

The Notion of Objectivity in 19th Century German Philosophy and its Role for the *Aufbau*

Christian Damböck
Institute Vienna Circle
University of Vienna
christian.damboeck@univie.ac.at

- This talk is the result of the first period of a research project on Carnap and Dilthey (FWF research grant P24615), which is expected to run from 04.2012 until 03.2015

Overview

1. Introduction
2. Dilthey's twofold conception of objectivity
3. Cohen's empirification of the a priori
4. Objectivity in the *Aufbau*
5. A note on (possible) influences

1.

Introduction

Michael Friedman's assessment of structural objectivity in the *Aufbau*

Our starting point is Michael Friedman's understanding of the *Aufbau* as being mainly concerned with (structural) objectivity:

[1] [The] most fundamental aim of the *Aufbau* [is] the articulation and defense of a radically new conception of objectivity. (Friedman 1999, 95)

The main problem

- What exactly does „objectivity“ mean here, in comparison to notions such as subjectivity, intersubjectivity, truth or realism?
- Can „objectivity“ – even in its „purely structural“ varieties – be something entirely unconnected with an external reality?
- Or does „objectivity“ inevitably lead to a „realism“ of some sort?
- Our starting point is the historical account of Daston & Galison that can be seen as a radical version of the first option

Objectivity counters subjectivity

[2] What is the nature of objectivity? First and foremost, objectivity is the suppression of some aspects of the self, the countering of subjectivity. Objectivity and subjectivity define each other, like left and right or up and down. (Daston & Galison 2007, 36f)

Objectivity has absolutely nothing to do with truth

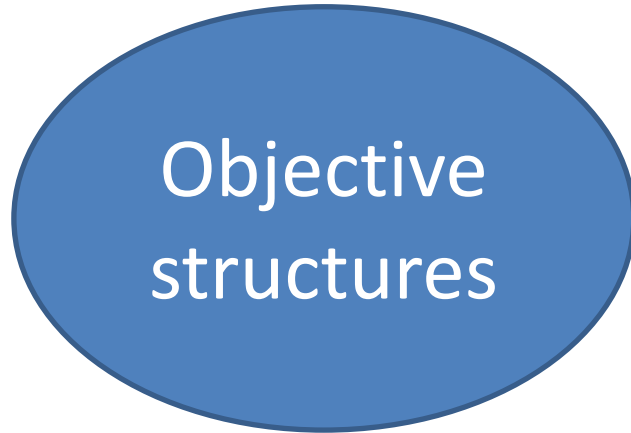
[3] [...] structural relationships [...] outlived the piled-up ruins of past scientific theories and the idiosyncracies of present scientists; these were “the only objective reality”.
[...]

Yet the preoccupations of late twentieth-century structural realists were not those of early twentieth-century structural objectivists: the former, like all realists, were primarily interested in the justification for the claim that science was true, that it correctly described real features of the world; the latter (including Poincaré) were chiefly concerned with the justification of the claim that science was objective, that it was „common to all thinking beings.“ (Daston & Galison 2007, 260f)

Objectivity = universal communicability (and nothing else)

- The radical claim by Daston & Galison is that Objectivity, for *all* philosophers and scientists between 1850 and 1930
 - is *positively* described as the property of being universally communicable
 - is *negatively* described as the property of having absolutely no ability to establish any connection to an external reality whatsoever

Pure selfs



universally
communicable

The external
world
(of objects)

(There are no connections here)

The main claim

- We share the positive side of the picture of objectivity as developed by Daston & Galison but not its negative side
- We share the general claim that objectivity as an epistemic virtue emerged in the second half of the 19th century
- But we claim that, in contrast to Daston's & Galison's description, for some (or most) philosophers and scientists of that time objectivity was deeply connected with external realities

Historical counterexamples: Objectivity and the external world

- 1) Objectivity may involve connections with objects at two different levels: (1) the observable spatiotemporal world and (2) the world of mental objects (*geistige Gegenstände*)
→ **Dilthey**
- 2) Objectivity may involve a modified transcendental story which is objectively bound to the respective state of the fact of science and culture
→ **Cohen**
- 3) Objectivity in the *Aufbau* is connected with these two external aspects of objectivity
→ **Carnap**

2.

Dilthey's twofold conception of objectivity

Justifications for our belief in the existence of an external world

[4] The causal nexus linking changes within the sensory organ to an independent external object as well as the motor impulses and voluntary movements of our own body is a product of logical processes. This nexus already presupposes the reality of the external world. All inductive processes of everyday life and of the science flesh out this causal nexus. Our actions can all be compared to experiments belonging to this inductive nexus. Thus life in its entirety, indeed the lives of all generation linked together, finally constitute a system of inductions that have the existence of external objects as their presupposition [...] (Dilthey 2010, 33f)

A non-absolutist (local) realism

- Science allows us to ensure that our beliefs in the existence of an external world are justified
- However, this only implies that our (scientific) statements may somewhat „save the phenomena“
- We just ensure certain connections with the observable parts of the spatio-temporal world but not with „theoretical entities“
- Instead of claiming the existence of “theoretical entities”, Dilthey establishes a second kind of objectivism that addresses “mental objects”:

An objectivist conception of hermeneutics

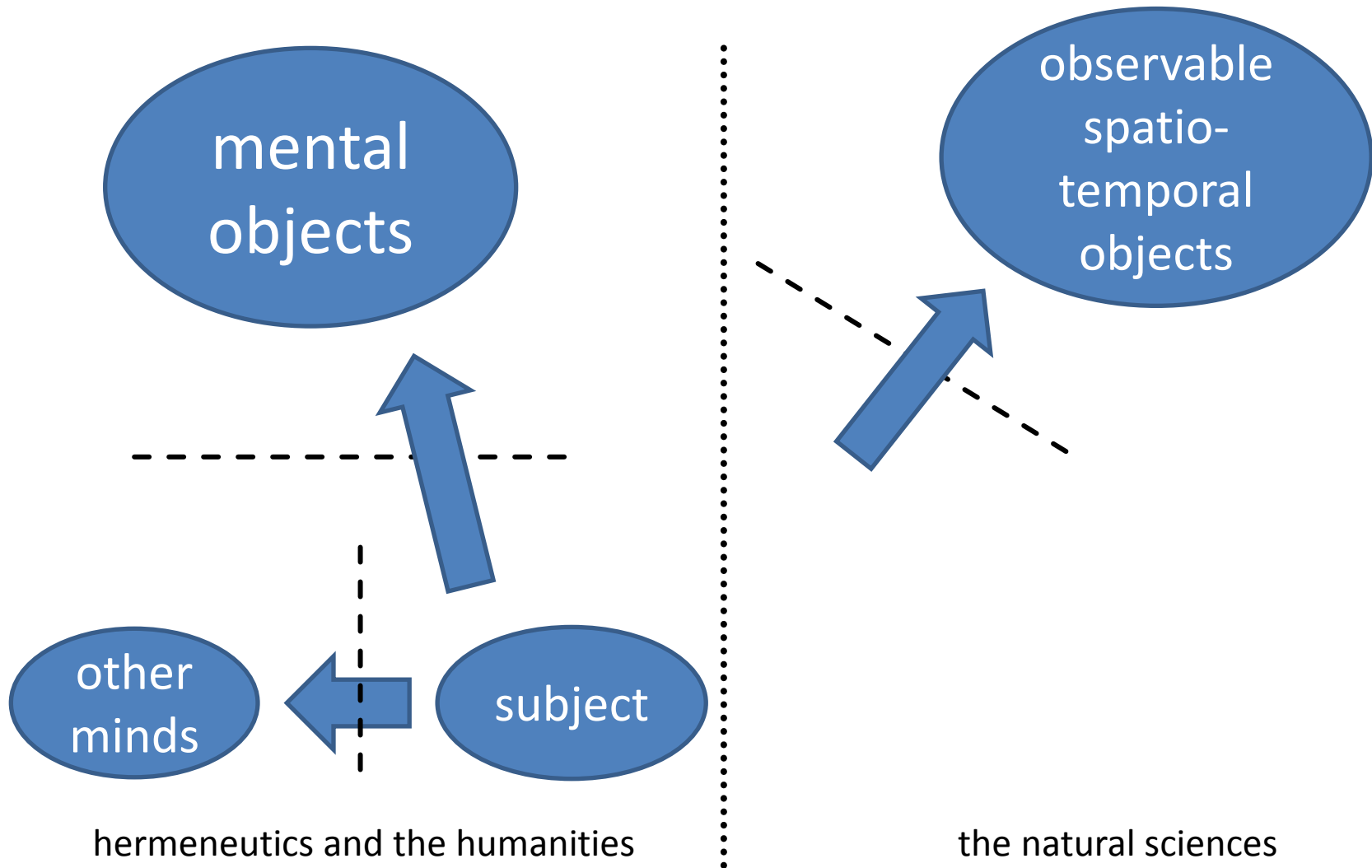
[5] Action everywhere presupposes the understanding of other persons; much of our happiness as human beings derives from being able to feel the states of mind of others; the entire science of philology and of history is based on the presupposition that such reunderstanding of what is singular can be raised to objectivity. (Dilthey 1996, 235)

[6] [The] main purpose [of hermeneutics is] to preserve the universal validity of historical interpretation against the inroads of romantic caprice and skeptical subjectivity, and to give a theoretical justification for such validity, upon which all the certainty of historical knowledge is founded. (Dilthey 1996, 250)

