25 See Derrida, *Aporias*, pp. 12 and 38.

26 'I cannot respond to the call, the request, the obligation of another without sacrificing the other other, the other others' (GD, 68).

27 See, for example, *The Gift of Death*, p. 92, but there are numerous other places throughout this and other texts where he criticizes this notion.

28 There are repeated references to this in *The Gift of Death*, see pp. 63, 88, 92, 95.

29 Derrida goes on to explain that the relation between the limit, that is, the singular, and the economy is an experience of aporia. In the next sentence he says: 'The affirmation that announced itself through a negative form was therefore the necessity of *experience* itself, the experience of aporia . . . as endurance or passion, as interminable resistance or remainder.'

30 For example, he says that the idea of duty 'is never simply given, that its status is not even that of a regulative idea in the Kantian sense, but rather something that remains to be thought and to come'; *Aporias*, p. 19.

31 For a discussion of the Kant–Derrida relation on this issue see Olivia Custer, 'Kant and Derrida: Inventing Oneself out of an Impossible Choice' in *Kant After Derrida*, ed. P. Rothfield (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003).

32 See 'The Politics of Friendship', *The Journal of Philosophy* 85(11) (1988): 634.

33 See Paul Patton's clear account of this issue in 'Future Politics' in *Between Derrida and Deleuze*, ed. Paul Patton and John Protevi (London: Continuum, 2003).

34 *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, ed. John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), pp. 16–17; emphasis added.

35 Heidegger argues that we are singular in the confrontation with death, and that this singularity is the defining feature of *Dasein*'s mineness, a notion only fulfilled in the confrontation with death. Levinas does not accept this story, for him the singular is not first or discovered as mine, as a responsibility for myself, but rather the other comes first. God in the Abraham story is this other that comes first.

36 *Aporias*, p. 20 citing his own *The Other Heading*, pp. 80–1. In *The Gift of Death* he describes Hegel's dialectic as 'speculation on every secret' (p. 83).

37 This is where my interpretation differs in particular from Pinkard's and Brandom's. See my 'Satisfying the Demands of Reason: Hegel's Conceptualization of Experience', *Topoi* 21(1) (2003): 41–53.

38 See Terry Pinkard's discussion of this issue in 'Virtues Morality and Sittlichkeit', *European Journal of Philosophy* 7(1999): 217–38 and in his *German Philosophy 1760–1860*.

Paul Livingston

Wittgenstein, Kant and the critique of totality

Abstract   In this paper, I explore Wittgenstein's inheritance of one specific strand of Kant's criticism, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, of reason's inherent pretensions to totality. This exploration reveals new critical possibilities in Wittgenstein's own philosophical method, challenging existing interpretations of Wittgenstein's political thought as 'conservative' and exhibiting the closeness of its connection to another inheritor of Kant's critique of totality, the Frankfurt School's criticism of 'identity thinking' and the reification of reason to which it leads. Additionally, it shows how Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy offers to challenge and undermine, in a historically novel way, the metaphysical assumptions underlying some of our most characteristic and ubiquitous social practices.

Key words   Theodor Adorno · identity · Immanuel Kant · Karl Marx · practices · reification · totality · Ludwig Wittgenstein

One of the most central and familiar elements of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is his call to replace the traditional inquiries of philosophy with investigation into the 'use' [*Gebrauch*] of words in their various practical connections and surroundings, linguistic and non-linguistic.[1] Again and again, Wittgenstein counsels his readers to abandon the search for deep or esoteric inquiries into the nature of things, in favor of reminders of the ways we actually employ language in the vast variety of contexts and situations that comprise a human life. These reminders have suggested to many interpreters that Wittgenstein can be understood as replacing traditional categories of thought and language with terms drawn from, or contributing to, the social theory of intersubjective practices. Since he wrote, Wittgenstein's invocation of use has accordingly made way for a series of projects, within analytic philosophy, that foreground the relationship of linguistic meaning to ordinary intersubjective

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praxis. But despite the familiarity and widespread influence of Wittgenstein's appeal to use, I argue in this article, this appeal has a *critical* significance that commentators have often missed. What has been missed in projects that construe Wittgenstein as offering a theory of meaning as grounded in social practice, in fact, is a far-ranging *critique of totality* that runs through Wittgenstein's work, early and late, and actually undermines both the possibility of positive theorizing about typical social practices and the elements of metaphysical thinking that often support them.

