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**The Totalitarianism of Therapeutic Philosophy:
Reading Wittgenstein Through Critical Theory**

Introduction

Ludwig Wittgenstein is one of the twentieth century's most recognised anti-essentialists. He holds there are many ways of speaking and thinking, many forms of language, with no common essential feature uniting them all—therefore no common set of rules to be applied unexceptionally to the totality, consequently no single standard for judging validity. It is quite natural, then, to suppose that Wittgenstein decisively counters totalitarian forms of thought. It is this point that this paper challenges.

This paper criticises Wittgenstein—especially his “therapeutic philosophy”—through the writings of Frankfurt School Critical Theorists, specifically the writings of Herbert Marcuse and Max Horkheimer. In particular, it disputes the claim that Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophy is, as one commentator puts it, “the critical, negative part” of his philosophy (Baker, 1980, p. 486). The aim, however, is not merely to criticise but to better understand Wittgenstein. His position is studied carefully; pains are taken to dispel misinterpretations that end in quick and easy dismissals of his work. There is no wholesale rejection of his philosophy, but instead a pressing on certain key issues. This paper argues, first, that Wittgenstein's analysis of the concept of “meaning”—while not wrong—is incomplete; and, second, that his views on the role of philosophy in combination with his conceptualisation of meaning cultivate a philosophy that confines itself to working *within* the boundaries of established discourses. A philosophy that adheres to the restrictions set by Wittgenstein commits itself to speaking in terms set by the world as it currently is and thus limits the potential to think beyond current realities, let alone move beyond them.

Perhaps most importantly, this critique places Wittgenstein's thought in the context of broader intellectual trends in the English speaking industrialised world. It shows how Wittgenstein's philosophy, together with broader intellectual trends, reflects and contributes to totalitarian currents in the social, political and economic fabric of advanced industrialised society.

I

Wittgenstein, Language and the Role of Philosophy

The subject of language is central in Wittgenstein's work, hence throughout this paper. The following reviews some of Wittgenstein's key ideas about language. It then introduces his therapeutic philosophy and discusses what, in his view, the role of philosophy is. Understanding his position here will, in sections to come, be essential to accurately locating sources of contention between him and Critical Theorists.

1. Grammar and Form, Sense and Nonsense

Wittgenstein describes his investigations as “grammatical”, and says their aim is to throw light on the workings of language and, in so doing, render a means of diagnosing and treating confusions that result from misuses and misinterpretations of language.

For Wittgenstein, “grammar” is basically *form*, the manner in which things combine. A word is used in various combinations with other words to form various meanings—a word's grammar is its possibilities of use. Sometimes different words are put to similar uses. Here, they are said to be “grammatically parallel” (*PI*, §150); this implies conceptual or categorical kinship, as when the verbs “can” and “understands” are both used to indicate an “ability” (e.g. “she can speak French” and “she understands French”). Words, of course, do not merely combine with other words, but within particular contexts. Environmental setting, gestures, intonation, relationships between language users—these are factors in how a word is used and its potential meanings. A toddler points at a lake and exclaims, “water?” and her father responds, “yes, water.” A man stumbling out of a desert gasps, “water!” In these different contexts the same word has different purposes; it serves as a means to different ends, and its meaning changes. In many though not all cases, writes Wittgenstein, “the meaning of a word is its use in language” (*PI*, §43).

By understanding the use of words, Wittgenstein believes we can sort sensible applications of language from nonsensical applications—that we can understand the kinds of things it is possible to say. He writes, “our investigation is not directed towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the ‘possibilities’ of phenomena. We remind ourselves, that is to say, of the *kind of statement* we make about phenomena” (*PI*, §90). It is possible for a sound to have loudness in decibels; it makes little sense to say this of colours—this grammatically confused and hence nonsensical combination of words, by virtue of being meaningless, cannot refer to any possible phenomenon. On the other hand, the proposition that “the roar of Niagara Falls exceeds 80 dB” is both sensible (it has meaning) and possible regardless of its truth. That is to say, while the truth of the proposition is an empirical question, its logical possibility is a question of meaning—a question of how we, as a community, use our words (see *PI*, §241). Certain usages have sense within the community; others do not. Before any empirical measurements of sounds, colours and waterfalls, therefore, the Wittgensteinian can sort sense from nonsense and thus possibility from impossibility. With something like this in mind, Wittgenstein writes, “[o]ne might . . . give the name ‘philosophy’ to what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions” (*PI*, §126; see also *T*, 2.0131).

On Wittgenstein’s view, philosophy does not advance theories, nor settle empirical questions (*PI*, §109); it settles questions of meaning. As he sees it, the question of what something is—of what “justice” is, for example—is really a question of what “justice” means.

2. The Good Order of Language

At the beginning of his first published work, *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein asserts, “what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence” (p. 3). Despite other major shifts, Wittgenstein retains this directive throughout his career. Later comments reaffirm his early view that language is in good order as it is (cf. *T*, 5.5563; *PI*, §98; *PI*, p. 48-49). He states it is not the philosopher’s job “...to refine or complete a system of rules for the use of our words in unheard-of ways” (*PI*, §133) and decrees that “[p]hilosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language” (*PI*, §124).

Philosophers—especially Continental philosophers—have a reputation for arcane language, and Wittgenstein’s remarks are often understood as a rebuke against Continental “metaphysical mumbo-jumbo.” But while Wittgenstein is critical of metaphysics, his rebuke is directed against thinkers on both sides of the Continental divide. In fact, often it is most squarely against the mathematicians, logicians, Positivists and early Analytic philosophers that surrounded him, many of whom—believing ordinary language too crude—sought to build logically perfect languages, translating everyday remarks into logically pristine forms that were, to most people, barely comprehensible. More broadly, however, Wittgenstein indicts any who use words in unheard-of ways. Those combining words into alien forms stand accused of producing grammatically confused constructions (nonsense) and opening themselves to conceptual confusions (grammatical misinterpretations).

What distinguishes appropriate uses of language from inappropriate ones? When considering the meanings of a word, Wittgenstein says “one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home?” and he speaks of the need “...to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use” (*PI*, §116). In an earlier draft he appends an additional comment: “The man who said that one cannot step into the same river twice said something wrong” (*BT*, S.412). While Wittgenstein surely grasped the intent of Heraclitus’ aphorism, it serves as an example of a philosopher’s “peculiar” and potentially “confused” use of language. In everyday language—leaving aside the issue of whether we can know the everyday languages of the ancient Greeks—a person can step into the same river twice; it is grammatically sensible to say so—hence Wittgenstein’s claim that Heraclitus said something wrong.

There is, however, a risk of oversimplifying Wittgenstein. A word as used in its “everyday” and “original home” does not necessarily mean the word as used vernacularly by the “man on the street.” Instead, Wittgenstein is referring to a word’s everyday use in whatever activities it happens to be used in. These may include the activities of the “man on the street,” but also the activities of the physicist in the lab, the mathematician, etc. Wittgenstein’s point is that if we want to understand what a word means, we have to look at how it is used and in what context. Confusions result when we take words from their original home and weave them into alien forms.

3. Therapy and the Role of Philosophy

A philosophical problem, according to Wittgenstein, is like a grammatical joke (*PI*, §111): both involve strange plays on words. Gershwin's *I Got Plenty of Nothing*, for example, treats "nothing" as an object of possession; one gets the joke—assuming it is nothing more than a joke—insofar as one recognises the grammatical slight-of-hand. This, however, is precisely what the confused philosopher does not recognise and so failing arrives at mistaken ideas about the meanings of words. The philosopher who (grammatically) treats "nothing" as a physical object perhaps struggles with the problems: "How can something physical occupy no space?" "If it occupies no space, can an infinitely large amount exist in an infinitely small space?" These sorts of problems are, for Wittgenstein, false problems: grammatical "fictions" or "illusions" arising from linguistic misinterpretations (*PI*, § 96, 110, 307). He likens them to illnesses (*PI*, §255) and sees his philosophy as a kind of "therapeutic" (*PI*, §133) and "analytic" (*PI*, §90) process, comparable to psychoanalysis (*BT*, S.410), that aims at exposing and dispelling grammatical illusions.

Wittgenstein's posthumously published volumes on psychology attest to his fascination with the subject, and his likening his approach to a kind "therapeutic analysis" is no accident:

He recognized the similarity of method between his style of philosophy and psychoanalysis. . . . Like the psychoanalyst, he merely makes the patient, the philosopher in the grip of a misguided picture, aware of what he is doing. . . . He arranges the grammatical rules which he elicits from the person who suffers from philosophical bafflement to reveal points of tension and to lay bare conflicting and illegitimate applications of language (Baker, 1980, p. 486-487).

