

Hegel's View of Language as a Critique of Empiricism

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I discuss Hegel's theory of language as found in several passages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and argue that this view of language can be taken as a critique of Empiricism as traditionally understood in the British Empiricist tradition and as Hegel discusses it in his *Encyclopaedia Logic*. Hegel's view of language is that it is a medium that captures the particular and the individual as well as the universal. I argue that such a language is ontologically epistemological and a priori as well as a posteriori. If Empiricism is the view that knowledge depends on sensory/a posteriori experience and given that Hegel criticizes Empiricism for taking only particulars as opposed to general experience as knowledge, I claim that Hegel's view of language opposes Empiricism in these two fundamental ways.

KEYWORDS: Hegel, Empiricism, Language, Universal, A priori

Hegel's critiques of Empiricism are the topic of much research in contemporary scholarship.¹ To be sure, Hegel himself made this a readily available topic for contemplation for his readers with his numerous open discussions of Empiricism, one of the most important of which may be found in the first part of his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (*EL*).² In this paper, I discuss Hegel's view of language in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*PhG*)³ in relation to Empiricism. Thus, I take on a topic that Hegel did not directly discuss in relation to Empiricism. However, I contend that this project nevertheless makes a useful addition to how we

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¹ See, for instance, DELIGIORGI, K. Religion, Love, and Law: Hegel's Early Metaphysics of Morals. In: S. Houlgate and M. Baur (Eds.). **A Companion to Hegel**. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011, pp. 23-44, or WESTPHAL, K. R. Self-Consciousness, Anti-Cartesianism, and Cognitive in Hegel's 1807 *Phenomenology*. In: S. Houlgate and M. Baur (Eds.). **A Companion to Hegel**. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011, pp. 68-90, or PINKARD, T. Spirit as the 'Unconditioned'. In: S. Houlgate and M. Baur (Eds.). **A Companion to Hegel**. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011, pp. 91-108.

² HEGEL, G.W.F. **The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze**. Trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991.

³ HEGEL, G.W.F. **Phenomenology of Spirit**. Trans. A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

think about Hegel's relation to Empiricism, since, as far as I am aware, no such discussion of the connection between his view of language and Empiricism exists in the scholarship on Hegel.

I discuss Hegel's view of language as presented in several passages of *PhG*, and the way in which this view of language shows that Empiricism is an inadequate model of cognition and epistemology. I begin with an account of Empiricism, followed by an account of Hegel's view of language in *PhG*. I explain that for Hegel, language is a medium that presents the tension between the individual and the universal in specific regard to the expression of the individual to the universal. I then discuss what Hegel's account of language shows to be deficient with Empiricism. This deficiency is two-fold. First, if there exists in conscious subjects a faculty that is at once a priori and a posteriori and stands ontologically in the middle ground – indeed, as a medium – for the expression of the individual as well as the universal, then an explanation of knowledge that relies solely on sensory experience must be false. Second, language as Hegel depicts it, is unable to capture the particular although it means to. If Empiricism privileges particulars over general experience, as I will show Hegel claims, then language cannot be a part of an Empiricist view of knowledge.

1. *Empiricism*

To understand how Hegel's view of language in the *PhG* can be taken to present a critique of Empiricism, we need to first grasp how Empiricism is traditionally understood and how Hegel viewed Empiricism. Although we can trace Empiricist ideas back to Aristotle,⁴ or perhaps even earlier, the views that are meant often when one speaks of Empiricism are those that arose in the 18th century with figures such as Hume and Locke (whose views are also doubtlessly in affinity with the ancient philosophers' views that tended towards empiricist ideas). And, indeed, Hegel makes a differentiation between the ancient Greeks and the so-called Empiricists such as Locke and Hume with his division of chapters in his *EL* when he explicitly takes on empiricism, but more on this will be discussed shortly.

⁴ See ARISTOTLE. *De Anima*, III.1-III.7.