Constantly directing his readers to recall the 'use' of a word, Wittgenstein nevertheless just as constantly resists the natural temptation to think of this use as an object, a unity or a whole, accessible to a comprehensive, theoretical understanding of practice or enclosable within a set of binding rules. In this way, his practice of linguistic criticism works to undermine the totalizing assumptions behind not only what he sometimes calls the 'metaphysical picture' of a rule but also the concrete technological and material practices that this picture often supports. Wittgenstein's philosophical method, in fact, challenges just those features of thought that Adorno characterized as 'identity thinking', and joins the tradition of critical theory in its criticism of the totalizing assumptions that underlie it. Seeing this connection – a connection ultimately rooted in the common Kantian heritage that Wittgenstein's project shares with the project of critical theory – can help us to understand the political significance of Wittgenstein's investigations of language in a new way, and suggests far-ranging implications for the method of philosophical reflection they embody.

I

It is a familiar point that one aim of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, particularly in the *Transcendental Dialectic*, is to exhibit the fundamental *incompleteness* of human thought. This incompleteness is, for Kant, a consequence of the operation of the very principles of reason itself, of the inevitability of its own critical questioning, in accordance with these principles, of its own scope and limits. What Kant, in the *Dialectic*, calls 'transcendental illusion' results from our tendency to misunderstand the principles of reason, construing these actually subjective rules as if they were objective principles really governing things in the world. The misunderstanding results from reason's inherent function, to synthesize the principles of the understanding into a higher unity,[2] It does so by means of *inference*, striving to reduce the variety of principles of the understanding [*Grundsatze*] under the unity of a small number of inferential principles of reason [*Prinzipien*].[3] But in so doing, reason also creates the problematic 'pure concepts' or 'transcendental

ideas' (A 321/B 378) that stand in no direct relationship to any given object.

The transcendental ideas arise from reason's synthesis by means of inference, in particular, when this process of synthesis is thought of as *complete*.[4] According to Kant, in seeking to unify knowledge under higher inferential principles, reason seeks the condition for any given conditioned, leading it ultimately to seek *totality* in the series of conditions leading to any particular phenomenon:

> Accordingly, in the conclusion of a syllogism we restrict a predicate to a certain object, after having first thought it in the major premiss in its whole extension under a given condition. This complete quantity of the extension in relation to such a condition is called *universality* (*universalitas*). In the synthesis of intuitions we have corresponding to this the *allness* (*universitas*) or *totality* of the conditions. The transcendental concept of reason is, therefore, none other than the concept of the *totality* of the *conditions* for any given conditioned. (A 322/B 378–9)

The search for totality, Kant explains, takes three forms, corresponding to the three kinds of inference through which reason can arrive at knowledge by means of principles.[5] These three forms furnish the rational ideas of soul, world and God that are the objects of transcendental dialectic. In each case, however, the transcendental critique will show that the pretension of these ideas to furnish to knowledge objects corresponding to them is unfounded. Whatever the *subjective* validity of the ideas of reason in instructing us to pursue the search for ever-greater unification, the attempt to provide *objects* of knowledge corresponding to the total synthesis of conditions cannot succeed.

Accordingly, one upshot of the Kantian critique of the totalizing ideas of reason, significant for the critical projects that would descend from it, is that the work of reason in synthesizing knowledge is, for Kant, *radically incomplete*. The critique of transcendental illusion opens an irreducible gulf between the sphere of possible knowledge and the satisfaction of reason's own demands, disrupting every attempt or pretense to present the work of reason as complete or completable. As John Sallis (1980) has argued, the Kantian critique of totality thus reveals the impossibility of any final repair of the 'fragmentation' that is characteristic of finite knowledge. By contrast with the unifying power of the deduction of the categories in the *Transcendental Analytic*, which succeeds in gathering the manifold of intuition into unities under the categories of the understanding, the 'gathering of reason' attempted in the *Transcendental Dialectic* ultimately fails:

> Thus, in each of the gatherings of reason, critique exhibits a radical non-correspondence between the two moments that belong to the structure of the gathering, between the unity posited by reason and the actual gathering

of the manifold into this unity. It shows that in every case the actual gathering of the manifold falls short of the unity into which reason would gather that manifold. An inversion is thus prepared: With respect to its outcome the gathering of reason is precisely the inverse of that gathering of pure understanding that is measured in the *Transcendental Analytic*. Whereas the gathering of reason culminates in the installation of radical difference between its moments, the gathering of understanding issues in identity, unity, fulfillment. (1980: 154–5)

