmatic operator that characterizes the restricted theoretical status of the sentences articulated within his own theoretical framework, namely, “From the perspective of communicative reason/rationality it is the case that ...φ.” Formalized: $\exists_{\text{CR}}φ$ (“CR” for: “from the perspective of communicative reason/rationality”). Here he is speaking from a higher theoretical level, more exactly: from an unrestricted theoretical point of view, articulated by sentences with the structure $\exists_φ$. Correspondingly, the concept “world” that occurs in those sentences has an unrestricted meaning. It designates all of reality and thus includes both the natural world as physical-biological evolutionary cosmos or process and the lifeworld, the dimension of communication and action.

Habermas insists that there is a difference between natural world and lifeworld. Indeed, he introduces a fundamental restriction, emphasizing that “we can opt for a naturalism that preserves the transcendental difference between the world and what is innerworldly, in spite of detranscendentalization” (TJ: 27). But here he runs into trouble. As we have seen, he introduces a
“metatheoretical assumption,” according to which

“our” learning processes [...] are in a sense simply the continuation of prior “evolutionary learning processes” that in turn gave rise to our forms of life. For then the structures that form the transcendental conditions of possibility for our kinds of learning processes themselves turn out to be the result of less complex, natural learning processes—and thereby themselves acquire a cognitive content. (TJ: 27)

Habermas here implicitly invokes an all-encompassing dimension that includes both “natural learning processes” and “our” learning processes,” the latter being “in a sense simply the continuation of prior ‘evolutionary learning processes’.” Habermas wants to preserve à tout prix the difference between the natural learning processes and our learning processes, but at the same time he maintains that the latter are continuous with the former. This continuity is in some sense explained by saying that the latter result from the former. At the same time, however, he emphasizes that he does not defend a reductionist view of the latter, i.e., of the lifeworld. But Habermas seems not to be aware of the status of his own statements (sentences). In presenting the theory he calls “weak naturalism” he is no longer speaking from the pragmatic perspective of the lifeworld (and, thus, of communicative reason or rationality), i.e., his stated sentences are not prefixed with the restricted operator (\(\mathbb{T}_{\text{TR}}\phi\)) (or, equivalently, (\(\mathbb{T}_{\text{LW}}\phi\)). Instead, he is formulating sentences prefixed with the unrestricted, absolute theoretical operator: \((\mathbb{T})_{\text{TR}}\phi\). But he does not articulate the immense implications this simple fact has.

It is not difficult to see and to show that the only way of presenting a coherent conception would be to explicitly endorse and explain the following two theses: 1) “Natural learning processes” and “our” learning processes,” and hence, the natural world and the lifeworld, are (the) two subdimensions of a universal, comprehensive dimension, which can be called “(the) World” (with capital “W”). 2) Once the World is introduced, it is possible to coherently affirm that the lifeworld is a continuation or a result of the natural world in a non-reductive sense. Habermas’s “transcendental difference between the world and what is innerworldly” should be reinterpreted as meaning: “difference between the World and (the) two segments of what is inner-Worldly, understood as the natural world and the lifeworld.”

This would be a formidable task. It is also one that Habermas could not undertake without abandoning his commitment to what he calls postmetaphysical thinking. dies ist nun

3.2.4 Third specific path Habermas cannot follow to its end: the ambiguous and incoherent conjunction of the rejection of metaphysics and the (re)evaluation of religion

In order to assess Habermas’s postmetaphysical thinking a third (last) central issue must be examined: his view or (re)evaluation of religion. Much literature thematizes this view or (re)evaluation, but clarity has not been attained: the issue is highly complex and multifaceted. Because of time limitations, it cannot be treated adequately in this article. For the purposes of the article, it suffices to briefly address one quite specific aspect: Habermas’s conception of religion in
connection with metaphysics and his postmetaphysical philosophical stance.

[1] Religion is a topic that is not completely new in Habermas’s thinking and evolution, only for the past 25 years or so—and especially in the most recent years—has Habermas worked to provide a concrete and detailed elaboration of his fundamental idea about religion. As early as 1988, in his book Postmetaphysical Thinking, he presented his central idea clearly and succinctly, as follows:

After metaphysics, the nonobjective whole of a concrete lifeworld, which is now present only as horizon and background, evades the grasp of theoretical objectification. Marx’s saying about the realization of philosophy can also be understood in this way: what has, following the disintegration of metaphysical and religious worldviews, been divided up on the level of cultural systems under various aspects of validity, can now be put together and also put right only in the experiential context of lifeworld practices. In the wake of metaphysics, philosophical theory surrenders its extra-everyday status. Explosive experiences of the extra-everyday have migrated into an art that has become autonomous. Of course, even after this deflation, everyday life, now fully profane, by no means becomes immune to the shattering and subversive intrusion of extra-everyday events. Viewed from without, religion, which has largely been deprived of its world-view functions, is still indispensable in everyday life for normalizing intercourse with the extra-everyday. For this reason, even postmetaphysical thinking continues to coexist with religious practice and not merely in the sense of the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous. This ongoing coexistence even throws light on a curious dependence of a philosophy that has forfeited its contact with the extra-everyday. Philosophy, even in its postmetaphysical form, will be able neither to replace nor to repress religion as long as religious language is the bearer of a semantic content that is inspiring and even indispensable, for this content eludes (for the time being?) the explanatory force of philosophical language and continues to resist translation into reasoning discourses. (PT: 50-51; translation altered)

Habermas’s central idea as regards religion is that religion has a place in modern society and that this implies the possibility and the task to translate religious semantic content into a modern rational discourse. This is an immensely complex, difficult and eminently important topic. How does Habermas in this context see the place and the role of religion compared with metaphysics? The answer is clear: there is no role and no place for metaphysics today; we live in a postmetaphysical era, but this era is not a postreligious era. This bold thesis is all the more surprising when one considers what Habermas has to say about the historical dimension of this problem. For Habermas, historical considerations provide absolutely essential support for his thesis; in a central respect, they are the sole supports for the thesis. According to him, consideration of history reveals both that metaphysics is passé and that religion cannot be dispensed with.

[2] Habermas grounds (begründet) his thesis (if his procedure can be called “grounding” at all) by introducing and describing two historical epochs. He calls the first of these “the Axial Age (around the middle of the first millennium BCE [Before the Common Era]),” and writes of it the following:

Viewed from the perspective of the cognitive advance from mythos to logos, metaphysics can be situated on the same level as all of the worldviews which emerged at that time, including Mosaic monotheism: each of them made it possible to take a synoptic view of the world as a whole from a
trancendent point of view and to distinguish the flood of phenomena from the underlying essences.²⁷

The second epoch is the modern one, in which modern science emerged:

Modern science compelled a philosophical reason which had become self-critical to break with metaphysical constructions of the totality of nature and history. With this advance in reflection, nature and history became the preserve of the empirical sciences and not much more was left for philosophy than the general competences of knowing, speaking, and acting subjects. With this the synthesis of faith and knowledge forged in the tradition extending from Augustine to Thomas fell apart.²⁸

These are partially false, partially incoherent, and unacceptably simplified statements. To put metaphysical worldviews and religious worldviews on the same level amounts to ignoring the fundamental difference between the religious dimension and the theoretical dimension. Metaphysics is a theoretical articulation of a worldview, whereas religions (at least the major religions) are in some sense based on and/or in some sense imply a worldview that they do not theoretically articulate. Habermas seems not to be aware that he incurs an incoherence: indeed, if metaphysical and religious worldviews are on the same level and if he assumes that “modern science compelled a philosophical reason [...] to break with metaphysical constructions of the totality of nature and history,” why does he not assert or conclude that modern science had a similar effect on religion? Instead of doing so, he simply states that metaphysics is passé but that religion is not.

Furthermore, Habermas runs into another incoherence. In saying that science compelled philosophical reason to break with metaphysical constructions he is elevating what he calls science to the sole acceptable form of knowledge and theory. If so, what about his own theory, which is not a scientific one? He rejects what he calls “the naturalism founded on naive faith in science.”²⁹ His critique of “scientism” is a constant in his philosophy. But then it is not understandable how he can simply state that modern science compelled reason to break with metaphysical constructions. It is highly significant that Habermas does not present any argument concerning the possibility or the unavoidability of metaphysics that is not entirely or partially historically oriented. In this sense one could call him a strange kind of historical positivist. It is not difficult to show that the well-founded lesson to draw from the history of philosophy and from the emergence and development of modern science as regards metaphysics is not the simple rejection of metaphysics as such; rather, it is the endeavor to correct, transform, rethink, and/or redefine metaphysics. That Habermas draws the lesson or consequence that metaphysics as such must be rejected is due to his arbitrarily restricted concepts of reason, knowledge, and theory.

[3] The second central thesis Habermas puts forward as regards religion and metaphysics

²⁸ Ibid. 16-17.
²⁹ Ibid. 18.
concerns the possibility and the task (or even the necessity) of translating religious semantic content into modern rational discourse. This is an immensely difficult and complex issue. Only two topics relating to this thesis need be considered in this article.