For Wittgenstein, there are many kinds of languages, many uses for language and hence many grammars. The role of the philosopher is to look at language in its own terms (i.e., according to its own grammar), clarify meaning, identify grammatical misinterpretations and misapplications of words and therewith alleviate conceptual confusions. Grammar is not hard and fast because, in addition to there being many forms of language, contextual factors affect the way we use words. In most contexts it is nonsensical to describe sounds as having colours, but in some it is permissible, as when musicians speak of "blue notes." Thus, like psychiatric practitioners who view every patient as different and advise against rigid rules, arguing that "...numerous techniques [are] available, requiring exquisite individual judgement..." (Porter, 1987, p. 217), Wittgenstein states, "[t]here is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies" (*PI*, §133). But while stating that philosophy admits many methods, Wittgenstein sees all of them as sharing a common element: the analysis and clarification of language.

On Wittgenstein's view, therefore, philosophy should aim at perspicuity or clarity (*PI*, §122, 133; *T*, 4.112). It should offer elucidations and reminders, that is, points of observation (ways of looking at things) from which we can command a better view of the use of our words (*PI*, §122, 127; *T*, 4.112, 6.54). Seen thus,

...[philosophical problems] are . . . not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: *in despite of* an urge to misunderstand them [sic]. The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known. (*PI*, §109; see also *T*, 4.111-4.116).

For Wittgenstein, "[p]hilosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (*PI*, §109).

II

Critical Theorists, Language and the Role of Philosophy

Critical Theorists are concerned with alternatives that haunt established realities (Marcuse, *OD*, p. xliii-xliv). They are concerned with exposing dubious ways of thinking that help maintain oppressive conditions. Not only is the validity of certain concepts brought into question, but also the validity of the forms of language through which these questionable concepts are constructed and expressed. So where

Wittgenstein focuses on conceptual confusions that result from grammatical misinterpretations within established forms of language, Critical Theorists are more concerned with confused or “false” discourses (forms of language) out of which problematic concepts arise. That a form of language is established, that it has proved useful—none of this is seen as evidence of its validity.

Wittgenstein, it will be recalled, says that it is not the philosopher’s job to build new languages but to try to understand and clarify existing ones—that philosophy “leaves everything as it is” (is now) and “may in no way interfere with the actual use of language” (*PI*, §133, 124; see also *BT*, S.418). Critical Theorists do not *per se* challenge Wittgenstein’s claim that confusions can result from grammatical misinterpretations. Nor are they necessarily opposed to including the clarification of language as among the roles of philosophy. However, Critical Theorists are not content to “leave everything as it is.” Insofar as established forms of language are false, new ones are needed.

1. Outside Views: The Bad Order of Language

Horkheimer repeatedly suggests that we arrive at a richer appreciation of the meaning of words and concepts when we examine them in the context of their historical development. Horkheimer also asserts that everyday language employed with little regard for history leads to conceptual confusions (*E*, p. 165-166). Words and concepts, therefore, cannot always be intelligibly discussed in terms of everyday grammar. Speaking about them intelligibly sometimes means speaking about them in a historically reflective manner, and this means locating their “original home” somewhere other than (alien to) the everyday activities of today.

The failure to appreciate the historical character of concepts may also translate to a tendency to express them in historically obsolete forms that obscure their significance. As Marcuse observes,

Contemporary industrial civilization demonstrates that it has reached the stage at which “the free society” can no longer be adequately defined in the traditional terms... New modes or realization are needed...

Such new modes can be indicated only in negative terms because they amount to the negation of the prevailing modes. Thus economic freedom would mean freedom *from* the economy—from being controlled by economic forces and relationships (*OD*, p. 3-4).

The concept of a free economy can be traced to the early capitalist/liberalist idea of allowing the economy to regulate itself—of having relatively independent and, by extension, relatively small interests operating in freedom from overarching systems that co-ordinate and align them. It was a progressive notion, both because it spoke against a small number of interests holding sway over the totality (i.e., against totalitarian control) and because it advocated a re-distribution of power from the aristocracy to the merchant class and thereby helped give rise to the middle class. What has emerged in late capitalism, however, deviates from this vision, though this is obscured through conflating abstract or ideal principles with principles as historically implemented. If implementing the ideal of economic independence once meant freeing economic interests from overarching regulation, this same course of action today tends to violate the ideal. In an era when the largest corporations are already more powerful than most countries, free reign can mean price fixing, wage fixing, the merging of many companies into a handful of multinational corporations; it can mean unprecedented corporate control of economies and therewith government mandates, unprecedented capacity to market and distribute the same basic item, hence instill the same basic wants across populations—in short, growing alignment and coordination of interests. It means power in the hands of the few: a new corporate aristocracy.

Yesterday’s idea of keeping interests independent is still a good idea, and, considered as an abstract principle, it means approximately today what it meant yesterday. Yet it also means something different: it implies a different course of action—thus, on the level of implementing practice, it *means* (or ought to mean if it is to be upheld) something different for today’s world. The failure to acknowledge historically relative dimensions in the concept of “free economy” weakens the critical and negative intent of the concept, turning it into an affirmation of established (economic) orders where large corporations already hold the balance of power. Marcuse plays with the concept not because it has become insignificant, but because it is “...too significant to be confined with traditional forms” (*OD*, p. 4). He plays with it to revive its critical intent and historical significance—to invalidate a universe of common usage that he feels has lost sight of what the concept means.

If, as Wittgenstein says, a language is an “activity” or “form of life” (*PI*, §23) comparable to a game (e.g., *PI*, §7), and understanding the “language-game” means being able to participate in it as an activity, that is, being able to employ words according to the rules of the game (the grammar), then most established forms of language may be said to have sensible grammars. But what does this mean? Boxing has perfectly sensible rules, but does this mean that two people smashing one another’s heads is a sensible activity? If one looks at the activity from the inside—if the aim is simply to understand or follow the rules of boxing—then the answer is yes. However, to the outsider—for example, to the doctor who treats the concussions—the activity may not appear so sensible (yes, this is playing with Wittgenstein’s use of “sense”). So long as we remain insiders and look at things in their own terms, even the most outrageous things remain sensible. The insanity of an overall form “...absolves the particular inanities...” (Marcuse, *OD*, p. 52). Cold war, capitalistic ethos, for example,

...turns crimes against humanity into a rational enterprise. When the people, aptly stimulated by the public and private authorities, prepare for lives of total mobilization, they are sensible not only because of the present Enemy, but also because of the investment and employment possibilities in industry and entertainment. Even the most insane calculations are rational: the annihilation of five million people is preferable to that of ten million, twenty million, and so on. It is hopeless to argue that a civilization which justifies its defense by such a calculus proclaims its own end (Marcuse, *OD*, p. 52).

It is by moving outside the form of life—by looking at it in terms alien to it—that internally sensible forms are revealed as irrational, absurd, false and senseless. Wittgenstein says that our language is in good order as it is (*PI*, §98). Marcuse says that “...the exact opposite is the case—namely, that every sentence is as little in order as the world is which this language communicates” (*OD*, p. 177).

2. Poetic Views: Twisting Grammar

It might be challenged that, like it or not, we are dependant on pre-existing forms of language—if we construct our own private vocabulary and grammar, nobody will understand us; nor will we understand ourselves. Marcuse does not deny this. He asserts that the established vocabularies and grammars “...are still those of the game (there are no others), but the concepts codified in the language of the games are redefined by relating them to their ‘determinate negation’ ” (*D*, p. 449; see also Horkheimer, *E*, p. 182-183). We are of course compelled to start from already existing discourses; as the example about the free economy demonstrates, we move outside the universe of common usage not by manufacturing our own language from scratch, but by re-ordering existing forms.

From this standpoint, certain philosophers are “difficult,” not because they are willfully arcane or spouting nonsense, but because they twist language to express ideas and concepts alien to what we already know. Marcuse compares the philosopher’s situation to that of the poet:

The poet . . . wants his poetry to be understandable and understood (that is why he writes it), but if what he says could be said in terms of ordinary language he would probably have done so in the first place. He might say: Understanding of my poetry presupposes the collapse and invalidation of precisely that universe of discourse and behavior into which you want to translate it. My language can be learned like any other language (in point of fact, it is also your own language), then it will appear that my symbols, metaphors, etc. are *not* symbols, metaphors, etc. but mean exactly what they say (*OD*, p. 192).

The idea that poetry means exactly what it says should mark an experience familiar to most students of Wittgenstein. He repeatedly uses metaphors, coins new terms (e.g. “language-games,” “forms of life”) and sometimes speaks in a quasi-poetic style. In trying to grasp Wittgenstein, the student initially tries to re-state his ideas in ordinary language. But as the student’s familiarity increases, the meaning of Wittgenstein’s remarks becomes evermore immediate. Eventually the student learns Wittgenstein’s language, which means understanding his remarks not as poetic metaphors but as meaning exactly what they say and, moreover, as expressing a meaning that cannot be completely translated into ordinary language. Indeed, many of Wittgenstein’s insights come from his genius with words, his unique way of

putting things. Wittgenstein himself held that his language could not be fully translated into another, insisting that English versions of *Philosophical Investigations* include the original German.