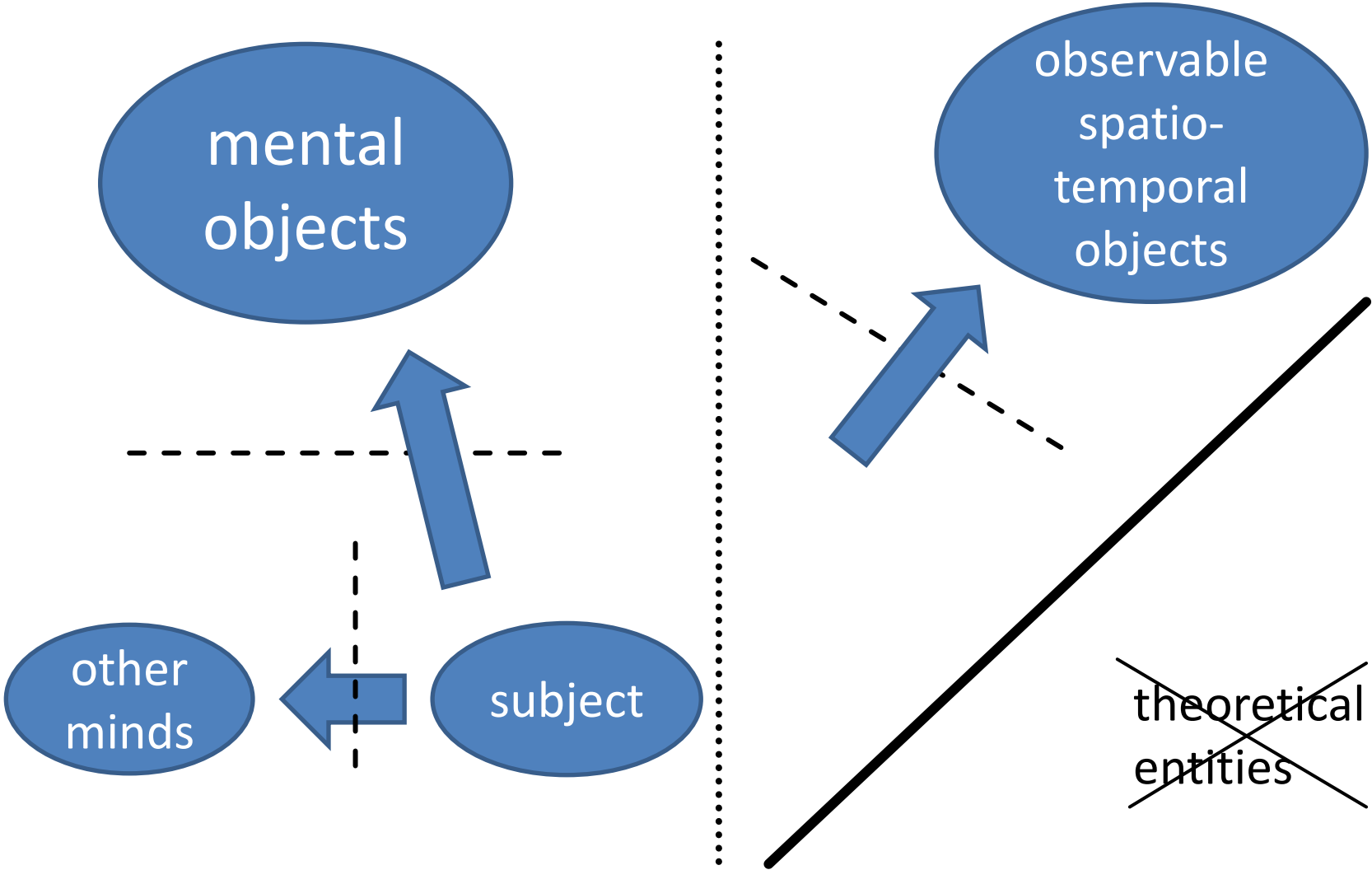
Dilthey = \neg Gadamer

- Whereas more recent hermeneutic conceptions are based on the idea of the principal inaccessibility of other minds and thoughts (Gadamer: „the real extension of our ego lies in the encounter of the un-understandable“)
- Dilthey, following the hermeneutic tradition of Schleiermacher and his teacher August Boeckh, is convinced that objective understanding must be possible (provided that we have sufficient information)

Dilthey's twofold conception of objectivity



No platonic heaven



3.

Cohen's empirification of the a priori

The third pillar: transcendental objectivity

- In Dilthey's writings there is not much mentioning of a third aspect of objectivity that nevertheless may be seen as a cornerstone of late 19th century externalist conceptions of objectivity
- Roughly, the absence of an absolute measure for truth does not imply that there is no measure at all for the *non-empirical content* of mental objects
- In other words, the absence of absolutism does not rule out *the possibility of a transcendental story*

The transcendental requirements of the fact of science and culture

- For Cohen, the transcendental is not accessible to pure reasoning
- By contrast, it requires acquaintance with the whole of the respective „fact of science“ or „culture“ that the „transcendental method“ intends to reconstruct
- Being bound to its empirical sources the whole method of a priori transcendental reasoning becomes empirically founded
- Thus, the transcendental is not given (gegeben) but quested (aufgegeben)