Surely, there is a host of literature written on Empiricism in the 20th century,⁵ but I will not delve into these debates. Instead, I will focus on the Empiricism with which Hegel was acquainted. Empiricism, traditionally understood, is the view that knowledge comes exclusively from sensory experience. Empiricism, thus, is the view that all knowledge, and cognition, come through a posteriori means. Stuart Brown writes that “[t]he term «empiricist» is used broadly of anyone who thinks that all knowledge *of the world* is based upon experience—or, slightly more narrowly, of anyone who thinks that all *substantive* knowledge is based upon experience.”⁶ As Locke famously claimed, we are born with our minds as blank slates, only to gain knowledge through our sensory experience of the outside world.⁷ Hume held a similar position with his view that all our ideas come from sense perceptions⁸ and his insistence on the point that we may not know causality outside of our reliance on custom.⁹

There are various ways in which one can criticize empiricism, starting with the various criticisms of the Rationalists. However, since our main task here is to say something about Hegel's critique of empiricism, an at that, specifically to tie Hegel's view of language in the *PhG* to a critique of empiricism, I will save us the trouble of going into much detail about the details of different views of empiricism, its proponents, and its critics, but go straight to what Hegel thought of the empiricists and his critique, briefly, to place us in a position to be able to discuss his philosophy of language in a manner suitable to address empiricism as a problematic.

I find it is appropriate to consider Hegel's explicit undertaking of the topic of empiricism in his *EL* to understand his view and main criticism of empiricism. This discussion takes place within the space of Hegel's three *Position[s] of Thought with Respect to Objectivity* where he undertakes to discuss the various significant (in the way he sees it) movements of thought

⁵ This debate was considered by many to be concluded with W. SELLARS's 1956 **Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind** (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997) in which he rejects the idea of a ‘given,’ that we can have perceptual content without pre-established conceptual content. There is further significant discussion, however, also concerning Hegel, by John McDowell and Robert Brandom. See REDDING, P. The Analytic Neo-Hegelianism of John McDowell and Robert Brandom. In: Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Eds.). **A Companion to Hegel**. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011, pp. 576-593.

⁶ BROWN, S. Introduction. In: S. Brown (Ed.) **British Philosophy and the Age of Enlightenment: Routledge History of Philosophy Volume 5**. London: Routledge, 1996, p. 10.

⁷ See LOCKE, J. **An Essay Concerning Human Understanding**. Books I and II.

⁸ See HUME, D. **An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding**. Section 2: Of the Origin of Ideas.

⁹ See HUME, D. **An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding**. Section 4: Skeptical Doubts Concerning the Operations of the Understanding.

(philosophy) and their modes of operation and merits. Empiricism is found in the first part of the *Second Position of Thought with Regard to Objectivity*. It comes after the first position which is “Metaphysics,” i.e. “the naïve way of proceeding” as “all philosophy in its beginnings.”¹⁰ It is so because this initial way holds the conviction that we may cognize objects truly as they are.¹¹

In Hegel's view, Empiricism is different from this initial naïve position of thought. Hegel claims about empiricism that, similarly to the naïve position of thought, it does not seek “what is true in thought itself,” but nevertheless like the native position, “Empiricism proceeds to draw it from *experience*, from what is outwardly or inwardly present.”¹² However, what really differentiates Empiricism, for Hegel, is the emphasis on “this or that single perception” as opposed to experience in general with its “form of universal notions, principles, and laws, etc..”¹³

Hegel finds valuable in Empiricism the fact that “in Empiricism there lies this great principle, that what is true must be in actuality and must be there for our perception.”¹⁴ For Hegel, this gives one a certain “freedom” since one needs to see for oneself in the “here and now,” in the present, as opposed to an “empty Beyond,” to be able to know.¹⁵ Nevertheless, this is precisely the problem that Hegel identifies with Empiricism: according to Empiricism, knowledge must depend on the here and the now, but the here and now is always fleeting; the here and now never stays stagnant and always changes into another here and now.¹⁶ Although Hegel presents a few other critiques of Empiricism, such as that in Empiricism “truth, universality, and necessity appear to be something unjustified” or that “juridical or ethical determinations and laws, as well as the content of religion, appear to be something contingent,”¹⁷ I take the above mentioned critique to be the main one which is the most serious. For, if our knowledge is dependent on what cannot remain still, then how are we to make any knowledge claim with solemnity?

¹⁰ HEGEL. *EL*, §26.

¹¹ HEGEL. *EL*, §26.

¹² HEGEL. *EL*, §37, 38.

¹³ HEGEL. *EL*, §38.

¹⁴ HEGEL. *EL*, §38.

¹⁵ HEGEL. *EL*, §38..

¹⁶ HEGEL. *EL*, §38, Zusatz.

¹⁷ HEGEL. *EL*, §39.