As Martin Heidegger—one of Marcuse’s teachers—discusses in his later writings, the word “poetry” comes from the Greek *poiesis* which means “bursting open,” “blossoming into bloom,” “bringing forth,” almost in the sense of “revelation,” “bringing out of concealment,” “bringing into the open,” “bringing to light.” And as both Heidegger and Marcuse suggest, philosophy, at its best, is a mode of *poiesis*. Both poetry and philosophy throw strange new light on things, both by twisting language into strange new forms. The poet-philosopher puts words together in new ways to express new insights, fresh truths. Or not merely to express, but to make visible and reveal things (realities, phenomena, etc.) heretofore undetected by our linguistic faculties—things formerly invisible to language as a consequence of being inexpressible in established linguistic forms. Hit by light things once in the dark (i.e., things formerly unseen) appear. They reveal themselves. And what of things bathed in a strange new poetic light? They shine through, reveal themselves and show themselves up in strange new ways. Or rather, it is not merely that things (i.e., things already known) show up in new ways, but that phenomena (things, etc.) heretofore unseen suddenly appear, almost in the way things not visible in normal light suddenly appear when bathed in ultraviolet.

Critical Theorists insist upon the following: “to counter Wittgenstein by uttering the unutterable. The plain contradictoriness of this challenge is that of philosophy itself...” (Adorno, *NeD*, p. 9). Citing Valéry’s sentiment that “thought is the labor which brings to life in us that which does not exist” (*D*, p. 448), Marcuse suggests that in the same way that the poet combines words in unheard-of ways to express something inexpressible in ordinary language, the critical philosopher does the same to bring life to ideas inexpressible in established discourses (see also Marcuse, *OD*, p. 67-68).

3. Critical Theory and the Role of Philosophy

The ideology of Linguistic and Analytic philosophy, writes Marcuse, “...finds its expression in such statements as . . . our common stock of words embodies ‘all the distinctions men have found worth drawing.’ What is this common stock?” he asks.

Does it include Plato’s “ideas,” Aristotle’s “essence,” Hegel’s *Geist*, Marx’s *Verdinglichung* in whatever adequate translation? Does it include the key words in poetic language? Or surrealist prose? And if so, does it contain their negative connotation—that is, as invalidating the universe of common usage? If not, then a whole body of distinctions which men have found worth drawing is rejected, removed into the realm of fiction or mythology; a mutilated false consciousness that decides on the meaning and expression of that which is. The rest is denounced—and endorsed—as fiction or mythology (*OD*, p. 188).

In view of Wittgenstein’s idea that language is an activity or form of life, as well as his talk of language-games—i.e., the idea that there are many kinds of language—and his oft cited assertion that philosophy is an activity (*T*, 4.112), it is perplexing that his conceptualisations of language should be used to attack philosophers who weave words into alien forms. If both language and philosophy are activities, why are alien philosophical discourses any less valid than other forms of language? Attacking philosophers on the grounds that they use grammatically unorthodox forms misses one of the major “activities” that has engaged philosophers for millennia: pushing the bounds of thought and language, building alternatives to the established universe of discourse, developing conceptual resources that allow for an alien glimpse of things.

However, Wittgenstein cannot be oblivious to these points, and there is, moreover, a danger in misinterpreting the source of contention between Wittgenstein and Critical Theorists. First, although Wittgenstein strongly emphasises everyday language, it is worth stating again that he does not assert that common or everyday forms of language (as in vernacular language) are the only ones acceptable—for example, he recognises a language of mathematics (*PI*, §124). Or put more accurately, “language in its everyday use” does not mean “vernacular language” for Wittgenstein, but language as used in life-activities, which can include the activity of doing mathematics, etc. Second, while Wittgenstein’s concept of language as an activity or form of life implies that grammatical constraints related to the activity or

form of life limit us from arbitrarily using words in new ways, the concept nevertheless leaves open the possibility of developing new forms of language. A new form of language evolves, not so much because people sit around constructing it, but because the newly evolving language is part of a newly evolving activity.

Since new languages evolve with activities—for example, the language of relativity in the activity of physics—why is the same not true for the activity of philosophy? Philosophers, like physicists, face historical process; they face a changing world, changing ways of understanding and changing bodies of knowledge (even if not empirical). Philosophers, like physicists, also encounter inadequacies in the established ways of talking and for this reason may feel obliged to develop new ones. Wittgenstein's concept of language is not grounds for precluding the development of new philosophical ways of speaking; nor does it provide justification for denying the validity of poetical philosophical languages. There is no obvious justification—logical, historical or otherwise—for his position that philosophers should “not interfere with language,” “leave things as they are” and “not use words in unheard-of ways.” This position is an ideal: a judgment about what philosophy *ought* to be, about what philosophers *ought* and *ought not* to do—a value judgment about the role of philosophy.

Value judgments are also involved in Critical Theory, but unlike Wittgenstein, Critical Theorists explicitly recognise their place. Marcuse writes:

From the beginning, any critical theory of society is . . . confronted with the problem of historical objectivity, a problem which arises at the two points where the analysis implies value judgments.

1. the judgment that human life is worth living or rather can and ought to be made worth living. This judgment underlies all intellectual effort; it is the *a priori* of social theory, and its rejection (which is perfectly logical) rejects theory itself;
2. the judgment that, in a given society, specific possibilities exist for the amelioration of human life and specific ways and means of realizing these possibilities (p. *OD*, xlii-xliii).

Without the judgment that human life is or ought to be worth living, there is no point in a philosophy that criticises current conditions of human life. As Marcuse says, logical necessity does not justify the claim. Rather, the first claim is a value judgment. The second claim is likewise a value judgment—specifically the value judgment that some conditions of living, modes of social and political organisation and so forth are better than others, and, moreover, that these better conditions are realisable. A philosophy that criticises ways of thinking that maintain current conditions while acknowledging that conditions “as they are” are as good as any realisable in either thought or practice is a philosophy that denies its own ends.

Part III Ways of Reasoning

At the beginning of *Eclipse of Reason* Horkheimer discusses the meaning of “reason.” He writes:

When the ordinary man is asked to explain what is meant by the term reason, his reaction is almost always one of hesitation and embarrassment. It would be a mistake to interpret this as indicating wisdom too deep or thought too abstruse to be put into words. What it actually betrays is the feeling that there is nothing to inquire into, that the concept of reason is self-explanatory, that the question is superfluous. When pressed for an answer, the average man will say reasonable things are things that are obviously useful, and that every reasonable man is supposed to be able to decide what is useful to him. Naturally the circumstances of each situation, as well as laws, customs, and traditions, should be taken into account. . . . This type of reason may be called subjective reason. It is essentially concerned . . . with adequacy of procedures for purposes more or less taken for granted... It attaches little importance to the question whether the purposes as such are reasonable (*E*, p. 3).

Subjective reason, also known as instrumental reason, ultimately “...proves to be the ability to . . . co-ordinate the right means with a given end” (*E*, p. 5). Horkheimer asserts that “[h]owever naive or superficial this definition of reasoning may seem,” it is indicative “...of a profound change of outlook that

has taken place in Western thinking in the course of the last centuries” (*E*, p. 4).

Wittgenstein’s therapeutic model of philosophy manifests the contemporary trend toward subjective or instrumental reason. The therapeutic philosopher looks at how language is used in a particular activity, aiming, among other things, to clarify meaning and expose misuses of words. A word is misused when employed in a way that is meaningless within the context of the activity—that is to say, when it does not support, advance or serve any useful function within the activity. Insofar as a word’s meaning is linked to its use—insofar as the word, if employed meaningfully, is a means to some end within the activity—the therapeutic philosopher is concerned with co-ordinating the right means with given ends. Insofar as the therapeutic philosopher focuses on what makes sense within an activity—not on the reasonableness of the activity itself—the therapeutic philosopher takes the activity, the form of life and language itself for granted.

Critical Theorists have concerns about criteria that evaluate the meaning of words and concepts as a function of their everyday use. They do not reject such criteria as wrong, but as incomplete—as lacking a historical dimension. This absence, they argue, leads to conceptual misinterpretations. They also argue that the aforementioned criteria, while suitably equipped to interpret some forms of language, are simply inappropriate to others. Ill-equipped to interpret certain forms of language, they misinterpret and prematurely dismiss them as nonsensical.