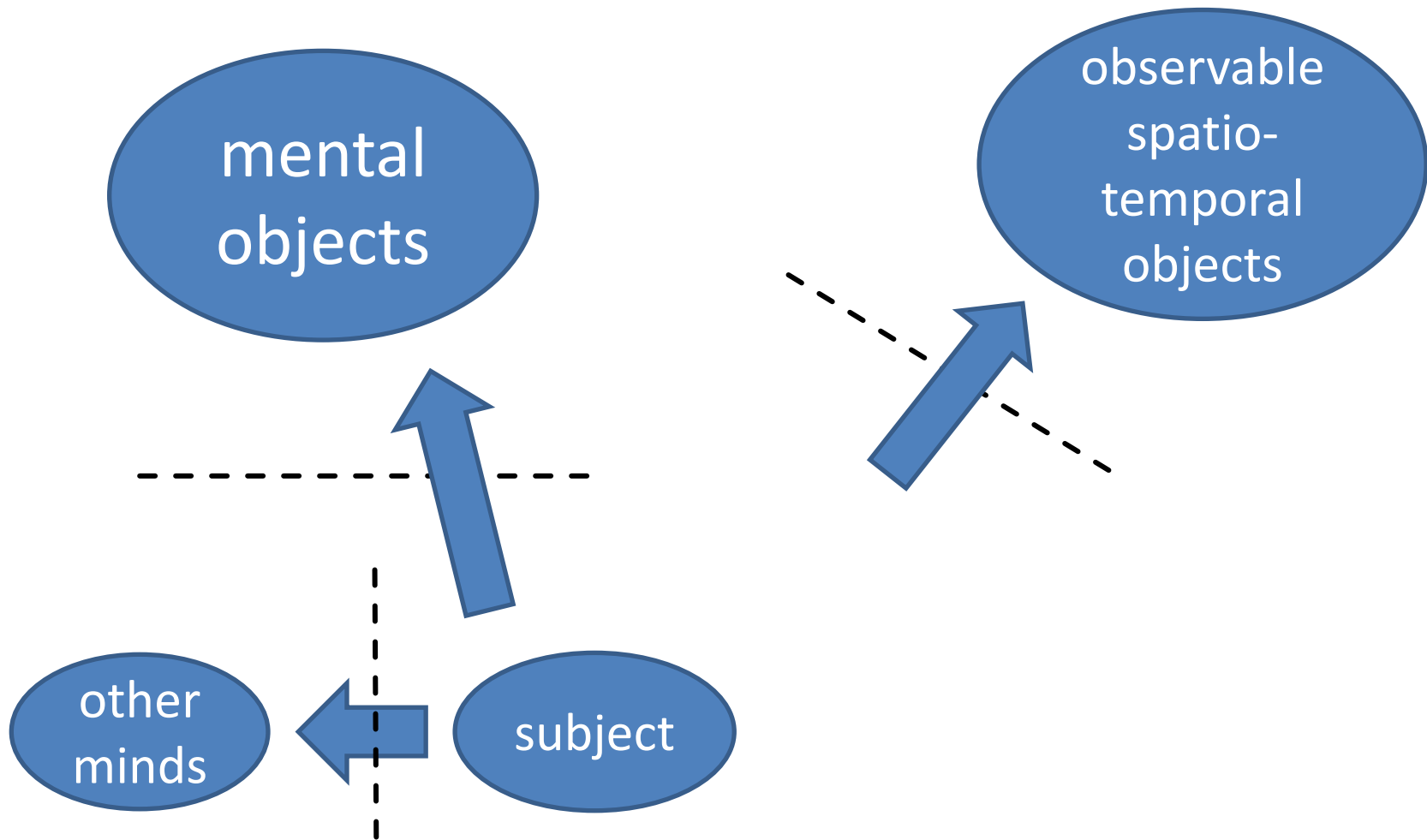
[7] Das Ding an sich ist somit der Inbegriff der wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnisse. Aber damit ist mehr gesagt. Die Erkenntnisse bilden nicht eine abgeschlossene Reihe, ein Kapitel toter Hand; sie sind nur, indem sie zeugen, dies ist der Charakter aller Ideale. Sie enthalten daher nicht nur das, was ermittelt ist, sondern in sich zugleich das, was fraglich bleibt. Dies ist der Charakter aller Begriffe: dass sie, indem sie Denkforderungen befriedigen, neue stellen. Es gibt hier keinen definitiven Abschluss. Jeder richtige Begriff ist eine neue Frage, keiner eine letzte Antwort. Das Ding an sich muss daher zugleich der Ausdruck der Fragen sein, welche in jenen Antworten der Erkenntnisse eingeschlossen sind. Diese fernere Bedeutung des Dinges an sich bezeichnet ein anderer Ausdruck, durch welchen Kant das x , als welches er wiederholentlich das transszendentale Objekt bezeichnet, bestimmt und vertieft hat. Das Ding an sich ist „Aufgabe“.
(Cohen 1918, 660f)

Transcendental notions secure and generate the fact of culture

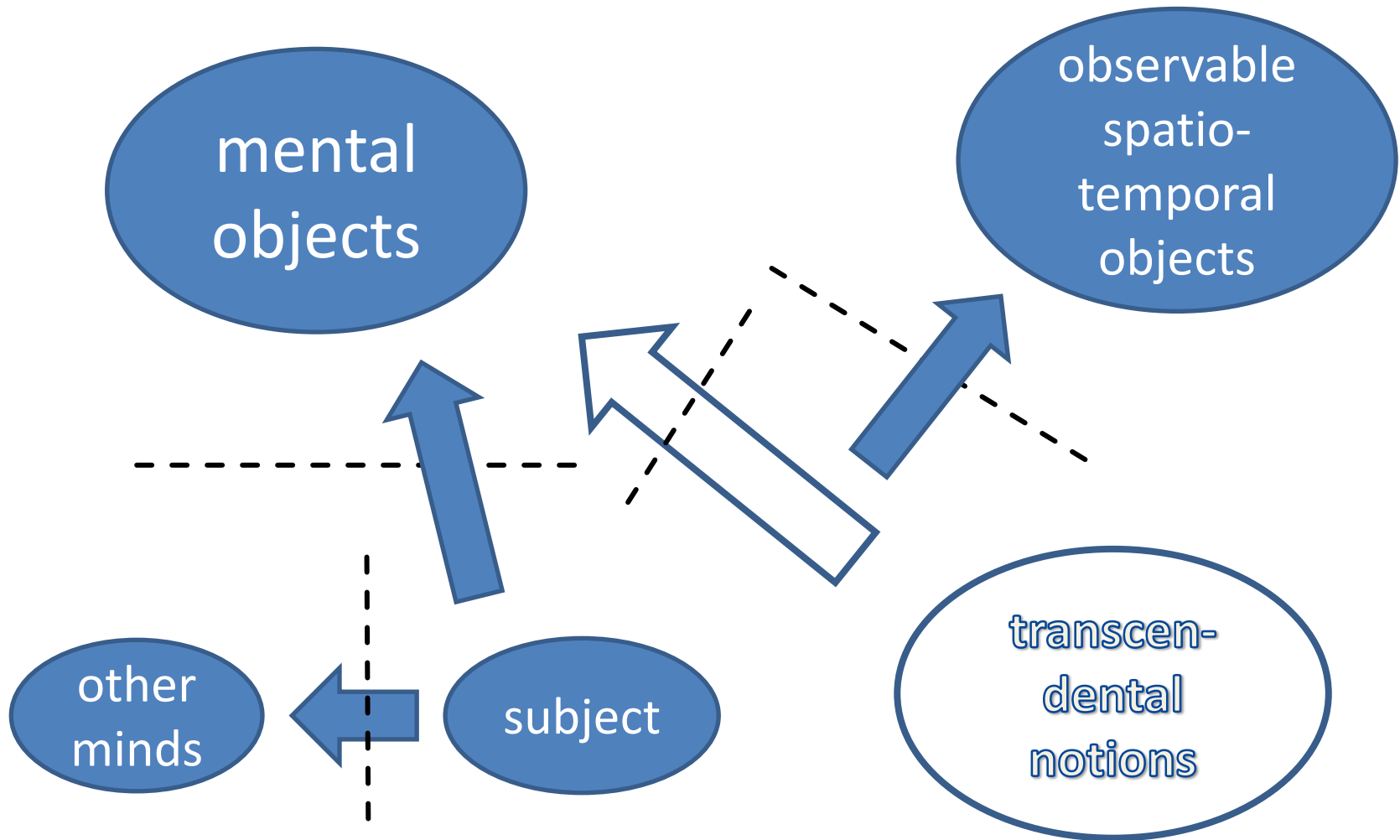
[8] „The objectivity of a concept lies in the fact that it is an independent and adequate means to secure and generate the object.“ (Cohen 1922, 131f)