First, what is “religious semantic content”? And, relatedly, how are we to understand the translation of religious semantic content into modern rational discourse? These are questions Habermas does not address. One can meaningfully speak of translation only if there is at least a certain equivalence of meaning, negatively said: if the contents that are translated do not suffer a detriment. Now, Habermas foresees the translation of religious semantic content into the language of modern rational discourse. Is this at all feasible? That depends on how Habermas understands “modern rational discourse.” We have seen that his conception of this discourse is extremely restricted: it is thoroughly determined by communicative rationality. Such a discourse can by no means be considered an adequate translational equivalent to religious language, at least if one considers the whole of religious language. Only metaphysical language and discourse can serve this purpose. And this is what Christian thinking has done throughout its history. When metaphysics in every form is simply excluded, what possibilities of translating the most fundamental religious semantic content of the major religions are left? In the Christian tradition metaphysics has always been the rational and theoretical tool for translating religious language in adequately rational language.

Let us illustrate this point by examining an example of a translation proposed by Habermas. At the center of religious language there is the word ‘God,’ the most fundamental and essential word of religious language. How does Habermas translate the word? He writes:

[T]he idea of God is transformed [aufgehoben] into the concept of a Logos that determines the community of believers and the real life-context of a self-emancipating society. “God” becomes the name for a communicative structure that forces men [sic], on pain of a loss of their humanity, to go beyond their accidental, empirical nature to encounter one another indirectly, that is, across an objective something that they themselves are not.30

The teologically oriented author Eduardo Mendieta comments on this passage thus: “God is the name for that substance that gives coherence, unity, and thickness to the life-world wherein humans dwell seeking to acknowledge each other as meaning-giving creatures.”31 But how to understand the central terms “Logos” and “substance”—if a metaphysical understanding is excluded? The vagueness of these unexplained terms show that the translation utterly fails to convey the original meaning of the word “God” in religious language. Here the indispensability of metaphysics becomes all too manifest.

It should be added that Habermas in recent years seems to point to a mysterious dimension that he characterizes only in vague terms as “[across] an objective something that they [the human beings] themselves are not” and “a awareness of what is missing.” Both formulations refer to religion. This gives rise to the question: Why does Habermas not try to articulate this “objective something” and this “what is missing”? It seems undeniable that Habermas in the case of religion is walking along a path that he cannot follow to its end. The reason he cannot is his central philosophical dogma: his postmetaphysical stance.

It should be added that his philosophical stance today exhibits something like a paradoxical, not to say ironic tendency. He insists that he is a postmetaphysical philosopher, but a postmetaphysical modern, not a postmetaphysical postmodern philosopher. This is undoubtedly true with respect to all topics excepting therefrom the topic of religion. Indeed, Jewish and Christian oriented postmodern authors like to conceive God as a mysterious, absolutely distant or other, unarticulable X or dimension; they would not reject Habermas’s formulations. They start using the word ‘God’ and then come to something like the X Habermas calls “what is missing” or “an objective something that human beings themselves are not.” Habermas doesn’t start speaking about “God,” but he arrives at a point those postmodern authors call God. What’s the difference?

[4] The decisive point as regards the issue of religion is Habermas’s concept of modern, secular, postsecular reason. Such reason he identifies with postmetaphysical thinking. And he then says:

My motive for addressing the issue of faith and knowledge is to mobilize modern reason against the defeatism lurking within it. Postmetaphysical thinking can cope on its own with the defeatism concerning reason which we encounter today both in the postmodern radicalization of the “dialectic of the Enlightenment” and in the naturalism founded on naive faith in science.

These are highly problematic or indeed empty assertions. Because of its impoverished status, postmetaphysical thinking cannot—as this article shows—“cope on its own” with the defeatism Habermas describes and much less with the immense problems it gives rise to. Habermas restricts the human mind to the level of socialized life and thinking. He thereby fails to do justice to the enormous intellectual potentialities of the human mind. In other words: in his postmetaphysical thinking there is no room for the so-called grand questions (“What does it all mean?”, “Why is there something rather than nothing?”, the question of Being...). Astonishingly, Habermas doesn’t even recognize these questions; not recognizing them, he of course cannot address them. His postmetaphysical thinking amounts to an imprisoning of the human mind. But it is extremely significant that he claims that his postmetaphysical thinking “can cope on its own with the defeatism concerning reason which we encounter today.”
4 Conclusion

Habermas has a poor understanding of metaphysics and its history. Given this, his conception of philosophy is fundamentally determined by two assumptions, a methodological one and a thematic one, that narrowly restrict the task, the themes, and the potentialities of philosophical thinking. The methodological assumption establishes the concept of reason or rationality as being, if not entirely, at least mainly confined to communicative rationality. This constitutes the central horizon and the point of view that determines Habermas's entire philosophical enterprise. According to the thematic assumption the subject matter proper of philosophy is the dimension of the lifeworld, the dimension of the communicative practices and actions of everyday life. Habermas's most important work is, not accidentally, titled *A Theory of Communicative Action*.