Whereas the categories in the *Analytic* result in a gathering of the representations of the intuition into a unity that is stable and uncontestable, the gathering of reason fails to result in a unity of knowledge, instead installing a radical heterogeneity or difference, at the heart of reason's work, between its actual attainments and its own irrepressible demands. The line of critique, stably drawn in the *Analytic* between the field of possible contents of experience and that which transcends this field, accordingly becomes *destabilized*. The work of reason's self-critique becomes a practically endless dialogue, an ever-renewed questioning of the claims of positive knowledge and a critical interrogation of its intrinsic claims to totality. The line that critique draws between truth and illusion becomes, rather than a stable line between two fields of definable contents, the unstable and constantly shifting line of reason's rediscovered finitude in the face of its infinite aims.

Kant's installation of radical difference and essential unsatisfiability in reason's own work proves essential, moreover, to the ability of critical practice to disrupt the totalizing claims of *instrumentalized* and *reified* conceptions of reason. In his lectures on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Adorno suggests that this moment of Kantian critique is in fact the source of critique's power to break up the hegemony of identity thinking:

> On the one hand, we think of the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a kind of identity-thinking. This means that it wishes to reduce the synthetic *a priori* judgments and ultimately all organized experience, all objectively valid experience, to an analysis of the consciousness of the subject. . . . On the other hand, however, this way of thinking desires to rid itself of mythology, of the illusion that man can make certain ideas absolute and hold them to be the whole truth simply because he happens to have them within himself. In this sense Kantian philosophy is one that enshrines the validity of the non-identical in the most emphatic way possible. It is a mode of thought that is not satisfied by reducing everything that exists to itself. Instead, it regards the idea that all knowledge is contained in mankind as a superstition and, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, it wishes to criticize it as it would criticize any superstition. . . .
>
> Now the greatness of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that these two motifs clash. To give a stark description we might say that the book contains an identity philosophy – that is, a philosophy that attempts to ground being in the subject – and also a non-identity philosophy – one that

attempts to restrict that claim to identity by insisting on the obstacles, the *block*, encountered by the subject in its search for knowledge. And you can see the double nature of Kant's philosophy in the dual organization of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. (1959: 66)

According to Adorno, Kant's thinking is implicitly totalizing in its attempt – with one of its voices – to reduce all knowledge to a unity of categories or a priori representations, to delimit the sphere of possible knowledge to the closed field of transcendental subjectivity, excluding all that lies outside this field. But at the same time, as Adorno notes, Kant's recognition of the essential incompleteness of reason's work inscribes non-identity and the possibility of radical difference within the project of critique, disrupting every totalizing claim to reduce knowledge to a stable unity. According to Adorno, it is this recognition of non-identity that makes Kantian critique enduringly relevant for the criticism of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment patterns of rationality. In particular, the recognition of an essential *limitation* and incompleteness of identity-thinking allows its pretensions of unity and totality to be criticized and dismissed in a continuous and ever-renewed movement of critique. 'Dialectics', Adorno says in *Negative Dialectics*, 'is the consistent sense of nonidentity.' Kant's early recognition of this provides both the source and the enduring model for critical theory's continued application of dialectical critique to prevailing norms and regimes of social behavior.

II

Standard interpretations of the critical element of Wittgenstein's philosophy often present his intention as one of drawing or articulating a *line* between meaningful language and nonsense. Thus, for instance, in his classic discussion of the *Tractatus*, Maslow suggests reading it as 'a kind of Kantian phenomenalism, with the forms of language playing a role similar to Kant's transcendental apparatus'. This interpretation, Maslow says, involves seeing language 'not only [as] an instrument of thought and communication but also [as] an all-pervading factor in organizing our cognitive experience' (1961: xiv); the task of Wittgenstein's critical philosophy is, according to Maslow, thus to establish the nature of this factor and mark its necessary bounds. In a similar vein, Pears (1970) suggests understanding Wittgenstein's thought as a whole as inspired by the 'Kantian' desire to understand the forms of language in order to deflate the pretensions of philosophy to go beyond them.[6] According to this interpretation, the critical purpose of the *Tractatus* is to investigate the logic of language in order to pave the way for a rejection of nonsense. Once the logical conditions for the possibility of meaning are clearly

understood, it will be possible clearly to distinguish utterances that satisfy these conditions from those that do not. This distinction will provide the Wittgensteinian linguistic philosopher with a new basis on which to criticize and dismiss the substantial claims of metaphysics that Kant already attacked, claims which can now be dismissed as going beyond not only any possible experience but also any possible sense.