1. Horkheimer’s Historical View of Meaning

Horkheimer does not deny that a word’s use and the context in which it is used have something to do with its meaning. His concern, rather, is that commentators linking use and meaning tend towards an all-too-narrow view of the contexts through which meaning is granted. Focused on everyday and hence immediate settings, they often ignore and sometimes even discount historical context. Yet, as Horkheimer insists, words and concepts “...acquire their full meaning in the course of historical process,” and although “[e]ach language carries a meaning embodying the thought forms and belief patterns rooted in the evolution of the people who speak it . . . it would be a mistake to assume that we can discover the essential meaning of a word by simply asking the people who use it.” People “...use words almost as schematically and unhistorically as the experts” (*E*, p. 165-166)—the “experts” being philosophers and other academics who, in Horkheimer’s view, pay too little attention to history.

The failure to investigate meaning through a historical lens sometimes results in the ideas of foregone eras being “...equated simply with stupidity and fraud” (*E*, p. 186). As Horkheimer contends, evaluating an idea, a concept or some piece of knowledge often means looking at what the idea, concept or piece of knowledge *has meant* for human beings at various times and places. He writes:

It cannot be said in general and a priori what meaning and value some particular knowledge has. . . . Thoughts which, taken in isolation, are identical in content can at one time be unripe and fantastic and at another outdated and unimportant, yet in a particular historical moment form factors of a force that changes the world (*P*, p. 420-421).

Much of Plato’s philosophy is in answer to the Sophists; much of Kant’s responds to the conflict between Rationalism and Empiricism; Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* is largely in reply to Russell and Frege. Insofar as the works of Plato, Kant and Wittgenstein are responses to historically specific issues, it is vital to examine them through a historical lens. In fact, the English philosopher Robin Collingwood repeatedly asserts in his *An Autobiography* that many of his colleagues have misunderstood other philosophers by failing to consider their writings as treatments of historically specific questions and problems. This is perhaps part of the reason why many in the English speaking world dismiss Continental philosophy as “metaphysical mumbo-jumbo.” Indeed, Collingwood cites cases where metaphysical forms of thought are taken out of historical context, misinterpreted and rejected before ever really being understood.

Evan Cameron, in a paper comparing Wittgenstein and Collingwood, provides an effective illustration of the importance of looking at things and their meaning historically. Summarising from Collingwood’s *An Autobiography*, he writes:

Suppose . . . that an archaeologist at work upon a site between Tyne and Solway were to

uncover yet another elongated section of shaped rock, aligned with others, that might seem to have been part of the wall. What must the archaeologist do to come to *understand* what has been uncovered?

The archaeologist must acknowledge that the object is an *artefact* that was constructed by human beings in the past to serve as a means towards ends they had wished to accomplish. [...]

To learn how an artefact was intended by its makers to *mean* (to be used), therefore, an archaeologist must engage unexceptionally in the evidentiary and open-ended task of coming to imagine better how its makers had tried to solve the historically specific problem they had faced by making it as they did (2004).

Collingwood (and Cameron) maintain that the practice of the archaeologist is applicable to fields outside archaeology, and the general approach advanced by Collingwood is, as it turns out, similar to what Horkheimer recommends for interpreting concepts. Just as we understand an artefact, first, by acknowledging that it was constructed by humans and, second, by grappling with the historically specific problems it was intended to solve, a rich understanding of a concept is gained, first, by acknowledging that the concept has been constructed by humans and, second, by contemplating how, at various stages of its development, the concept was a response to historically specific conditions. For instance,

...the idea of dignity of man is born from the experience of barbarian forms of domination. During the most ruthless phases of feudalism, dignity was an attribute of might. Emperors and kings . . . demanded and received veneration. Anyone who was negligent in obeisance was punished, anyone who committed *lèse majesté* was put to death. Today, freed from its bloody origin, the notion of the dignity of the individual is one of the ideas defining a humane organization of society (Horkheimer, *E*, p. 177-178).

With historical change comes new forms of human association and therewith alterations in the concepts of society (Horkheimer, *P*, p. 417). But while the meanings of concepts such as dignity and justice are not eternal or absolute, neither are they simply a matter of current use. Dignity and other such concepts have roots in conditions and events of both the past and present.

It is true, of course, that people can and do ignore history. Yet this is not grounds for rejecting a historical account of meaning—at least, not unless ignorance and mendacity constitute acceptable criteria for determining meaning. If a historical revisionist convinces a community that the Holocaust never happened, it does not mean that millions were not exterminated. A person's ignorance or denial of history more than just changes the meaning of a concept: according to Horkheimer, it leads to its false construction. However, the claim that there are criteria beyond everyday use for judging meaning should not be taken to imply that concepts are “real” entities that somehow exist over, above and separate from language, waiting to be discovered. Horkheimer readily admits that concepts “...are inseparable from the words that express them...” (*E*, p. 179), and therefore that they are constructed in language, not discovered. What he rejects is the idea that a word or concept can be adequately understood merely by looking at its everyday use within current discourses.

From a historical perspective, for example, the person who today says “there's inherent dignity in destitution” says something wrong, regardless of how ubiquitous, acceptable and sensible such sentiments may be in the ordinary language of today. True, many destitute people may have dignity, but if the concept of human dignity has evolved historically through a process of negation to become a reaction against oppressive forms of social organisation, that is, a claim to basic equality and an equal right to life, then there is something inherently undignified human destitution. Wittgenstein might object that this introduction of historical criteria mixes up philosophical issues with empirical issues. He might further argue that a historical determination of the meaning of dignity presupposes understanding what people mean when they use the expression in everyday life. Horkheimer would agree that historical criteria are at some level empirical, but would deny Wittgenstein's insinuation that there is a clear separation between the philosophical and the empirical. He might also point out that if historical criteria are empirical, then so too is Wittgenstein's grammatical criteria. After all, the latter sorts sense from nonsense by examining whether a word—as used in some particular instance during some activity—is employed according to the established grammars of the activity, that is, whether a particular use of a word conforms to one or another of the word's ordinary uses. What the grammar or the ordinary uses of a word are is an empirical

question. To Wittgenstein's objection that we cannot judge the historical validity of what people say without first knowing what they mean, Horkheimer would respond that we cannot know the meaning of concepts such as "dignity," "justice" and "freedom" without looking at them historically. "If it is true that we must know what freedom is in order to determine which parties in history have fought for it," he writes, "it is no less true that we must know the character of these parties in order to determine what freedom is" (*E*, p. 168). The meaning of "freedom" is a theory of history, and when we ignore its history, we are apt to speak nonsense. Horkheimer—and Critical Theorists in general—hold that historical criteria, however empirical they may be, are essential for determining the meaning of certain concepts and thus for sorting sense from nonsense. The assertion that there is inherent dignity in destitution is not just empirically false. Understood historically, it is also conceptually confused. In Wittgenstein's terms: it is nonsense.

2. Different Criteria for Different Forms of Language

Marcuse agrees with Wittgenstein that in many cases we need to look no further than the everyday use of a language in order to determine the meaning of words. What Marcuse contests is Wittgenstein's remarks that we *must* "stick to the subjects of our everyday thinking, we must not go astray and imagine that we have to describe extreme subtleties..." and that "if the words 'language,' 'experience,' 'world,' have a use, it must be as humble a one as that of the words 'table,' 'lamp,' 'door.'" (*PI*, §106, 97, quoted in Marcuse, *OD*, p. 177).

Marcuse insists that philosophical thought, by virtue of being philosophical, does describe extreme subtleties. He observes this to be the case even with Wittgenstein, jesting, "...as if 'extreme subtleties' were not the suitable term for Wittgenstein's language games..." (*OD*, p. 177). Marcuse also insists that "...an irreducible difference exists between the universe of everyday thinking and language on the one side, and that of philosophic thinking and language on the other" (*OD*, p. 178). He writes:

In normal circumstances, ordinary language is indeed . . . a practical instrument. When someone actually says "My broom is in the corner," he probably intends that somebody else who had actually asked about the broom is going to take it or leave it there, is going to be satisfied or angry. [...]

In contrast, if, in a philosophic text or discourse, the word "substance," "idea," "man," "alienation" becomes the subject of a proposition, no . . . transformation of meaning into a behavioral reaction takes place or is intended to take place. The word remains, as it were, unfulfilled—except in thought, where it may give rise to other thoughts. And through a long series of mediations within a historical continuum, the proposition may help to form and guide a practice. But the proposition remains unfulfilled even then—only hubris of absolute idealism asserts the thesis of a final identity between thought and its object. The words with which philosophy is concerned can therefore never have a use "as humble . . . as that of the words 'table,' 'lamp,' 'door.'" (*OD*, p. 178-179).

Criteria well equipped to interpret the meanings of "table," "lamp" and "door" are not, according to Marcuse, equipped to interpret concepts such as "dignity," "justice," "freedom," "substance," "idea," "humanity," and "alienation." He observes, moreover, that these and other "difficult" concepts stand in danger of being rejected as nonsense by the instrumentalist philosopher who cannot adequately account for them in terms of their usefulness (see *OD*, p. 13). At stake in this rejection is "...the right . . . to think and speak in terms other than those of common usage—terms which are meaningful, rational, and valid precisely because they are other terms" (*OD*, p. 178).