A view that we ought perhaps to consider is Tom Rockmore's in his *Cognition: An Introduction to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹⁸ Rockmore claims that there are three kinds of Empiricism, and that Hegel's view falls into the third kind. The first view, according to Rockmore, is that of the English Empiricists, who claim "direct knowledge of an independent object."¹⁹ The second kind of Empiricism is the Kantian one; this "empiricism claims that we only experience and know dependent objects."²⁰ The third kind of Empiricism, 'tertiary empiricism' in Rockmore's words, agrees with secondary Empiricism in "restricting experience to dependent objects" but goes a step further and claims that we cannot "know objects independent of us."²¹ According to this kind of Empiricism, then, we cannot know "anything else beyond experience," where, of course the term 'experience' is qualified to mean our *Erlebnis* of the object, our cognizance of it. Rockmore writes, for Hegel, "knowledge begins with but does not arise in experience, and does not refer to anything further than what is given in experience."²²

Rockmore's insight is valuable for understanding Hegel's conception of experience and knowledge of objects, especially in relation to the English Empiricists and Kant. Hence, it is important to have discussed it here. However, it is also important to present Rockmore's distinction to be able to see exactly which view Hegel is arguing against and how it is different from Hegel's own view. In the following discussion of language and the analysis with regard to Empiricism, the view that I will present that Hegel is against is mainly the first kind of Empiricism. Although Hegel sees the second kind of Empiricism that Rockmore identifies to be close to the first kind of Empiricism, he nevertheless sees it as distinct²³ and does not mean the Kantian view of knowledge when he discusses Empiricism. Therefore, my discussion will also be limited to Hegel's critique of the first kind of Empiricism.

¹⁸ ROCKMORE, T. *Cognition: An Introduction to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

¹⁹ ROCKMORE. *Cognition*, 197.

²⁰ ROCKMORE. *Cognition*, 197.

²¹ ROCKMORE. *Cognition*, 197.

²² ROCKMORE. *Cognition*, 197.

²³ In *EL*, the chapter titled *The Second Position of Thought with Respect to Objectivity* is divided into two sections: *Empiricism* and *Critical Philosophy* which refers to Kantian philosophy. Hegel writes, at the beginning of the latter, "Critical Philosophy has in common with Empiricism that it accepts experience as the *only* basis for our cognitions; but it will not let them count as truths, but only as cognitions of appearances" (*EL* §40). This claim, as well as the division of the chapter, indicates that when Hegel speaks of Empiricism, he is not speaking of Kantian philosophy.

Of course there is a lot that can be said about Hegel's discussions of Empiricism. However, since our focus here is on Hegel's view of language, what we have focused on so far will suffice to show how Hegel's view of language in *PhG* emphasizes and in a manner enlightens his criticism and aversion to Empiricism, in some ways similarly to and in some ways different from the criticism I have highlighted here.

2. *Language*

In *PhG*, language takes an explicit role in several places. While language is not the main focus in the journey of consciousness through its shapes in *PhG*, we can nevertheless see that it plays an important role in the whole progression when we pay attention to its unfolding in the various places in which it makes an appearance. Language, in all of these instances reflects the universal and abstracts from the individual. In the overview that I will present in this section, we will see that language is presented as a medium under the employment of the individual consciousness to be able to express the individual or the universal, either one or the other or both, but it never succeeds to express simply either the individual or the universal alone, and is thus always stuck as a medium, a mid-point, between the individual and the universal. There are interesting consequences of this in relation to empiricism, since language is in close relation to cognition, but I will discuss these consequences in the following section after the thorough examination of the passages in which there is explicit discussion of language in the *PhG*.²⁴

The last chapter in which Hegel discusses language explicitly in *PhG* is the Religion chapter, in two distinct sections: *Abstract work of art* and *Spiritual work of art*. Given the structure of the *PhG*, we know that what is implicit at the beginning of the work becomes explicit through the trials and failures of consciousness that is undergoing education and the determination and mediation that this movement requires and brings about. Hence, it is useful to explore these sections first to then make sense of what comes earlier, for surely the discussion of the later sections sheds light into how we are to understand the earlier discussions of language.

²⁴ There will not be a discussion of Absolute Knowing because it has no explicit discussion of language. The relation of Absolute Knowing to the discussion in the paper is the topic for a further study.