The transcendental method secures and generates the transcendental requirements of a certain fact of science and culture and completes this fact of in that respect (with some “categories” and other abstract philosophical concepts)

A state of the fact of science and culture (FC)



The transcendental requirements of FC



Three external aspects of objectivity (three aspects of local truth)

- 1) Being true to the observable spatio-temporal world
(a task for the natural sciences)
- 2) Being true to the mental objects as construed in other or earlier states of minds and cultures
(a task for hermeneutics and the humanities)
- 3) Being true to the transcendental requirements of a certain state of the fact of science and culture
(a task for philosophy)

4.

Objectivity in the *Aufbau*

Objectivity is intersubjective ...

[9] Even though the subjective origin of all knowledge lies in the contents of experience and their connections, it is still possible, as the constructional system will show, to advance to an intersubjective , objective world, which can be conceptually comprehended and which is identical for all observers. (Carnap 1967, § 2)

... it is purely structural ...

[10] [...] *each scientific statement can in principle be so transformed that it is nothing but a structure statement.* But this transformation is not only possible, it is imperative. For science wants to speak about what is objective, and whatever does not belong to the structure but to the material (i.e., anything that can be pointed out in a concrete ostensive definition) is, in the final analysis, subjective. (Carnap 1967, §16)

... but it is not *merely* intersubjective

[11] The requirement that knowledge may be objective can be understood in two senses. It could mean objectivity in contrast to arbitrariness: if a judgment is said to reflect knowledge, then this means that it does not depend on my whims. Objectivity in this sense can obviously be required and achieved even if the basis for knowledge is autopsychological.

Secondly, by objectivity is sometimes meant independence from the judging subject, validity which holds also for other subjects. (Carnap 1967, § 66)