On one level, Wittgenstein acknowledges that one set of criteria does not fit all forms of language. The idea that there are many language-games and many grammars implies there are many criteria for judging sense. At the same time, however, there is an implied formula that, while admitting some exceptions, generally applies across the board: if you want to know what a word or a concept means, look at its everyday use. This formula fails to include the sort of historical criteria that Critical Theorists feel are essential for interpreting certain concepts and ideas. It fails to consider that meaning, as Horkheimer would put it, is in some cases a theory of history. Having thus failed, it risks impoverishing, misunderstanding and falsely constructing the meaning of certain concepts. It further risks taking the issue of meaning out of the hands of the critical, thinking subject and surrendering it to the currently established order.

Part IV Totalitarianism

The contemporary shift towards subjective or instrumental reason, while introducing the problem of nihilism, seems to mark a shift away from totalitising systems of thought. The Wittgensteinian position that meaning is judged internally, according to the rules of the language-game or activity, implies that meaning is relative to the context; it depends on the ends—on what the game is. From this standpoint, no truth can be applied unexceptionally to the totality. What is true, sensible or meaningful in one activity is not necessarily so in another; ways of thinking and speaking that make sense in one activity do not necessarily make sense in another. That there are many ways of speaking and thinking, and that each way can only be judged internally—this position effectively rejects encompassing “theories of everything” and abrogates standards that apply to the totality of all things.

Having said this, it is premature to conclude that either Wittgenstein’s philosophy or instrumental reason moves decisively away from totalitising forms of thought. To be sure, they avoid certain kinds of totalitarianism, but there are others. There is, in particular, what Marcuse calls “one-dimensional” thought. Part IV of this paper focuses on Marcuse’s theme of one-dimensionality. Following Marcuse, it introduces one-dimensionality, first, by discussing how it is manifested at a societal level. It then describes how this form of totalitarianism is manifested in Wittgenstein’s ideas about language, as well as the broader intellectual climate of advanced industrial society.

1. “One-Dimensionality” and Advanced Industrial Society

As members of the Frankfurt-based Institute for Social Research, Marcuse, Horkheimer and others within it experienced the rise of fascism in Germany where their Marxist background and Jewish heritage made them conspicuous targets. Ultimately they fled, re-establishing the institute in America. In escaping Germany, they escaped imminent peril, but not totalitarianism. Totalitarianism, Marcuse was to observe, “...is not only a terroristic political coordination of society, but also a non-terroristic economic-technical coordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests” (*OD*, p. 3).

Though Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* was published late in his life, his theme of one-dimensionality expresses a general concept of totalitarianism that appears throughout both his writings and those of his colleagues. In advanced industrial society, Critical Theorists observe conditions that limit people’s inclination to envisage, let alone enact, alternatives to the established order. With change contained, a system of one-dimensional totalitarianism emerges: a single order—the established order—becomes the totality of all possible orders; oppositional, alien, and transcendent elements that constitute another dimension of reality are collapsed into a single dimension (*OD*, p. 57).

Emblematic of the one-dimensional scenario is the Nazi’s use of the swastika, not only as the symbol of the party, but also as the nation’s flag and an insignia of military and police authority. By branding the many with one identity, the swastika diminishes the ruling party’s separateness from the nation, its people and various state agencies. The symbolic gesture is more than a marketing ploy, however. The suppression of independence between state rulers and state agencies is actual, as is the party’s move to integrate a wide array of social spheres under a single and hence total system of administration: its own. The bestowal of a common identity, the party’s oneness with state agencies, the general suppression of separateness—these factors cultivate a felt and actual dependency upon the party, thereby promoting its interests as the interests of all.

This kind of self-affirming organisation which integrates oppositional elements and converts particular interests to shared interests is not especially related to blatantly despotic regimes. Rather, it is a general affiliate of advanced industrial society. In advanced industrial society,

...the productive apparatus tends to become totalitarian to the extent to which it determines not only the socially needed occupations, skills, and attitudes, but also individual needs and aspirations. It thus obliterates the opposition between the private and public existence, between individual and social needs. (Marcuse, *OD*, p. xlvii).

That an individual’s wants and desires are in some measure imposed “from without” is not unique to

advanced industrial society. Material, social and historical conditions, salesmanship and rhetoric, availability and non-availability of certain commodities surely played on the wants and desires of pre-industrial populations as well. Yet when it comes to delivering large batches of virtually indistinguishable items, the pre-industrial artisan cannot match the assembly-line. What separates pre-industrial from advanced industrial production is the latter's capacity for dispersing the same basic item and hence the same basic want on a global level, that is, to the totality.¹

Idiosyncrasies inherent in the handcrafting process would have made it difficult and often impossible for a pre-industrial artisan to replicate multiple objects with no discernible difference. It would have been even more difficult for one artisan to replicate the work of another, especially if the two were from regions with markedly different cultures, material resources, technical knowledge and economic organisation. But granting even that the artisans of one region could compete with advanced industrial operations in producing batches of virtually identical items, they could not compete with its volume of output and breadth of distribution. In comparison to today, therefore, pre-industrial goods were not evenly and widely dispersed. The goods found in one English village might differ significantly from those found in a neighbouring village, even more so from those found on the Italian peninsula, in the Middle East or Inuit settlements in the Arctic. With different commodities available, the people of different regions were open to different wants and desires. While a 15th century Florentine merchant might have daydreamed about acquiring an icon of Christ, a jewel encrusted gold ring or new tack for his horse, we can be confident that no 15th century Inuit woman fantasised about these items inasmuch as these items were unavailable and unknown within that culture. As an item becomes available (known), it becomes a possible object of want and desire. Advanced industry's capacity to expand the availability of essentially identical products invites unanimity (oneness) in the wants and desires of consumers which, for Marcuse, translates to totalitarian co-ordination of people's interests.

In the movie *The Hunt for Red October* (1990), Soviet officers discuss the virtues of America. One wistfully remarks that Americans are permitted to own recreational vehicles. Apparently, America can boast moral superiority insofar as it does not deprive its citizens of this inherent human need. Where the established system cultivates similar desires across a large span of a people and where it cultivates desires for what it can supply, individuals may feel a certain (false) harmony or lack of alienation with the world. Their interests, after all, are the same as other people's interests, and the world, after all, is capable of satisfying wants it imposes on people. True, people may not always be able to afford that recreational vehicle, yet this is not rectified through resisting the established system, but by becoming better integrated with it—getting a better job, earning more money, investing in stocks. “A vicious circle seems indeed the proper image of a society which is self-expanding and self-perpetuating in its own preestablished direction—driven by the growing needs which it generates and, at the same time, contains” (Marcuse, *OD*, p. 34). One-dimensionality marks a situation where, rather than changing the current reality, we “cut our cloth” to match it. Oppositional, alien, and transcendent elements that constitute the negative side of thinking are rendered taboo or merely co-opted. The established reality, the world as it currently is—that is, the world seen in its positive dimension—becomes the primary model for human thought and action, so entrenching the established reality.

2. Suppressing the Alien: Operational Criteria, Positivism and One-Dimensionality

Every man, they said, must face reality. Must face the Here and Now! Everything that was *not so* must go. ...they filleted the bones of Glinda the Good and Ozma and shattered Polychrome in a spectroscope and served Jack Pumpkinhead with meringue at the Biologists' Ball! The Beanstalk died in a bramble of red tape! Sleeping Beauty awoke at the kiss of a scientist and expired at the fatal puncture of his syringe. And they made Alice drink something from a bottle which reduced her to a size where she could no longer cry 'Curiouser and curiouser'— Ray Bradbury, *Usher II*, in *The Martian Chronicles* (p. 170).

Horkheimer observes that experimental physics and laboratory techniques are becoming prototypes for all spheres of intellectual life (*E*, p. 50). While it is not clear that Wittgenstein models his philosophy after laboratory techniques, some of his methods nevertheless parallel those of science. These parallels mark a positivistic side of Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophy. They also, it will be argued, mark a trend towards one-dimensionality.

Scientists often “operationalise” concepts, specifying their definitions as the operations used to measure

and manipulate them. In experimental psychology, for example, the personality dimensions “self-esteem,” “neuroticism” and “conscientiousness” are basically defined as the tests—usually questionnaires—that measure these dimensions. On a more general level, operationalising a concept means clarifying “abstract,” “general” or “vague” concepts by translating them into concrete descriptions of overtly observable or, at least, measurable phenomena. By providing unambiguous criteria for concepts, this practice allows one scientist to be reasonably clear about what another means when she or he uses some term, allowing for the replication of experiments.