In the *Spiritual work of art* section, language is presented as expressing universal humanity because the national spirits unite under and are expressed by language.²⁵ The spiritual work of art is first in the form of the Epic where it “contains the universal content of the world”²⁶ and thus is used in a manner that makes it employ the universal. Then it is in the form of Tragedy that gathers and unifies, bringing individuals together into a universality, including the individual actor playing the part of her character expressing universals through her language.²⁷

Here we see that language does not present only what the individual desires to express, but rather humanity as a universal. The individual is something that goes beyond herself, which is manifested in her use of language: she cannot do but express the universal humanity because she belongs to a nation and national spirits unite under language. Hence, each use of language points towards something much beyond the individual herself. This is the highest point in the *PhG* with regard to language use: since this is the latest section in which language is explicitly discussed, it is also the most determinate and mediated account of language. In all of the earlier discussions of language, we find similar, albeit less determinate and mediated accounts.

However, this universal humanity of the united national spirits is not the only manner in which language shows an expression of ‘humanity.’ In fact, reading back through the *PhG*, as I have suggested, bearing in mind that the *Spiritual work of art* section of the Religion chapter is where language is most developed, we may see that the tension regarding language is about expressing some form of humanity as a universal through individual means.

In the *Abstract work of art* section of the Religion chapter, though there is not the complexity of the unity of national spirits yet, there is the universality expressed through language first as “symbol”^{28,29} and then as “hymn.”³⁰ The symbol comes up when the artwork in the human form loses its animal shape to become “a mere symbol”³¹ and as such becomes

²⁵ HEGEL. *PhG*, §727.

²⁶ HEGEL. *PhG*, §729.

²⁷ HEGEL. *PhG*, §741.

²⁸ A.V. Miller translates here the word *Zeichen* as ‘symbol’ when it is better translated as ‘sign,’ since Hegel himself makes a distinction between *Zeichen* and *Symbol* in other works, for instance see HEGEL, G.W.F. **Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts**. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2013, p. 161f, or HEGEL, G.W.F.. **Ästhetik I**. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2013, p. 394f.

²⁹ HEGEL. *PhG*, §707.

³⁰ HEGEL. *PhG*, §710.

³¹ HEGEL. *PhG*, §707.

language; this particular human form is language. Thus the individual work of art expresses something beyond itself which is the human form. By abstracting the animal form to a symbol, it is turning the individual form to what is accessible universally. This use of language as symbol expresses the universal human form.

The hymn is similar to the symbol in that it expresses what goes beyond the individual artwork. Just as the symbol expresses a higher universality than the individual artwork, the hymn that is brought about through the artwork is meant to transcend the particularity of the artwork. It is used because the artwork has been made by the artist who knows her creation as hers, which means that the artwork requires a ‘higher element’ to bring god (that is, something beyond itself) forth. This ‘higher element’ turns out to be Language³² in the form of a hymn.³³ The requirement of a higher element is a way of abstracting from the individual into the universal: from the artist’s particular individual relation with the work of art to what the work of art means as a symbol of god (i.e., how the crowds take it to be).³⁴

In the Spirit chapter which precedes the Religion chapter, though the focus of the discussions of language is not on humanity but on culture and society, humanity can be seen implicitly present in culture and society, just like culture and society is present as superseded [*aufgehoben*] in the humanity in Religion. In the way that language expresses the unity of the national spirits or the human form through individual uses of language in Religion, in Spirit too language is used by the individual in various ways to express the universal. In the *Morality* section, in the part on *Conscience*, language is used by the individual to express the universal and is for others, i.e. the universal, as something beyond the individual.^{35,36} This happens when the individual’s deeds are a kind of self-expression: they are language that exists for others (for the universal) and they create sociality through acknowledgement and recognition.^{37,38} Language

³² A.V. Miller in his translation chooses to capitalize the word ‘language’ in this instance. This may be because the language that is being discussed here is a divine form of language and may be seen as distinct from and more fundamental than language in the other instances that it was discussed.

³³ HEGEL. PhG, §710.

³⁴ HEGEL. PhG, §710.

³⁵ HEGEL. PhG, §652.

³⁶ Hegel himself emphasizes this by writing “[h]ere again, then, we see language as the existence of Spirit” (HEGEL PhG §652).

³⁷ HEGEL. PhG, §650.