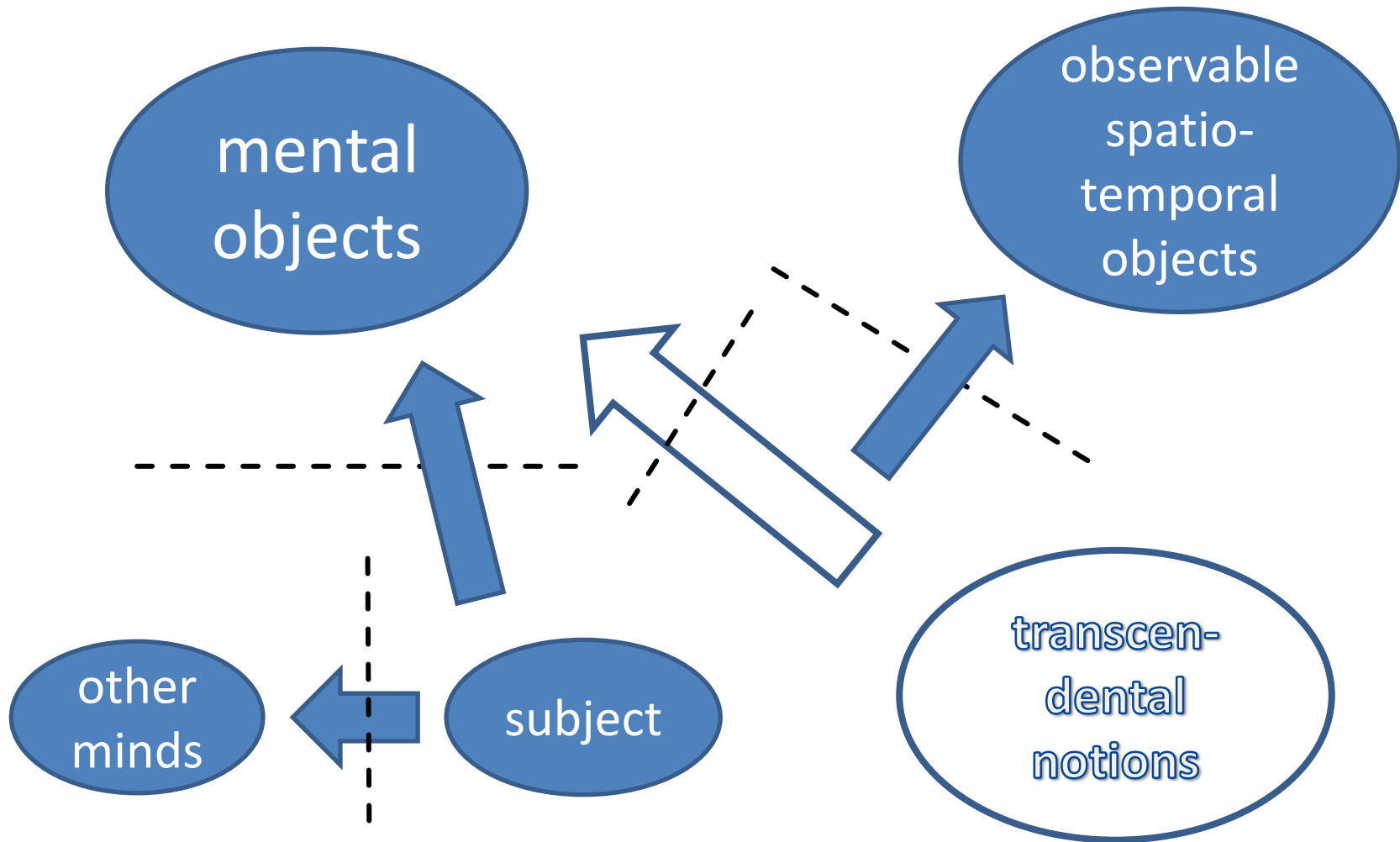
Varieties of objectivity 1 in the *Aufbau*

- Objectivity 1 establishes external aspects of objectivity at two different levels
- First thesis: the constitutional theory CT of the *Aufbau* is adequate (the transcendental story)
- Second thesis: the constitutional system CS allows us to reduce its object spheres to each other and therefore to establish objective connections between them (objectivity à la Dilthey)

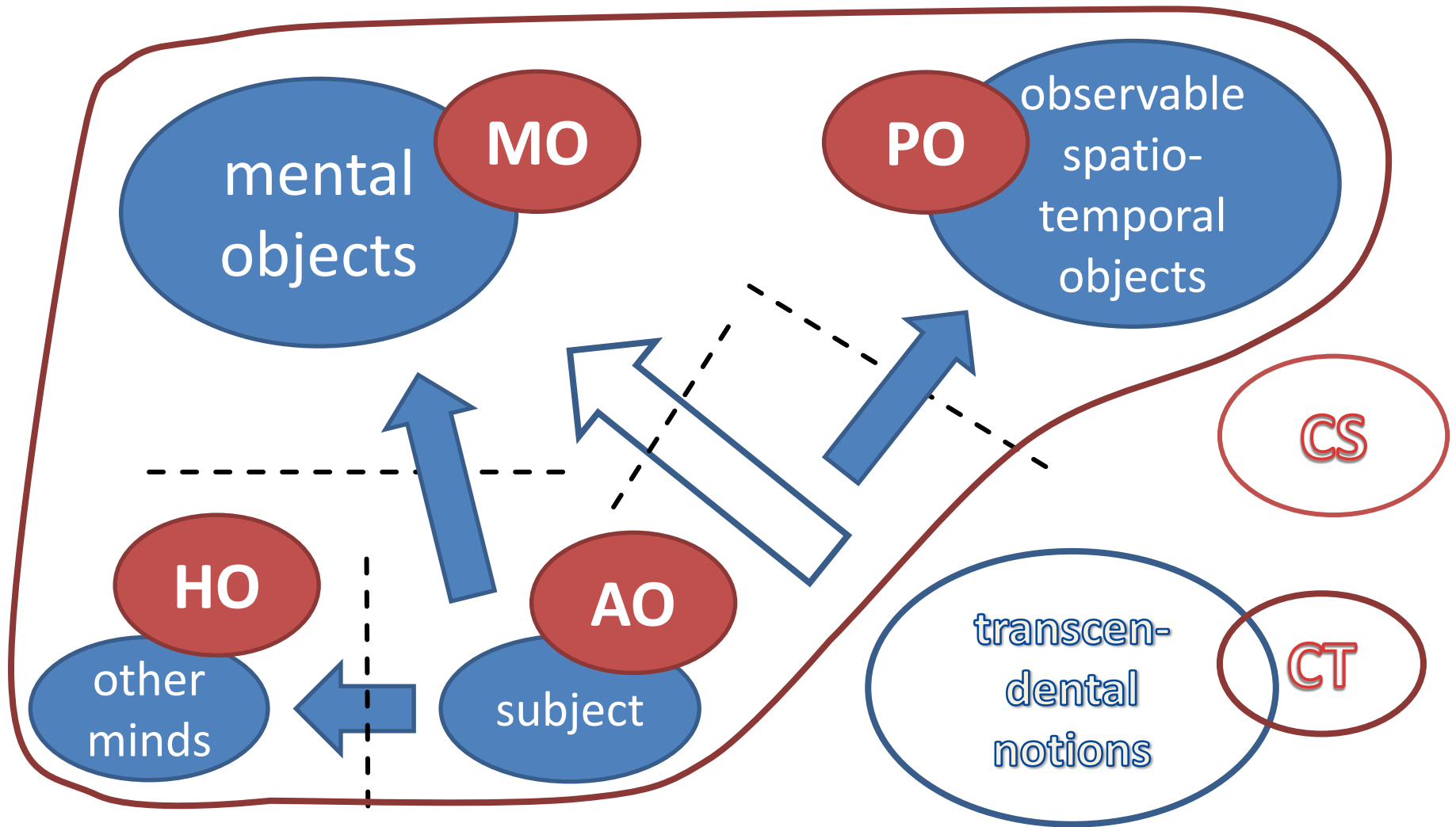
[12] [...] constitutional theory will have to ascertain whether the conceptual system which is based on this theory, namely the „constitutional system“, provides place for each of the object types which we have just mentioned. (Carnap 1967, §25, with some corrections) → first thesis