Within the context of this usual way of viewing Wittgenstein's critical intentions, his appeal to practice can seem to have an essentially *conservative* flavor. On the usual interpretation, the purpose of Wittgenstein's treatment of meaning as use is to remind us that a word only has significance insofar as it functions within a well-defined and established ordinary practice, one of the many unities of intersubjective speaking, acting and accomplishing that Wittgenstein (so it is often supposed) designates as 'language-games'. This interpretation of Wittgenstein as a conservative thinker has in fact prompted some philosophers to reject Wittgenstein's method outright.[7] Alternatively, others have accepted and celebrated what they see as the 'conservative' implications of Wittgenstein's appeal to use.[8] Still others, along similar lines, take the supposed uncriticizability of practices on Wittgenstein's view to establish a relativism that denies the possibility of criticizing any practice or 'language-game' from any position external to it.[9] For all of these interpretations, however, Wittgenstein's appeal to use has the significance of dismissing *nonsense* on the basis of an identification of *sense* with the unity of a practice. The accordance or non-accordance of a piece of language with the standards or criteria established by an existing practice – itself thought of as, in principle, a bounded and demarcated unity – determines the extent to which it has sense. As the stable *basis* for the critical determination of sense, the unity of practices is itself, on this standard interpretation, immune from criticism. The delimitation of the bounds of sense and the identification of nonsense can only confirm and consolidate existing practices, tracing their boundaries ever more securely, but never challenging their underlying stability.

Despite the ubiquity of this usual reading, however, Wittgenstein can be read differently. In particular, an alternative interpretation becomes possible as soon as we see *another* way in which Wittgenstein inherits the critical legacy of Kant. For Wittgenstein, I shall argue, does not invoke 'use' only, or primarily, to *confirm* the logic of existing practices by identifying their boundaries with the bounds of sense. For even though Wittgenstein's invocation of 'use' calls upon us to remember the way that the sense of a word is dependent on its usual employment, on the surroundings of practice in which it ordinarily functions, Wittgenstein also constantly and recurrently aims to challenge the assumption of any stable theoretical *delimitation* of these surroundings.

As Alice Crary has argued, the standard interpretation of Wittgenstein's project as drawing a stable critical line between sense and nonsense

itself results from the assumption that Wittgenstein formulates a 'use-theory' of meaning according to which the 'place a bit of language has in our lives – the public techniques to which it is tied – fixes or determines its meaning' (2000: 119). As Crary argues, this standard way of understanding Wittgenstein's intention makes the assumption of a fixed line, determinable in principle, between the kinds of use licensed by these 'techniques' and those outside their bounds more or less inevitable. This, in turn, generates the entire debate between 'conservative' interpreters who see Wittgenstein as arguing for the inviolability of established practices and 'conventionalist' or relativist interpreters who see him as establishing the contingency of any particular set of practices. Against this, Crary urges that we should not see Wittgenstein as theorizing meanings as 'fixed' at all:

> Wittgenstein hopes to expose as confused the idea that meanings might somehow be 'fixed' (whether independently of use or otherwise). There is, he wants us to grasp, no such thing as a metaphysical vantage point which, if we managed to occupy it, would disclose to us that meaning were 'fixed' in one way or another and would therefore enable us to bypass the (sometimes enormously difficult) task of trying to see whether or not a new employment of a given expression preserves important connections with other employments. His aim is to get us to relinquish the idea of such a vantage point and, at the same time, to relinquish the idea that what we imagine is to be seen from such a vantage point has some bearing on our ability to submit practices to criticism. (2000: 138)

As Crary suggests, we can actually gain a new sense of the critical implications of Wittgenstein's practice of linguistic reflection by seeing the way in which it *resists* the idea of the fixity of meaning that underlies the most usual way of understanding its critical implications.[10] We can gain this new sense, in particular, by seeing how Wittgenstein situates his reflection on meaning, from the beginning to the end of his philosophical career, *within* the practices for which it provides terms of criticism. This problematizes the usual understanding of the shape of Wittgenstein's inheritance of Kant – according to which Wittgenstein would be involved in the project of drawing a fixed, stable line between sense and nonsense – but also makes room for *another* way of understanding the Kantian legacy of Wittgenstein's method. If Wittgensteinian reflection on meaning is not the drawing of a stable line of critique, but rather an ever-renewed process of reflecting on sense from a position wholly within the practices it criticizes, then one result of Wittgenstein's method, like Kant's own critique of reason, is to call into question the totalizing view that any such line can be drawn at all.