³⁸ HEGEL. PhG, §651.

here is not something that the individual uses but is what the individual becomes, that is, the expression of the universal in individual terms. The self as language is thus necessarily universal.^{39,40}

Earlier in the Spirit chapter, in the *Culture* section, language is presented as being employed by the individual to express the universal in two ways: one concerning “the haughty vassal”⁴¹ and the other concerning the “unlimited monarch.”⁴² The haughty vassal as an individual represents the state power which is a universal. The haughty vassal acts on behalf of the state power.⁴³ Although the vassal himself is an individual, he represents that which is far removed from his individuality. Thus the vassal’s action and the relation of the vassal to individuals are at a universal level. Consequently the vassal’s language too does not relate to the intrinsic being of an individual. In other words, the individual that represents the state power represents it as a universal and not for the individual good.^{44,45} Hence, though humanity is not expressed explicitly as it is in Religion, the universal is in the form of the society for and to whom the haughty vassal speaks.

The monarch too, is an individual using language to express the universal. An individual becomes the ‘monarch’ by being called as such and has his power by virtue of this act of naming.⁴⁶ The monarch at the same time loses his individuality because others are telling him what he is through his name, especially since the name is what makes the monarch’s power actual.⁴⁷ Language in this use is the mediation through which Spirit comes about.^{48,49} Here, implicitly humanity is in the background. The emergence of Spirit as a universal through the individual uses of language is later expressed in the Religion chapter as the unity of the national spirits.

³⁹ HEGEL. *PhG*, §654.

⁴⁰ HEGEL. *PhG*, §662.

⁴¹ HEGEL. *PhG*, §505.

⁴² HEGEL. *PhG*, §510.

⁴³ HEGEL. *PhG*, §505.

⁴⁴ HEGEL. *PhG*, §505.

⁴⁵ HEGEL. *PhG*, §506.

⁴⁶ HEGEL. *PhG*, §510.

⁴⁷ HEGEL. *PhG*, §510.

⁴⁸ Hegel writes that “[t]his language is, therefore, not yet Spirit that completely knows and expresses itself” (HEGEL, *PhG* §510), which indicates that even though language is not Spirit yet at this stage of *PhG*, it will be at a later stage. This will be a stage at which Spirit completely knows and expresses itself.

⁴⁹ HEGEL. *PhG*, §510.

In the Reason chapter,⁵⁰ Hegel indicates that speech and language are an expression of the ‘inner’ being of a human.⁵¹ Speech is then seen as a medium employed by the individual to express on the ‘outer’ what is ‘inner.’⁵² Here language expresses what is particular to the individual in universal terms. Thus the individual expression is to be understood only through a universal medium. What is most specific to the individual, the inner aspect of the individual, when expressed in speech, becomes something outer and no longer specific to the individual but something that is to be interpreted by others in universal terms.⁵³ Hegel is here already speaking specifically of a ‘human,’ whose inner aspects are to be evaluated by other humans in the outer, and hence in universal terms. This is an expression of the implicit ‘humanity’ that is later discussed explicitly in the Religion chapter with the discussion of language. Language, as a human faculty,⁵⁴ is employed in Reason already as such, already referring to the humanity of the individual that uses language and the humanity of those who interpret that language.

In Sense-certainty, the section of *PhG* most famous for its discussion of language use, consciousness wants to express what is immediately and indeterminately available to it with words such as ‘This,’ ‘I,’ ‘Here,’ and ‘Now.’^{55,56} However, consciousness’s use of these words turns out to be problematic because consciousness uses these words to express a particular thing⁵⁷ or place or time,⁵⁸ yet these words never succeed at picking out the individual to which they are intended to refer; rather they refer to a universal.⁵⁹

There are two salient points here. The first is that our use of words is mediated by how another might use them: the use of language depends on others.⁶⁰ Hence, the use of language is universal. Even though there is not yet a community, or any other consciousness explicitly present, we see that because the use of ‘I’ can refer to others who are ‘I’ as well, there is

⁵⁰ By the time consciousness reaches the ‘Observing Reason’ section of the Reason chapter, consciousness has already passed the self-consciousness shape and thus has an understanding of itself as subject and is apperceptive. The claims made of language in this section reflect the ability to see ‘inside oneself.’

⁵¹ HEGEL. *PhG*, §312.

⁵² HEGEL. *PhG*, §312.

⁵³ HEGEL. *PhG*, §312.

⁵⁴ This notion of faculties is relevant to the discussion of a priority in the later sections of this paper.

⁵⁵ HEGEL. *PhG*, §90.

⁵⁶ HEGEL. *PhG*, §95.

⁵⁷ HEGEL. *PhG*, §91.

⁵⁸ HEGEL. *PhG*, §95, §96.

⁵⁹ HEGEL. *PhG*, §96.