[13] [...] the thesis of the present treatise [...] merely asserts the possibility, in general, of a constitutional system and especially of a constitutional system of the same form as we have used here; furthermore, the thesis asserts the applicability and fruitfulness of the indicated method. (Carnap 1967, §122, with some corrections) → second thesis

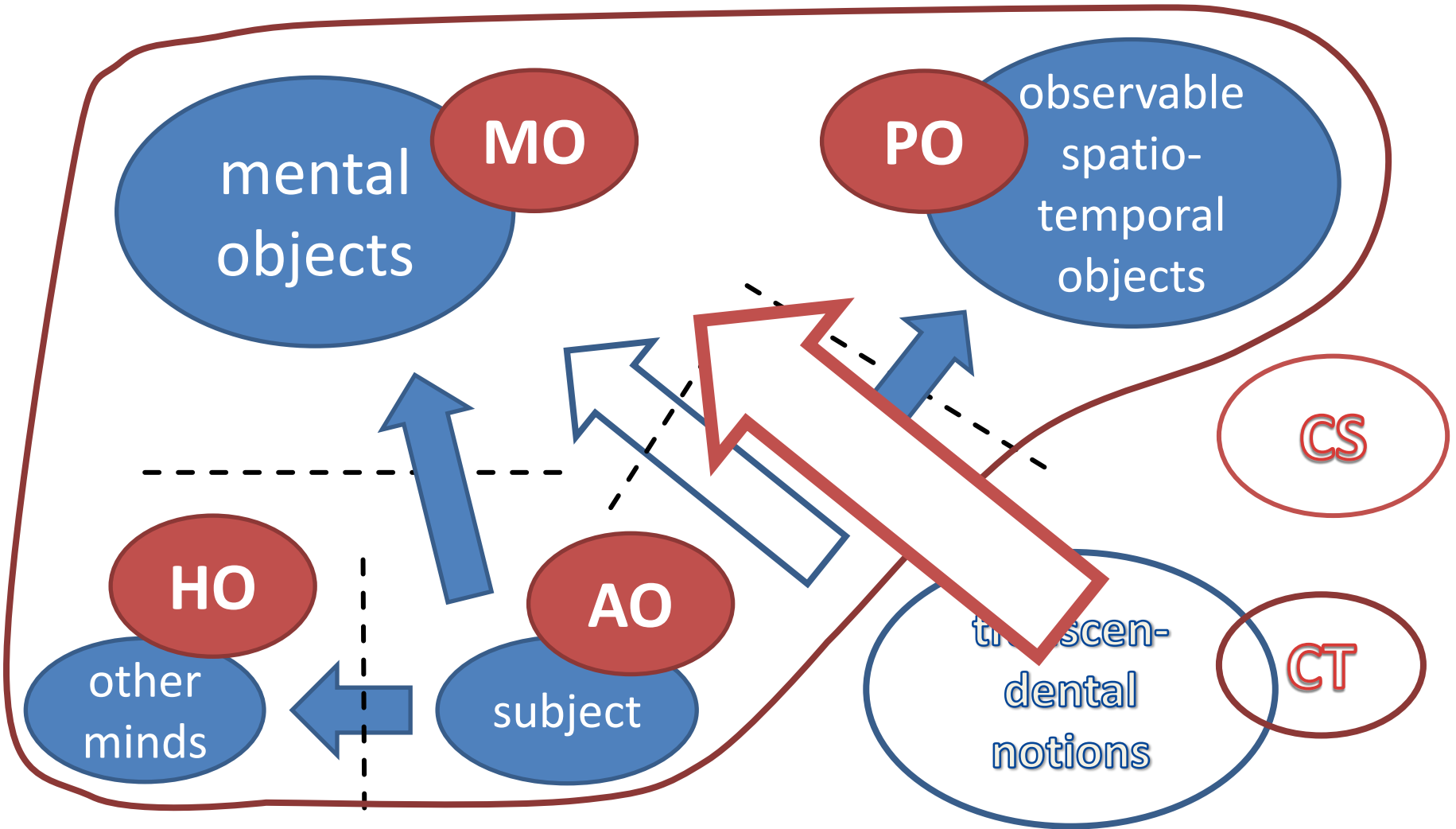
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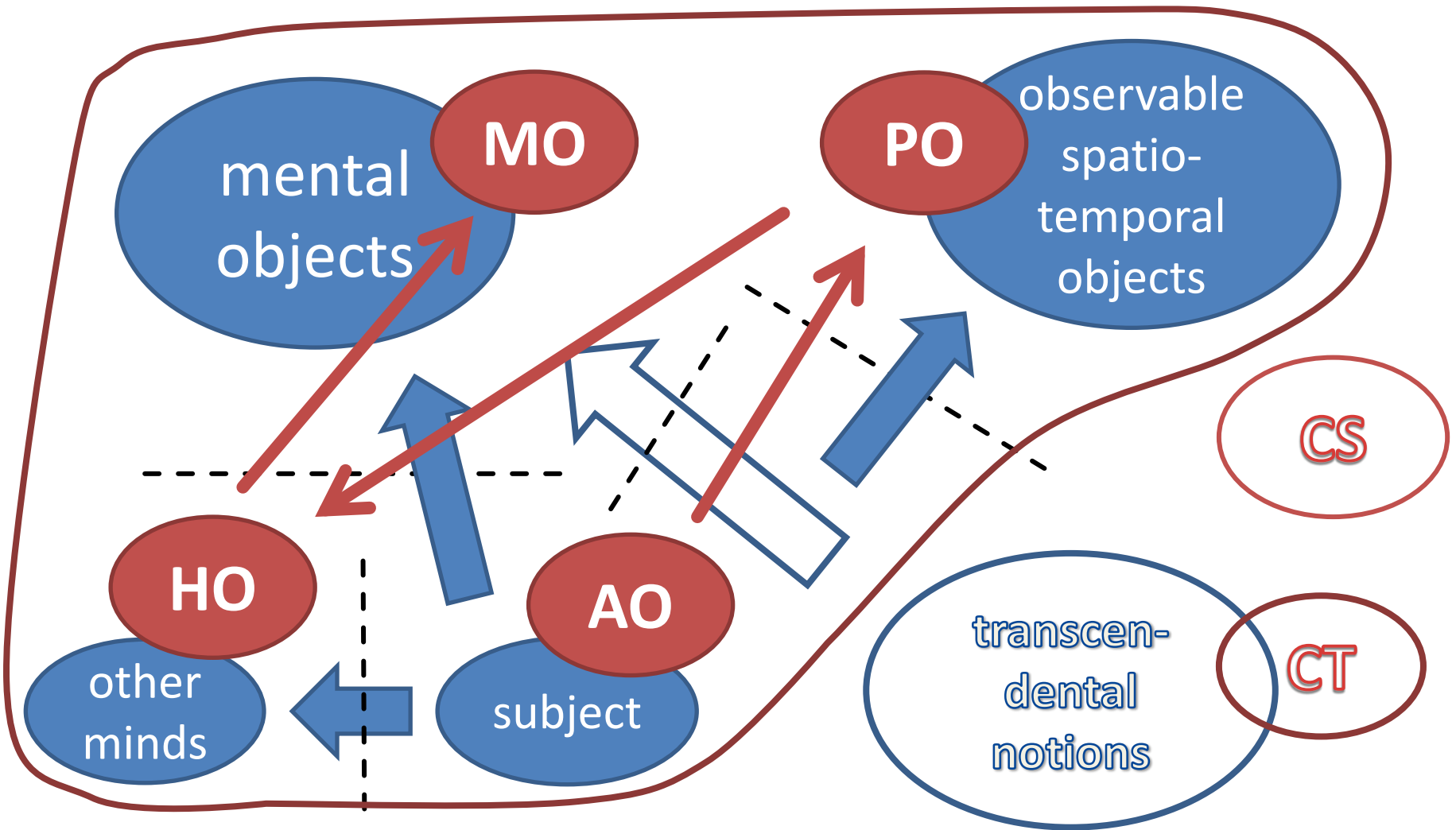
The epistemic realms of the *Aufbau*