The practice of operationalisation can also be interpreted as a tacit admission of the impossibility of objective knowledge. Procedures used to observe something also disturb it, suggesting that “. . . completely visualizing anything ‘as it is’ is self-contradictory. ‘As it is’ means without external intervention, in which case the system is sitting alone in the dark, unperceived” (Finkelstein, 2003, p. 373). Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle is an example of how the experimenter’s actions affect the observed—if the experimenter measures the momentum of a particle, she or he cannot observe its position. Physicist David Finkelstein writes:

In classical physics one represses the observer and the act of observation and talks naively about “things as they are”... Heisenberg formulated the quantum theory in the same city and decade in which Kandinsky coined the phrase “non-objective art.” I assume that Heisenberg borrowed from Kandinsky when he called quantum theory “non-objective physics.” The main idea of quantum theory is to talk about *what you do*, not about “things as they are” (p. 2-3, 2003b; emphasis added).²

As Marcuse contends, the philosophy of contemporary physics does not actually deny or question “...the reality of the external world [or the ‘things as they are’] but in one way or another, it suspends judgment on what reality itself may be, or considers the very question meaningless and unanswerable.” This, he says, “...strengthens the shift of the theoretical emphasis from the metaphysical ‘What is . . . ?’ to the functional ‘How . . . ?’” (*OD* p. 151). And this kind of reasoning is not confined to physics, but enters into other spheres of life, including philosophy. John Dewey is a case in point. He writes that “...knowing is literally *something which we do*; that analysis is ultimately physical and active; that meanings in their logical quality are standpoints, attitudes, and methods of behavior towards facts, and active experimentation is essential to verification” (quoted in Horkheimer, *E*, p. 48-49; emphasis added).³ According to this perspective, “...the behavior of people decides the meaning of the concept.” “Meaning is supplanted by function or effect in the world of things and events” (Horkheimer, *E*, p. 46, 22).

Critical Theorists’ grievances against this kind of instrumentalism are not centred around questions as to whether a “true world” exists, whether the “apparent world” is the only one conscious subjects can encounter and so on. Horkheimer says that “the subjectivism of the [pragmatist] school lies in the role that ‘our’ practices, actions, and interests play in the theory of knowledge, not in its acceptance of phenomenalist doctrine” (*E*, p. 45). Critical Theorists’ concern is that if meaning arises from our practices, actions and interests—or, as both Finkelstein and Dewey put it, from “what we do”—it follows that principles such as “liberty” and “justice”—principles on which western democracies are reputedly founded—refer to nothing more than “what western democracies do.” This would permit a western democracy to suspend the writ of *habeas corpus*, indeed, commit any action whatever while legitimately claiming to act in the interest of “liberty” and “justice” since everything the country does is, by definition, identical to these principles.

This example is perhaps a little glib, and insofar as the absurdity of the claim is obvious—insofar as we are not duped and recognise it as an abuse of words—the example may seem to refute its own point. In *One-Dimensional Man*, however, Marcuse outlines a similar but more compelling example (p. 114-120). The example comes from a study called “Competitive Pressures and Democratic Consent.” The goal of its authors, Morris Janowitz and Dwaine Marvick, is to “judge the extent to which an election is an effective expression of democratic process.”⁴ This judgment, they say, implies evaluating the electoral process “in terms of the requirements for maintaining a democratic society.” However, before any such evaluation they must settle on a definition of “democracy.” The authors look at two kinds of definition—one based on a “mandate” theory of democracy, the other on a “competitive” theory. Janowitz and Marvick write:

The ‘mandate’ theories, which find their origin in the classical conceptions of democracy, postulate that the process of representation derives from a clear-cut set of directives which the electorate imposes on its representatives. An election is a procedure of

convenience and a method for ensuring that representatives comply with directives from constituents.⁵

Janowitz and Marvick view this mandate theory as a “preconception” of democracy and reject it “in advance as unrealistic because it [assumes] a level of articulated opinion and ideology on the campaign issues not likely found in the United States.” In place of a mandate theory, therefore, they define democracy with a competitive theory: the view that democratic processes are means for selecting candidates who are in competition for public office. “This definition,” writes Marcuse, “in order to be really operational, requires ‘criteria’ by which the character of political competition is to be addressed” (*OD*, p. 115). Janowitz and Marvick offer three:

- (1) a democratic election requires competition between opposing candidates which pervades the entire constituency. The electorate derives power from its ability to choose between at least two competitively oriented candidates, either of whom is believed to have a reasonable chance to win.
- (2) a democratic election requires both [!] parties to engage in a balance of efforts to maintain established voting blocs, to recruit independent voters, and to gain converts from the opposition parties.
- (3) a democratic election requires both [!] parties to be engaged vigorously in an effort to win the current election; but, win or lose, both parties must also be seeking to enhance their chances of success in the next and subsequent elections...⁶

Marcuse says, “I think these definitions describe pretty accurately the factual state of affairs in the American elections of 1952, which is the subject of the analysis” (*OD*, p. 115). What this means, however, is that “...the criteria for judging a given state of affairs are those offered (or, since they are those of a well-functioning and firmly established social system, imposed by) the given state of affairs” (*OD*, p. 115). The aim of the authors, it will be recalled, is to “judge the extent to which an election is an effective expression of democratic process.” But with a definition of democracy based on current practices in America, the investigation is “...circular and self-validating. If ‘democratic’ is defined in the limiting but realistic terms of the actual process of election, then this process is democratic prior to the results of the investigation” (Marcuse, *OD*, p. 116). By emphasising the identity—the positive relation—between democracy as a theory and democracy as a practice, and downplaying the difference, that is, the negative relation between the two, Janowitz and Marvick preclude “...a concept of democracy which would reveal the democratic election as a rather limited democratic process” (*OD*, p.116).

A conceptualisation of democracy based on practice, on what has been actualised—on the world as it is now—is a fundamentally positivistic conceptualisation. Critical Theorists do not move to exclude positivistic dimensions from the concept, but push for a concept that includes both positive and negative dimensions—what Marcuse would call a “two-dimensional” concept. The negative dimension speaks to “...the historical intent of democracy, the conditions for which the struggle of democracy was fought, and which are still to be fulfilled” (Marcuse, *OD*, p. 117). Conceived negatively democracy does not simply name what has been actualised in practice. The concept, rather, is and has been a cry for a system as yet unachieved—a conceptual rallying point that calls attention to the undemocratic character of democratic practices, a rejection of the world as it is.

There are similarities between the technique of operationalisation and Wittgenstein’s therapeutic philosophy, and these similarities suggest a positivistic bias in Wittgenstein. Both operationalisation and therapeutic philosophy aim at clarifying what certain words mean. Operationalisation emphasises the importance of being concrete. Wittgenstein emphasises the importance of being concrete and looking at the particulars. Wittgenstein clarifies the meaning of words by looking at their function—by looking at how they are used. Janowitz and Marvick clarify “democracy” by looking at how it is practiced. When looking at the use of words, Wittgenstein focuses on everyday activities, that is, on things as they now are. Janowitz and Marvick likewise focus on the world as it now is. They reject “a mandate theory” of democracy because it is not representative of current practices in America and because, in their own words, it assumes “...a level of articulated opinion and ideology. . .not likely found in the United States.” That is to say, the belief that Americans, as a community of language users, do not use the word “democracy” in such a sophisticated manner is grounds for dismissing a mandate theory of democracy. They, like Wittgenstein, look at how the word is currently used and determine its meaning on that basis.

Their "...analysis is 'locked'; the range of judgment is confined within a context of facts which excludes judging the context in which the facts are made, man-made, and in which their meaning, function and development are determined" (Marcuse, *OD*, p. 115-116). Wittgenstein's analysis is likewise locked inside the activity or language-game, and confined to determining whether a given move makes sense according to the rules of the game. Clarifying meaning either through operationalisation or therapeutic philosophy limits the universe of discourse to the world as it now is within some relatively insulated sphere of human activity. This constitutes the positivistic (as in affirmative) bias of both the scientific practices of Janowitz and Marvick and of Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophy.

It is perhaps unfair to say Wittgenstein affirms the *status quo*; yet his thought is affirmative insofar as his "...philosophic critique criticizes *within* the societal framework and stigmatizes non-positive notions as mere speculation, dreams, or fantasies" (Marcuse, *OD*, p. 172), that is, as grammatical fictions and illusions. Wittgenstein says the philosopher should not interfere with the actual (i.e., the actual use of language) and that philosophy should leave everything as it is now (*BT*, S.418 & *PI*, §124). He dismisses the idea that philosophical analysis of language calls for a second-order language, that is, a metalanguage⁷ (*PI*, §121) and talks of bringing words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use (*PI*, §116). By insinuating that the alien (i.e., non-everyday) character of metaphysical language is what makes it objectionable, he rebukes the philosopher who speaks in alien forms that negate the world as it is. A philosophy that discourages this kind of discourse, writes Marcuse,

...sets up a self-sufficient world of its own, closed and well protected against the ingression of disturbing external factors. In this respect, it makes little difference whether the validating context [i.e., the activity in which the language is used] is that of mathematics, of logical propositions, or of custom and usage. In one way or another, all possibly meaningful predicates are prejudged. The prejudging judgment might be as broad as the spoken English language, or the dictionary, or some other code or convention. Once accepted, it constitutes an empirical *a priori* which cannot be transcended (*OD*, p. 182).