⁶⁰ Even though this is not explicitly stated in this chapter, it is implicit.

implicitly a community, Spirit, and even nations as we see in the Religion chapter before Absolute Knowing. The second point is that the words in question for sense-certainty refer to concepts that are universal. Even though ‘Now,’ at the time when the statement is uttered or written down expresses a truth, the truth of that claim is limited to the time in which it is uttered.⁶¹ Our use of such words holds a distinct meaning from each particular instance of use.⁶² In both of these points we see that language remains as a mere mid-point and medium, not successful in attaining the end that consciousness expects of its use: “it is not possible for us to ever say, or express in words, a sensuous being that we *mean*.[”]^{63, 64}

There are four distinct patterns that can be observed in these discussions of language in *PhG*. The first one is what I have been arguing all along, that there is a dynamic between the individual and the universal generally in each case where language is discussed: the individual is using language, yet cannot help but express the universal, and universal expressions always come out through the individual. In this way, (and this is the second pattern) language is always a medium. However, there are two other separate nuances regarding this tension and the role of language as a medium. One is that in some cases specific individual circumstances are to be understood universally, and in other cases, conversely, the representation of the universal has to be done by the individual, so the individual is burdened with a task that goes beyond the individual.

In Sense-certainty, *Reason*, and the *Morality* section of the Spirit chapter, the individual is using language to express something individual and particular but this ends up being understood in universal terms. This shows, first of all, that language fails at expressing the individual because whenever the individual tries to express herself, it becomes a universal expression, and secondly,

⁶¹ HEGEL. *PhG*, §95, §96.

⁶² This is similar to the discussion about empiricism earlier. I will take this issue up in more detail in the following sections.

⁶³ HEGEL. *PhG*, §97.

⁶⁴ K. WESTPHAL, in his *Hegel's Epistemology: A Philosophical Introduction to the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003) claims that the epistemological theory that is presented in this section of *PhG* is that “Our conceptions of «time,» «times,» «space,» «spaces,» «1,» and «individuation» are pure a priori and are necessary for identifying and knowing any object or event” (WESTPHAL, *Hegel's Epistemology*, 66-67). This claim about the a priority of these concepts found in language will become relevant in my discussion later. Westphal also claims, of the following chapter on Perception, which I do not discuss in this paper, that the epistemological theory found in it is that “Observation terms are insufficient for empirical knowledge; our conception of «physical object» is pure a priori and is necessary for identifying and knowing any object or event” (*ibid.*). This analysis is similar to my analyses later in this paper with regard to a priority and empiricism.

that as a medium, language in these instances functions as privileging the universal though it starts from an individual point.⁶⁵ However, we can see the relation between the individual and the universal happen the other way around as well: this is in the *Culture* section of the Spirit chapter and the two discussions of language in the Religion chapter. In these cases, the representation of the universal has to be done by the individual in the use of language. Thus, the individual is tasked to express what goes beyond the individual using language that is individual.⁶⁶ It is beyond the goals of this paper to explain this nuance in depth. Nevertheless, pointing out this nuance is useful in showing the intricacies of the tension between the individual and the universal regarding language, which is of importance for the following sections of this paper.

3. Critique through language

Now that we have a view of the way in which language is discussed in the *PhG* in all of the passages in which it appears explicitly, an account of how these seemingly disparate discussions of language not only come together but also form a narrative of their own, and an account of Empiricism to work with, we are in a position to evaluate my initial claim that Hegel's account of language presents a critique of Empiricism.

⁶⁵ In Sense-certainty, consciousness expresses over and over again what is individual, yet by virtue of the universal characteristic of these words, i.e. referring to more than the particular individual, they pick out different things in different circumstances. Not only is it possible for a word like 'This' to be ambiguous in picking out the individual to which it is meant to refer, it is also the case that such words have their meaning by virtue of being universal: one would not understand what 'This' meant unless it could pick out various potential 'This'es. In Reason, the discussion of language starts along with the discussion of the particularity of the individual as expressed in her "lineaments" (HEGEL, *PhG*, §311). Once the individual outwardly expresses what is inner to her, this expression is left to be interpreted by others. Thus what is inner is brought to the outer to be at the mercy of the understanding of those who do not have direct access to the inwardness of the individual. In the *Morality* section of the Spirit chapter, the deeds of the self are an expression of the self's individuality, but recognition of this individuality creates sociality, as mentioned above. Insofar as they are expression, they are language. Language as such is the indication of the existence of community in which communication takes place.