Wittgenstein's first work, the *Tractatus*, already carries out a practice of reflecting on meaning by reflecting on use, and enacts, at least implicitly, a critique of the assumption of the *totality* of use. The preface specifies the aim of the book as that of drawing 'a limit to thought, or

rather – not to thought, but to the expression of thought . . .' (1961: 3). For Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, the critical line is not to be drawn between two regions of practice that are independently identifiable; this would involve thinking on *both* sides of the limit, which would be impossible. Rather, like Kant in the *Dialectic*, Wittgenstein seeks to draw the critical line from within the very practices that are thereby delimited. It follows that the critical practice of the *Tractatus* will reject metaphysics from within the very practices that also constitute it, steadfastly rejecting the goal of any theory of meaning that would delimit these practices in a general or total way. And although it has most often been read as advancing a representationalist 'picture theory' of meaning, the *Tractatus* already in fact theorizes meaning in terms of praxis, while at the same time enacting a radical self-critique that undermines this 'use-theory' from within.

The theory takes shape in the remarks in section 3 that distinguish between signs – mere written or auditory marks – and symbols, which additionally have meaning. According to the theory of sense Wittgenstein expounds in section 3 of the *Tractatus*, we cannot understand the meaning of a sign unless we see how it is used with a *sense* – that is, unless we understand its 'logico-syntactic employment' in significant contexts throughout the language (3.326–3.327). Prior to our understanding how it is used in the language, according to Wittgenstein, a sign is just a sign. Without a use, it is inert; any understanding of its meaning will be shown by, and manifest in, a grasp of the set of contexts and combinations, throughout the language, in which it can significantly appear. With this grasp, the mere sign becomes what Wittgenstein calls a 'symbol' – a sign with a sense. The symbol is the sign taken together with an awareness of its significant uses, of the set of ways in which it can be combined with other signs to form combinations that are themselves significant.

Read straightforwardly, therefore, the *Tractatus* theorizes the *meaningfulness* of a sign as its *use* in significant contexts throughout the language, and treats the *meaning* of a sign as clarified insofar as the total set of its significant uses is clarified.[11] It is, in fact, to ordinary language's tendency to obscure the rules that Wittgenstein traces the typical sources of philosophical error:

> 3.323 In everyday language it very frequently happens that the same word has different modes of signification – and so belongs to different symbols – or that two words that have different modes of signification are employed in propositions in what is superficially the same way.
> Thus the word 'is' figures as the copula, as a sign for identity, and as an expression for existence; 'exist' figures as an intransitive verb like 'go', and 'identical' as an adjective; we speak of something, but also of something's happening.

> (In the proposition, 'Green is green' – where the first word is the proper name of a person and the last an adjective – these words do not merely have different meanings: they are different symbols.)

> 3.324 In this way the most fundamental confusions are easily produced (the whole of philosophy is full of them).

In ordinary language, it is typical for one and the same sign to stand for what are, in fact, two or more different *uses*; seduced by the surface form of language, we are easily led by this to commit the error of taking what are in fact two different symbols as the same one. Logical analysis, introducing the real underlying rules of logical syntax that actually govern the significant use of signs in the language, allows us to disambiguate the signs and clarify their *actual* uses. The endpoint of logical analysis is a 'perspicuous notation' that eliminates this potential for confusion, by rigorously employing exactly one sign for each possible 'mode of employment' or use in the language.

