

It appears that yet another debt I may owe to Habermas is a clear distinction between "the surface level of meaning" and "the very rules that inform the production of utterances or that inform linguistic interaction." Correspondingly, there is the distinction between "the explication of meaning," which is directed to "the semantic content of the symbolic formation," and "rational reconstruction," which is directed to "the intuitive [or pretheoretical] knowledge [or foreknowledge] of competent subjects." Whereas the first consists in understanding or critically interpreting the meaning of particular symbolic, or semiotic, formations, the second consists in systematically reconstructing "the general rules by which every interaction is governed," or "universal rules of pretheoretical knowledge or universal capabilities built into the human being for the production of utterances" (Holub: 11 f.).

Just this distinction is fundamental to my understanding of the relation as well as the difference between the humanities otherwise and philosophy as one of the humanities. The first are all directed, in one way or another, to "the explication of meaning," whereas the second is properly "rational reconstruction" (i.e., "reflection" in the first of the two senses in which, according to Holub, Habermas uses the term—to mean "consideration of the subjective conditions of possibility for knowledge in general," as distinct from the second sense of the term, in which it means "a subject's reflection on specific obfuscations that have developed in the course of human history and the resultant reorientation of action on the basis of ridding oneself of these obfuscations"[9]).

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