In the sense that "*meta*" means "beyond," "over" or "transcendent," it implies something that is outside and alien. So while Critical Theorists, like Wittgenstein, see little value in a technical, second-order metalanguage "...constructed mainly with a view of semantic or logical clarity" (*OD*, p. 195), they do see value in forms of language that allow us to move outside established discourses and conceptualise things in negative terms. They contend positivistic rationality "...in its exclusive form, without any contradictory metaphysics to supplement it, corresponds to limitless trust in the existing world." It thus "...reveals itself as the friend of what exists at any given time. The dogmatism concealed within it is the affirmation of the existing power" (Horkheimer, *P*, p. 425, 418).

Wittgenstein claims that what can be said can be said clearly in everyday language, and the rest must be passed over in silence. The unwillingness to interfere with and move outside established forms of language, the refusal to speak the unutterable, the declaration that what cannot be said must be passed over in silence—all this is an effective legitimisation of current ways of speaking and thinking. Horkheimer says, "[t]he ideal pragmatist philosopher would be he who, as the Latin adage has it, remains silent" (*E*, p. 49). *Qui tacet consentit*—silence is consent.

V

Bulwarks against Subversion

Wittgenstein, it will be recalled, draws comparisons between his philosophical methods and psychoanalysis. It will also be recalled that Wittgenstein is a leading figure in Analytic philosophy. It might be said, therefore, that Wittgenstein's philosophy emphasises the analytic side of psychoanalysis. Insofar as "analysis" implies the breaking of things into smaller parts, it implies a method wherein one does not need to look to the outside; the answer is already there; finding it, as Wittgenstein says, is a matter of rearranging what is already established or known (*PI*, §109); it is a matter of investigating internal relationships.

The idea that moves within a language-game are judged from inside the game, according to the rules of the game or activity, is an idea associated not just with Wittgenstein, but with subjectivist rationality where the question of what is reasonable, good or valid depends on the activity or ends:

According to [these] standards, good artists do not serve truth better than good prison wardens or bankers or housemaids. If we tried to argue that the calling of an artist is nobler, we would be told that the contention is meaningless—that while the efficiency of two house maids can be compared on the basis of their relative cleanliness, honesty, skill, et cetera, there is no way of comparing a housemaid and artist (Horkheimer, *E*, p. 31).

This type of reasoning is, in some sense, liberating. By positioning things in separate brackets, it protects one form of life from being subjugated by a more dominant one. Science, for example, currently enjoys a high status. Things that are “scientific” are supposed by many to be better or truer than things that are “unscientific.” That certain spiritual beliefs, alternative forms of medicine, philosophical ideas and so forth have not been and in some cases cannot be scientifically verified all too often becomes grounds for scoffing at them. But from a Wittgensteinian perspective, science, spiritualism, alternative medicine and philosophy—while perhaps having overlap—are different games. We would not use the rules of basketball to referee hockey, and in many cases it is questionable whether scientific criteria are sufficient or appropriate for interpreting domains outside science (see Wittgenstein, *LC*, p. 61). And if judging one game through the rules of another is questionable, then applying the rules of one game to the totality of all games is even more questionable. It is by throwing doubt on whether the rules of one game can be used to judge other games that Wittgenstein moves against totalitising forms of thought.

The move is double-edged, however. The same move that helps prevent one form of life from dominating others also forestalls criticism and helps entrench the current reality. Conservatives often lament the lack of values in the contemporary world, but while certain values may not be taken as seriously as in the past, they are protected from outside interference. Religion is a case in point; rules that apply elsewhere do not apply to it. Whereas a business can be sued and even legally prosecuted for refusing to employ women, religious institutions can exclude women from their clergy with impunity, even in cases where clerical positions are paid positions and thus amount to a profession.

The current disrepute of the idea of objective, universal and immutable truth does not eliminate dogmatism. In fact, the potential of objective forms of reason to attack dogma “...is perhaps more serious than that of subjective reason, which . . . is inclined to abandon the fight . . . by setting up . . . different brackets...” for different spheres of life, thus recognising them all (Horkheimer, *E*, p. 12). Impartial tolerance of all views is totalitarian by virtue of its refusal to be critical of any them—a refusal which translates to deference. Wittgenstein says philosophy must not interfere with the actual (*PI*, §124), but the same brackets which provide shelter from outside interference also provide shelter from criticism.

It might be objected that, while impartial tolerance affords protection to the *status quo*, it nevertheless is progressive insofar as it implies tolerance for critical and transcendent (as in alien) forms of thought that move against the *status quo*. For Marcuse, however,

hostility [towards the alien] is most sweeping where it takes the form of toleration—that is, where certain truth value is granted to the transcendent concepts in a separate dimension of meaning and significance (poetic truth, metaphysical truth). For precisely the setting aside of a special reservation in which thought and language are permitted to be legitimately inexact, vague, and even contradictory is the most effective way of protecting the normal universe of discourse from being seriously disturbed by unfitting ideas. Whatever truth may be contained in literature is a “poetic” truth, whatever truth may be contained in critical idealism is a “metaphysical” truth—its validity, if any, commits neither ordinary discourse and behavior, nor the philosophy adjusted to them. This new form of the doctrine of the “double truth” sanctions a false consciousness by denying the relevance of the transcendent language to the universe of ordinary language, by proclaiming total non-interference. Whereas the truth of the former consist precisely in its relevance to and interference with the latter (*OD*, p. 184-185).

The sanctuary granted to alien thought by a bracketed universe of tolerance is comparable to the sanctuary of the madhouse: the asylum shelters inmates from the world, but it also shelters the world from deviant forces that might interfere with it and subvert it.

1. Normative Psychology and Therapeutic Philosophy

“They said I was mad; and I said they were mad; damn them, they outvoted me.” —
Nathaniel Lee, Restoration poet confined to Bethlem (quoted in Porter, 1987, p. 2).

John Locke distinguishes between idiots and the mad: Idiots suffer “...from want of quickness, activity, and motion in the intellectual faculties.” The insane, on the other hand, “do not appear to have lost the faculty of reasoning; but, having joined together some ideas very wrongly, they mistake them for truths, and they err as men do that argue right from wrong principles” (1690, bk. II, ch. xi, sect. 13). Locke did not comment extensively on madness, but as a giant of the Enlightenment, his writings were canonical among the educated classes, including those in the burgeoning psychiatric profession. By emphasising human malleability and advancing a “blank-slate” model where everything is learned through associations in the mind, Locke contributed enormously to the rise of mental approaches in psychiatry (see Porter, 1987, ch. 4). If madness was a consequence of ill-formed associations between ideas, it was reasoned a kind of therapeutic re-education, not physick (medicine), was the most promising remedy.

By suggesting that madness could be overcome through correcting mistakenly associated ideas, Locke countered the widely held view that the insane were, in most cases, incurable. By positing that the mad do not suffer from want of reason or mental acuity, he countered the view that the mad, having been deprived of their thinking faculty—the feature supposedly separating human from beast—were more akin to beast than human. “If, however, in these respects Locke’s model of madness was emancipatory, its potential for regarding all intellectual irregularity as a mode of insanity was to prove far more equivocal” (Porter, 1987, p. 192).

While it would be an overstatement to suggest that Locke actually views all intellectual irregularity as insanity, he does display antagonism towards deviant or alien forms of thought and expression. He states that language is abused by “...applying old words to new and unusual significations... or else putting them together as may confound their ordinary meaning” (1690, bk. iii, ch. x, sect. 5). He suggests that metaphysical language is often without meaning (1690, bk. iii, ch. x, sect. 2). He attacks poetic language as an abuse of language, though allowing for it “...in discourses where we seek rather pleasure and delight than information and improvement” (1690, bk. iii, ch. x, sect. 34). But even this allowance is a dismissal, for it effectively bars the poet from saying anything serious or important. The poet might respond: “Your tolerance is deceptive. In reserving for me a special niche of meaning and significance, you grant me exemption from sanity and reason, but in my view, the madhouse is somewhere else” (Marcuse, *OD*, p. 192).

Psychiatric models of mental illness have long been criticised for turning non-conformist (alien) behaviour into a medical condition. While many commentators have undoubtedly inflated the frequency and scope of this occurrence, as well as its sinister implications for social control, an abundance of examples do attest to the basic criticism. Thus it is suggestive—given the historical role of normative models in psychiatry—that Wittgenstein characterises his philosophy as “therapeutic.”