This theory of the meaning of a word as consisting in the totality of its uses supports, as well, the official Tractarian account of the origination of philosophical error. According to the *Tractatus*, the illusions that lead us to philosophical inquiries typically arise from *mistaking* the uses of words in ordinary language. Because ordinary language allows one and the same sign to be used in various possible ways, we very often misconstrue our signs or fail to give them any determinate use at all. This happens, in particular, when we are tempted to use words outside the normal contexts of their ordinary significance. Accordingly, Wittgenstein says that the correct method of philosophy would simply be to critique this kind of mistake:

> The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science – i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy – and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. (6.53)

By reminding ourselves of the uses that we ourselves have given – or failed to give – our signs, we correct the typical errors that lead to philosophical speculation and purge our language of metaphysics. Criticism of the *misuse* of words thereby becomes criticism of metaphysical illusion itself: the philosopher's insight into the correct use of words suffices both to diagnose the sources of our tendency to use words beyond the bounds of sense, and to eliminate these uses.

In the practice of philosophical criticism that the *Tractatus* recommends, therefore, reflection about the correct or legitimate *uses* of signs suffices to expose the errors of ordinary language and positive metaphysics

alike. In this way, the *Tractatus* already points toward the reflection on use that is characteristic of the *Investigations*' inquiry into meaning. But it is significant that nowhere in the *Tractatus* does Wittgenstein suggest that this reflection must involve explicitly stating or deriving the rules of 'logical syntax' that distinguish sense from nonsense. In fact, the suggestion of the *Tractatus* as a whole is that any such statement must undermine itself, rendering the propositions that articulate it nonsensical:

> My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)
> He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright. (6.54)

The remarks that 'frame' the *Tractatus* suggest a pragmatic and performative dimension of its teaching that do not appear on the level of straightforward theory. Rather, as recent commentators like Diamond (1991) have noted, they invite us to undertake a certain kind of elucidatory self-criticism. According to Diamond, the point of the book is not to show or reveal some metaphysical structure of the language and the world, substantial in itself, that can be said or described; the point is, rather, to dramatize the non-existence of any such structure by showing that the attempt to describe it immediately results in nonsense.[12] The text invites us to see this by leading us to enter imaginatively into the supposed theory of the world and language that it outlines, and then showing us how, by the very lights of this theory itself, every proposition that attempts to express it must be nonsense. In this play of the imagination – constituted by our initial identification with, and then forceful separation from, the position of the philosopher who takes the sentences of the *Tractatus* to outline a substantial theory – we come to see the illusoriness of the perspective from which the propositions that theoretical philosophy formulates can seem to have sense. We gain the kind of 'solution' that is 'seen in the vanishing of the problem' – vanishing not in the sense of having been resolved or answered, but in the sense that it has been revealed as *not* being a problem at all.

In particular, the 'frame remarks' of the book – the 'Preface' and the last two remarks – show that Wittgenstein's philosophical practice stands in an ironic and critical relationship to the theoretical content seemingly articulated by the rest of the text. These contents must be accepted, but then eventually rejected when they are seen to undermine themselves inevitably. In the particular case of the *Tractatus* use-theory of meaning, attending to the 'frame remarks' allows us to see how the very same critical movement that *draws* the line between sense and nonsense also serves to *destabilize* it. For if the *Tractatus* theory of meaning articulates a line between the region of sense and that of nonsense, the very propositions that seem to draw this line theoretically, in general terms, must themselves stand on the side of nonsense. As Wittgenstein shows, any positive, theoretical delimitation of the bounds of sense would itself run afoul of those bounds. In this way, the *Tractatus* implicitly criticizes, in its own practice of philosophical criticism, the totalizing assumption of a stable boundary or limit enclosing the totality of legitimate uses of any linguistic sign. By subjecting its own propositions to the semantic test that they themselves define, the *Tractatus*' critique of nonsense becomes a critique of a certain picture of totality, the philosopher's picture of the use of a word as a clearly delimited, rule-bound unity.

Thus, the practice of distinguishing sense from nonsense, rather than depending on a stable theoretical boundary, becomes a constantly renewed work of reasoning in concrete cases, without the assurance of any criterion of meaningfulness exterior to this practice itself. As Ostrow has argued, this compels us to recognize not only the inherent instability of the critique of nonsense, but also the *Tractatus*' ongoing engagement with the metaphysics that it criticizes:

> My contention . . . is that the Wittgensteinian view of the nature of his own claims, of philosophy generally, is not expressible in some self-standing formula, but is rather given entirely in and through the recognition of an intrinsic instability in a particular kind of utterance; it is contained in the seeing how our philosophical assertions change their character, how they undermine their own initial presentation as straightforward truth claims . . . In different terms, what this discussion helps to make evident is the fundamentally dialectical nature of Wittgenstein's thought in the *Tractatus*. It brings to the fore the extent to which we are, at every juncture of the book, engaged with the very metaphysics that is apparently being disparaged. (2001: 12)