First thesis: adequacy of CT



Second thesis: reducibility of object spheres



[14] *The realist orientation of the physicist* shows itself primarily in the use of realistic language; this is practical and justifiable (cf. § 52). A more pronounced realism, as an explicit thesis, goes beyond this and is not permissible; *it must be corrected so as to become* (what we may call) “*objectivism*”: the regular connections (which in natural laws are formulated as implication statements) are objective and are independent of the will of the individual; on the other hand, the ascription of the property „real“ to any substance (be it matter, energy, electromagnetic field, or whatever) cannot be derived from any experience and hence would be metaphysical. (Carnap 1967, § 178, with some corrections)

Objectivity in the *Aufbau* (conclusions)

- Objectivity in the *Aufbau* is *not only* purely structural and inter-subjective but *also* external
- Although, according to Carnap, there is no way to „derive“ a thoroughgoing scientific realism „from experience“
- we can „derive from experience“ some local realisms, on the basis of
- (1) adequacy of CT, and
- (2) objective connections between epistemic realms such as AO, PO, HO, MO

5.

A note on (possible) influences

- It was not the aim of this talk to provide further evidence for the hypothesis that Carnap might have been directly influenced by the Dilthey-school and by Neo-kantian philosophers
- As already pointed out on various places, Carnap studied in a social climate that was highly infiltrated with Neo-Kantians (Richardson 1999, Friedman 2000) and with representatives of the Dilthey-school (Gabriel 2004, Dahms 2004, Damböck 2012)
- The aim of this talk was simply to point out, on an entirely systematic level, in what sense Carnap really might have been influenced by his teachers and friends
- The corresponding empirical story shall be provided elsewhere

Thank you!