As Marcuse writes of Wittgenstein and, more generally, of Analytic and Linguistic philosophy:

The therapeutic character of philosophical analysis is strongly emphasized—to cure from illusions, deceptions, obscurities, unsolvable riddles, unanswerable questions, from ghost and spectres. Who is the patient? Apparently a certain sort of intellectual, whose mind and language do not conform to the terms of ordinary discourse (*OD*, p. 183).

Where Locke’s psychology potentially interprets non-conformity as madness, Linguistic and Analytic philosophers have stigmatised non-conformist linguistic constructions as confused mumbo-jumbo comparable to illnesses. They have, as Marcuse observes, displayed an almost paranoid suspicion of the alien. He writes:

[They often spread] the atmosphere of denunciation and investigation by committee. The intellectual is called on the carpet. What do you mean when you say . . . ? Don’t you conceal something? You talk a language which is suspect. You don’t talk like the rest of us, like the man in the street, but rather like a foreigner who does not belong here (*OD*, p. 192).

If the evocation of a denunciation trial seems extreme, recall that Marcuse experienced both the rise of Nazism and the paranoia of McCarthyism. In America his status as Leftist—that is, as a political non-conformist—was a liability, and it is evident that he downplayed the Marxist influences in his writings. In the world of English speaking philosophy, likewise, his status as a Continental thinker—that is, his status not only as an intellectual alien, but more specifically one who fails to use ordinary language—would have rendered his thought suspect in many philosophical circles.

Marcuse asserts that Linguistic and Analytic philosophers punish intelligent non-conformity (*OD*, p. 174). He objects that they conduct their therapeutic philosophy “...without Freud’s fundamental insight that the patient’s trouble is rooted in a *general* sickness which cannot be cured by analytic therapy,” that is, without acknowledging the possibility that “... the patient’s disease is a protest reaction against the sick world in which he lives” (*OD*, p. 183). The illness is instead treated as a failure to adapt to the world as it is; the therapeutic philosopher “...has to restore the patient’s health, to make him capable of functioning normally in the world (*OD*, p. 183). The patient must cut his cloth to fit the established reality.

Therapeutic philosophy assumes that conceptual or philosophical problems result from grammatical misinterpretations. It assumes, basically, that confusion arises from the peculiar, odd or incorrect use of words. It gives little attention to the idea that the conceptual confusion may arise because a given language-game is in as little order as the world which it communicates (Marcuse, *OD*, p. 177). Nor does it amply appreciate that the patient may not be sick, but simply refusing to collaborate with a bad order. The patient, like one who has escaped Plato’s cave, may only appear befuddled because he is judged by those who see less clearly than he. Recognising inadequacies in the established universe of discourse, the patient may feel a need to speak in other terms. It is in virtue of being alien—not confused—that these terms appear nonsensical when judged according to the rules of established language-games.

2. Conservative Voices

Marcuse observes in Linguistic and Analytic philosophy the righteous indignation of conservatives hating to see the boat rocked. We are subjected to the rule of established facts—“only linguistic facts, to be sure, but society speaks its language, and we are told to obey. The prohibitions are severe and authoritarian” (*OD*, p. 178), almost commandments. “Philosophy *may in no way* interfere with the actual use of language.” “And we may not advance any kind of theory. There *must* be nothing hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all explanation, and description *alone must* take its place” (Wittgenstein *PI*, §124, 109, quoted in *OD*, p. 178; emphasis added). These proclamations are reinforced with a chummy “...familiarity with the chap on the street...” (*OD*, p. 174) that appeals “...righteously to the normal understanding of ordinary people” (Marcuse, *OD*, p. 198) and thus “...excludes from the beginning the high-brow vocabulary of ‘metaphysics’ ” (*OD*, p. 174). The rhetoric “militates against intelligent non-conformity; it ridicules the egg-head.” (*OD*, p. 174)

The poles of pontificating authority and easy-going chumminess are, according to Marcuse,

...perfectly fused in Wittgenstein’s use of the imperative with the intimate or condescending “*du*” (“thou”); or in the opening chapter of Gilbert Ryle’s *The Concept of Mind*, where the presentation of “Descartes’ Myth” as the “official doctrine” about the relation of the body and mind is followed by a preliminary demonstration of its “absurdity,” which evokes John Doe, Richard Roe, and what they think about the “Average Taxpayer” (*OD*, p. 174).

This is a voice that proclaims its own legitimacy by insinuating that the absurdity of the opposing philosophy is so obvious as to be seen at a glance. Those who dislike the philosophy are therefore let off the hook—its “obvious absurdity” is a pass to dismiss it without studying it. So too are those who struggle to comprehend it—its “obvious absurdity” allows them to blame their difficulties on the inherent incomprehensibility of the philosophy rather than their own failings. And the message to those who dare entertain the philosophy is this: to even consider it is to prove oneself a fool. Opposition is thus curtailed prior to serious debate.

Linguistic and Analytic philosophers have often exhibited an anti-metaphysical and in some cases an anti-

theoretical stance. Their stress on usefulness, on the everyday, on the concrete, on practice over theory, rhetorically implies that their philosophy deals not with heavenly but earthly concerns—with problems that matter to human beings. Yet, as Marcuse counters, the endless language games about buildingstones (see Wittgenstein, *PI*, part I), the conversations between Joe Doe and Richard Roe, the debates over propositions about the baldness of the present king of France, or what is means to point and say, “this is red,” or to tell someone that “the broom is in the corner”—in the end these exercises are an escape “...into that which is only academically controversial” (*OD*, p. 199), therefore an escape into that which poses no threat to the established order.

VI

Final Remarks: Critical and Uncritical Philosophy

Wittgenstein suggests philosophy is critical in nature when he remarks that philosophy destroys idols (*BT*, S.413), and there is no denying that his philosophy, in some instances, does serve this function. It questions the magisterial authority of certain philosophical concepts and principles. It also throws doubt on certain everyday truisms—for example, the idea that the words “understanding” and “knowing” refer to some inner process or experience. What it does not draw into question, however, is our faith in the established universe of discourse. Wittgenstein suggests that language is in good order as it is (*T*, 5.5563; *PI*, §98; *PI*, p. 48-49), and his basis for questioning both philosophical concepts and everyday truisms is that they confuse the good order of language.

Critical Theorists, like Wittgenstein, hold there is much clarification to be done by philosophy, including even the clarification of ordinary language. But for Critical Theorists, this means investigating “...ordinary language in really controversial areas, recognizing muddled thinking where it *seems* to be the least muddled, uncovering the falsehood in so much normal and clear usage.” Conducted accordingly, “...linguistic analysis would attain the level on which the specific societal processes which shape and limit the universe of discourse become visible and understandable” (Marcuse, *OD*, p. 195). It would thus shake our certainty in what is normal and clear, in what is already established. Clarity, therefore, would bring doubt and uncertainty, and through them it would liberate.

Marcuse says that two propositions describe the situation faced by the Critical philosopher: “ ‘The whole is the truth,’ and the whole is false” (*D*, p. 541). For Critical Theorists, things are not simply what they are. As Horkheimer shows us, words do not simply mean what they mean. Everyday use poorly accounts for the meanings of “dignity,” “freedom” and “justice,” and philosophy reminds us of this. It exposes the contradiction between the use of our words and their meanings, between theory and practice, between conditions within a society and ideals on which the society is founded. For Critical Theorists, philosophy aims at revealing the world in a two-dimensional light; it aims, as it were, at showing the world for what it is, then showing that the world is false. Thus, writes Marcuse, “there is no more unphilosophical motto than Bishop Butler’s pronouncement which adorns G.E. Moore’s *Principia Ethica*: ‘Everything is what it is, and not another thing’ ” (*OD*, p. 184).

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Notes

1. It is grammatically convenient to use the terms “pre-industrial,” “early industrial” and “advanced industrial” as if they refer to time periods, with the first two terms indicating bygone eras, but strictly speaking the terms refer to systems of production. In the 1950s, for example, America was highly industrialised, whereas much of rural China was pre-industrial.

2. Note: I am unable to provide a full reference for this quotation and hence do not list it in my list of references. I originally read it on-line, but the paper, which appeared in a 2003 conference, is no longer posted. The author has, however, confirmed in a personal communication that the cited passage is indeed his own, though he is also unable to specify the source.

3. Horkheimer cites Dewey’s (1916) *Essays in Experimental Logic*, p. 330.

4. Note: unless explicitly credited to Marcuse, all quotations in this discussion are from Janowitz and Marvick as cited by Marcuse. Marcuse provides page references for the longer quotations, but not the

shorter ones; hence I do the same.

5. Marcuse cites H. Eulau, S. J. Eldersveld, M. Janowitz (eds), *Political Behavior* (Glencoe Free Press, 1956), p. 275.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 276.

7. Metalanguage is language used to talk about language.

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