If Tractarian critique is self-critique, then it cannot result in any stable, unified or totalizing demarcation of the bounds of sense. The reflection on the uses of words that it calls upon us to undertake does not actually aim at, or conclude in, the demarcation of a stable region of 'sense' to be distinguished from another region of 'nonsense'. Instead, the idea of such a stable demarcation is *itself* one of the pieces of metaphysics that the *Tractatus* centrally aims to confront. The self-critical practice of linguistic reflection problematizes, in its very critical movement, every attempt to authorize such a line or introduce it theoretically by a movement exterior to itself.

What, then, is the residue of the practical significance of the *Tractatus*, once this radical self-critique is complete? As Hacker (2000) has noted, one problem with Diamond's interpretation itself is that it can seem to leave us with little at the end of the day: if the whole aim of

the *Tractatus* is to undermine its own propositions as nonsense, then how can we be said to learn from the book? The *Tractatus* would seem, on the resolute interpretation, to swallow its own tail, leaving nothing behind that a reader could genuinely benefit from. But attention on the role of use allows us to correct this impression. We saw that the *Tractatus* suggests not only a theory of meaning as use but also a *practice* of clarifying meaning by reflecting on use: and this practice can remain even when the theory that introduces it is undermined by radical self-critique. It is true that the practice of analysis can no longer aim toward the stable endpoint of a theoretically comprehended, rule-bound totality of use. Following the radical self-critique, we no longer have any reason even to believe that the description of any such totality would be coherent. But we can nevertheless take away from the *Tractatus* the possibility of a self-directed critical *practice* of reflection. This practice works to elucidate the meanings of words by reminding us of the ways in which they are typically used, and by demonstrating the ordinary tacit conventions and norms of practice that govern them. But purged of the assumption that this elucidation must result in the demonstration of a stable totality of rules, this practice becomes as multiplicitous, fluid and varied as the words and contexts of language itself. It becomes, in other words, the practice of reflection on 'ordinary language' that Wittgenstein would increasingly specify following his return to philosophy in 1929, culminating with the *Investigations*.

III

I have argued that the *Tractatus* is already implicitly critical of the idea that the use of a word can be understood as a systematic whole or a delimited unity of practice. Though the official theory of the book may seem to suggest just such a delimitation, its elucidatory practice criticizes this totalizing assumption by exposing the way in which the assumption of a totality of practice corresponding to any individual symbol undermines itself. In his writings during the 1930s and early 1940s, leading up to the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein would make this critique of the totality of practice explicit as he came to see, with more and more clarity, the irreducible *complexity* of uses that characterizes even the most straightforward words.

When Wittgenstein returned to philosophy in 1929, one of the first substantial criticisms he made of the *Tractatus* theory of language was already that the meaning of an elementary proposition depended not only on its individual logical form, but on its relation to the whole system of propositions in which it figured.[13] Thus, the logical form of, for instance, a proposition about color could not be captured wholly by

the atomistic system of the *Tractatus*, since it had this logical form only against the backdrop of its systematic interconnections with the whole structure of color-propositions in the language.[14] A proposition's meaning, Wittgenstein began to think, is analogous to a position on a yardstick: instead of comparing propositions singly with reality, we must compare the entire system with reality. It follows from this that the act of understanding a proposition must be considerably more complicated than the *Tractatus* had suggested. If understanding a proposition requires not only comparing it individually with reality, but also 'holding up to reality' the whole system of propositions in which it functions, then understanding how to *use* a proposition means knowing how to use a whole *system* of propositions. The 'use of a word', already *implicitly* holistic in the *Tractatus* in referring to the whole set of contexts in which a word can significantly figure, now becomes *explicitly* holistic. As Wittgenstein recognizes, the comprehension of a proposition does not rely simply upon the correspondence of its intrinsic form with the facts. Instead, our ability to identify the logical form of any proposition depends on our recognition of its place in a larger systematic whole. Understanding any individual word means grasping its systematic interrelations in use with a whole variety of other words in the language.