This article has shown that Habermas's self-imposed methodological and thematic restrictions are the result of his openly proclaimed postmetaphysical stance and that this stance has the highly significant effect that his thinking as regards central topics embarks on paths that it cannot follow to their ends. Habermas's somewhat stubborn attempts to somehow address central philosophical issues while relying on a postmetaphysical posture have led to fundamental problems, obscurities, incoherencies, the absence of clarifications, and non-solutions.

From the methodological perspective, Habermas never explains the theoretical status of his conception, more exactly: of the sentences occurring in his “theories.” The theoretical operator (implicitly) prefixed to the sentences that articulate his position within his own theory is a significantly restricted operator, a pragmatic communicative operator. But when he does not speak from within his own theory, but attempts to characterize and situate his theory within the unrestricted theoretical domain, he relies on theoretical sentences that are intelligible only if understood as governed by the *unrestricted* theoretical operator: “It is the case (simpliciter) that... φ.” Habermas seems completely unaware of this problem and of its far-reaching implications.

As regards the contentual side of Habermas' thinking, the article examined the three issues most important for its purposes: first, the conception of truth together with the question, raised by that conception, of realism; second, the theory he calls weak naturalism; third, the relationship between religion(s) and postmetaphysical thinking. In the three cases it identified deep dichotomies: first, the dichotomy between truth as a central element of the lifeworld and the mind-independent world as the totality of objects; second, the dichotomy between natural world and lifeworld; third, the dichotomy between religious semantic content and an adequate equivalent theoretical discourse. Habermas leaves the three dichotomies unexplained; explaining them would require him to thematize the World, i.e., the dimension encompassing both poles of the dichotomies, and a non-restricted concept of reason and theory. Such thematization would yield a theory that would be, in traditional terms, metaphysical.

The article did not aim to present or to examine Habermas's central theory, the one presented in *A Theory of Communicative Action*. The article was concerned only with his classification of his thinking as postmetaphysical. Leaving aside terminological questions, the real meaning and content of what Habermas calls his postmetaphysical philosophical stance amounts to this: he arbitrarily and
dogmatically sets very narrow boundaries to philosophical thinking. He thereby completely disregards the immense cognitive and theoretical potentialities of the human mind. We human beings have questions that we understand and that we can articulate that go far beyond the limits Habermas wants to impose to our intellectual inquiries. This is the most fundamental and serious error he commits.

There is a short passage in *Truth and Justification* that makes manifest Habermas's main error. In this passage he refers to Karl Marx and says that the founder of Marxism gives

the transcendental concept of cognition a materialist turn. [...] In short, “nature in itself," along with "subjective nature,” creates the conditions for the appearance of an “objective nature." However, if there is a rigid, that is, inescapable, correlation between objective nature and the possible forms of coping with nature that are determined by subjective nature, then the construction of a “nature in itself” can only be the result of a metaphysical glimpse—a glimpse running riot beyond the cognitive boundaries given by nature (*naturgegeben*)—behind the scenes of the human mind. (TJ: 22; transl. modified)

Here Habermas clarifies what he considers to be the most fundamental reason for rejecting metaphysics: he takes metaphysics to be the attempt to articulate a glimpse—“a glimpse running riot beyond the cognitive boundaries given by nature (*naturgegeben*)—behind the stage of the human mind.” No doubt, this is an impressive rhetorical formulation. But it is no more than that. Moreover, this is a kind of self-defence or self-immunization from critique. What are “the cognitive boundaries set by nature”? Does the human mind determine those boundaries? It is Habermas himself who sets the boundaries when he asserts that the boundaries are set by nature. On the basis of what criteria does he do so? To attribute to the human mind the power to give itself cognitive boundaries is deeply incoherent and self-contradictory, because in attempting to do that human mind implicitly claims that it is entitled to set them and that presupposes that it is capable of setting them. It can set them, however, only if it is beyond them—only, indeed, if it is, then it is not subjected to any limits.

Habermas' postmetaphysical posture amounts to a decapitation of the human mind and of philosophy.

The article has presented only a critique of Habermas' postmetaphysical thinking. In order to be thoroughly intelligible and convincing, it would have had also to include a positive alternative conception; otherwise, the critique could be countered by saying that its demand for a theory of the World, the all-encompassing dimension, cannot be satisfied. To be sure, limitations of time and space prevented the author from exposing his own theory of the World, but he allows himself, in closing, to refer the audience to his systematic book *Structure and Being. A Theoretical Framework for a Systematic Philosophy*, in which he has presented a conception of systematic philosophy that attempts to elaborate at great length on the issues raised in this article.