⁶⁶ In the *Culture* section of the Spirit chapter, both the haughty vassal and the monarch have to represent through use of language the universal, the society for which they hold power, even though they are mere individuals. In the case of the haughty vassal, language has its point of departure in the individual to express the universal, and Spirit comes forth as actuality in this 'mediation' (HEGEL, *PhG*, §509). The case is similar with the monarch, and Spirit of culture is found in this use of language (HEGEL, *PhG*, §513). In the *Abstract Work of Art* section of the Religion chapter, in both of the ways in which language is used, i.e. as symbols and as hymns, language is a representation of the universal that has to be done by the individual work of art. Thus the universal is given voice through the individual. In the *Spiritual work of art* section, the national spirits are expressed in language and are expressed through individuals. In this sense, the universal finds expression in particular individuals that use language.

However, before I start with this evaluation, I will mention that Katharina Dulckeit, in her essay *Language, Objects, and the Missing Link: Toward a Hegelean Theory of Reference*⁶⁷ discusses Hegel's theory of language as providing a solution to the problems of reference in the analytic philosophy of language of the last century. She mentions that "language and world, word and object, speaker and referent remain opposed and mutually exclusive in experience"⁶⁸ and details the problems with which theories of reference are plagued. She explains, however, that for Hegel, these dichotomies do not necessarily pose a problem like they do for current theories of reference, because, for Hegel, "all opposition is mediated while, at the same time, mediation is harmless."⁶⁹ She writes "[a]ccording to Hegel, this dichotomy between inner and outer—both ontologically and *phenomenologically*—is a deeply misleading and profoundly incoherent idea."⁷⁰ Thus, she has a similar account to my position on Hegel's view of language.

Though her account is valuable in placing Hegel within the discussion of reference in analytic philosophy of language and showing that Hegel's view of language solves various problems of theories of reference, her account is problematic. Her view towards Hegel's theory of language is empiricist from the outset since she limits her account of Hegel's view of language to whether it is successful in reference. This already condemns language to an empiricist agenda insofar as reference is explained according to the relation of referent and reference: language, as referring, is reference to an object, its referent. Of course there is no denying that the problem of reference has been significant in discussions in the philosophy of language in the past century starting with Frege. This, nevertheless, does not mean that we ought to confine Hegel within the same boundaries as well. Hegel's theory of language goes beyond the limits of just basing language on a theory of reference, as is evidenced by the inherent critique of empiricism that can be found in his account. Dulckeit herself foresees this critique when she writes "Hegelians might see as illegitimate any attempt to appropriate Hegel in this fashion because they take Hegel's project as going beyond the «limited» problem of reference."⁷¹ However, my reason for critique is not for the reason she identifies: my issue is the empiricist boundary of her approach, not

⁶⁷ DULCKEIT, K. Language, Objects, and the Missing Link: Toward a Hegelean Theory of Reference. In: J. O'Neill Surber (Ed.). **Hegel and Language**. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006, pp. 145-164.

⁶⁸ DULCKEIT. Language, Objects, p. 147.

⁶⁹ DULCKEIT. Language, Objects, p. 147.

⁷⁰ DULCKEIT. Language, Objects, p. 154-5.

⁷¹ DULCKEIT. Language, Objects, p. 155.

merely the limitation of the problem of reference. Although there is research done on the merits of Hegel's philosophy of language and attempts to use it to solve problems in current philosophy of language, there is not, as far as I am aware, an effort to show that Hegel's view of language can be taken to provide a critique of empiricism and can also be evaluated as such.

To go back to our analysis of Hegel's view of language, we have seen that in every instance in which language appears in the *PhG* there is a tension between the individual and the universal: the individual uses language to express either something individual but cannot do so because of the reliance of language on the universal, or to express something universal but cannot do so because the individual herself cannot be representative of the universal through her use of language. We have also seen that Empiricism, as the view that champions that knowledge is acquired through a posteriori means, is critiqued by Hegel because it privileges the particular instances of experience. The question to ask then is what does this tension between the individual and the universal that language presents as a medium have to do with Empiricism? How does this characterization of language oppose a view of knowledge that privileges particular instances?

To make the connection between language and Empiricism, we need to first explain what specifically language has to do with knowledge and cognition [*Erkenntnis*]. When viewed simply as a tool of expression, one may be deceived to think that language is removed from knowledge, and is not integral to the cognition process. However, when we consider carefully Hegel's accounts of language, we may see that it is not so easy to disentangle language itself as a mere tool of expression from the knowledge process.

That language is a part of the knowledge process and not simply an after-thought that has only to do with expression as separate from knowledge is clear in every instance in which Hegel discusses language, which I enumerated in the above sections of this paper. This shows that there is something ontologically epistemological about language. For instance, in the Sense-Certainty section, consciousness comes to know and cognize the inadequacy of knowledge through particulars through her use of language. We see here that the use of language is a knowledge act: consciousness's knowledge cannot be separated from her use of language, from her expression of this knowledge, that is, the expression is the knowledge itself. Or, if we look at the *The world of self-alienated Spirit* in the *Spirit* chapter, the monarch is a monarch by virtue of being named as such. Here, language has the power of bringing to reality through expression what it expresses.

Thus, language is not a detached tool that expresses reality, but rather ‘makes’ reality insofar as it makes it known through expression. In every instance of language discussed in this paper, one can see a similar pattern, that language is not a detached tool but rather integral to the knowledge-process. Hence, language, in the way in which Hegel treats it in the *PhG*, is ontologically connected to epistemology; an account of language, therefore, will be relevant to an account of knowledge, an epistemology.

If, then, language is ontologically relevant for epistemology, we may be able to discuss Hegel’s position on language in relation to Empiricism, i.e. a certain account of knowledge. In Hegel’s discussions of language, we see that language is not simply something *a posteriori*, does not only depend on sensory experience. We have repeated many times that language relies on the individual as well as the universal, but we can see that this also translates into a claim about language that has to do with a priority and *a posteriority*. I claim that in Hegel’s view of language, language cannot only be *a posteriori*, as an Empiricist view of language would require.

One may see language as an *a posteriori* phenomenon: after all, language acquisition takes place only in social context,⁷² and language use is perceived through the senses in hearing or in sight. However, as Hegel shows us, this is a superficial rendering of what language is at its core: a medium of expression integral in the knowledge process that depends on the individual as much as it depends on the universal and vice versa. This reliance on the individual and the universal in a co-dependence gives language its *a priori* characteristic. If language is an integral part of the knowledge-process in an ontological manner, then what more is there left to say about its *a priori* nature? Hence, if language has an *a posteriori* as well as an *a priori* character, then it cannot be explained simply through Empiricism; that is, Empiricism, relying only on a *posteriority*, falls short on explaining a phenomenon of language that is as rich and ontologically deep-rooted as with what Hegel presents us.

However, this is not the only point that can be presented against Empiricism through Hegel’s account of language. As I discussed in the section on Empiricism above, what I take to

⁷² This claim is consistent with the theories of universal grammar. If grammar is hardwired in our brains, then the requirement of being in a social environment to acquire language through what is hardwired in our brains is not contradictory. See CHOMSKY, N. **Language and Mind**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Furthermore, the cases of feral children show that until one is in a social environment in which language is used, one does not acquire language. See CURTISS, S. **Genie: A Psycholinguistic Study of a Modern-Day “Wild Child”**. Boston: Academic Press, 1977.

be Hegel's main critique of Empiricism in *EL* is that Empiricism fails to consider experience as a whole but privileges particulars. As was clear from the outset of the discussions on language, it is impossible to indicate only particulars through language: one always refers to more than the individual in all uses of language; the universal is always implied if not takes the forefront in any particular expression of a particular. Although each single instance of use of language is a particular use, it always refers to much more than that particular and meaning could not be conveyed even if it would have been possible to limit oneself to particular meanings, because language only makes sense through its universal character. Hence, at the core, ontologically, language, in Hegel's account, shows that Empiricism is not an adequate account of knowledge.

In this paper, then, I have presented the reader with two ways in which Hegel's view of language as found in *PhG* opposes what is traditionally understood by Empiricism in terms of British Empiricism and what Hegel specifically critiques in his *EL*. There is a lot more that can be said about Hegel's view about Empiricism, his relation to and aversion from it. However, focusing on the view of language presented in *PhG*, we saw that language is a medium that is at once a priori and a posteriori, and cannot focus simply on particulars and individuals but must always necessarily involve universals, and we emphasized a critique of Empiricism that focused on Hegel's view of language in this particular work. Further fruitful engagement in this topic can go in the direction of expanding the focus on the view of language to more than just the *PhG* and perhaps engaging in more detail with Hegel's other explicit discussions of Empiricism.

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