During the 'transitional' period between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, therefore, Wittgenstein came to see that characterizing the *use* of a word would require much more than simply understanding its own intrinsic grammatical type or logical form. It would require a description of the systematic interrelationships of the particular word with other words throughout the language, and a systematic understanding of its possibilities of significant combination with other words throughout the language. At the same time, though, Wittgenstein had also begun to recognize other kinds of inherent complexity in the comprehension of use. He began to see the uses of words to report, question, command and speculate as being just as significant as the descriptive uses he had privileged in the *Tractatus*. And he became increasingly aware of the systematic interweaving of the uses of words with their *practical* surroundings, of the integration of the use of words with non-linguistic behavior and with material practices of handling non-linguistic objects.

As he became increasingly aware of the inherent complexity of the use of a word, Wittgenstein also became explicitly critical of the philosophical tendency to assume that the *meaning* of a word must be an object that is co-present with it in the *mind* of a user. In the first pages of the *Blue Book*, he describes this tendency as arising especially from 'one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment', the tendency to pose general questions such as 'What is meaning?' and look for things corresponding to the substantive terms that these questions involve. In

the particular case of the question about meaning, this tendency to look for an object corresponding to the substantive leads us to think that there must be 'certain definite mental processes bound up with the working of language, processes through which alone language can function' (1958: 3). Impressed by the power of these processes, we tend to portray them as occurring in a 'queer kind of medium, the mind' and think of this medium as bringing about effects that 'no material mechanism could'. What underlies this portrayal is a mistaken conception of the proper object of our search:

> The mistake we are liable to make could be expressed thus: We are looking for the use of a sign, but we look for it as though it were an object co-existing with the sign. (One of the reasons for this mistake is again that we are looking for a 'thing corresponding to a substantive.')[15]

Asking after the meaning of a word on any particular occasion, we are actually asking after its use, after the appropriateness or inappropriateness of using it in *this* way, in *this* combination, at *this* time. But in asking the general question 'What is meaning?' we introduce the ungrounded assumption that our everyday understanding of a word – our ordinary *ability* to use it correctly – must depend on the presence of a substantial *object* which explains this ability in each case. In challenging this assumption, Wittgenstein seeks to re-direct the general philosophical question of how we understand a word to immanent, particular reflection on how we use words in *particular cases*, while at the same time challenging the belief that there is anything at all – any object, system or whole – that can be called the 'use' of a word overall.

For the later Wittgenstein, then, seeing the great variety and heterogeneity of the contexts in which we can significantly employ a word means seeing the complexity of anything that we can understand as its 'use'. But recognizing this essential diversity and heterogeneity is also a way of criticizing our own inclination to *reduce* it. For the late Wittgenstein, this inclination is one of the characteristic tendencies of philosophy, and the one that the philosopher of language must most ardently strive to avoid. According to Wittgenstein, when we try to understand the essence of meaning and understanding, we are tempted to think of the entire use of the word as something that must in some way be *present* each time we understand it. And although there is a sense in which the *use* of the word is present to my mind when I understand it (in the sense that, if I understand it, I know *how* to use it), knowing the use in this sense does not mean having the *totality* of the word's uses present to mind, not even in a shadowy or schematic way.[16] To understand the word is to know how to use it, and the understanding of a word is manifest in the kinds of use one makes of it, in a diversity of contexts, over time. But even while seeing this, there is a temptation to think that to understand the use of the word is to grasp the totality of its use all at once, in the moment of understanding; and accordingly that this totality of use must be describable or capturable as a whole.

The opening sections of the *Investigations* develop Wittgenstein's invocation of use by reminding the reader of the diversity of uses of words, of the *various* ways in which they function and bring about results.[17] The 'Augustinian' picture of language with which the *Investigations* begins is, itself, Wittgenstein argues, a characteristic result of failing to see this diversity of function.[18] Augustine's mistake is like the failure of someone who, seeing the visual uniformity of a printed script, assumes that the uses and purposes of the words are as uniform and similar as the script itself appears to be.[19] Characteristic philosophical errors – for instance, the error of assuming that every sentence is a proposition, or that every propositional sentence is the 'assertion' of a judgment – themselves result from the same tendency to miss the great multiplicity of different purposes of words in the language.[20]

Wittgenstein's criticism, in the *Investigations*, of the explicit theoretical position of the *Tractatus* itself consists largely in reminding the reader of the inherent complexity and heterogeneity of the uses of a word.[21] Missing this complexity, Wittgenstein argues, we are inclined to think of the meaning of a word as something uniform that it carries with it on each occasion of its use. In pursuing the philosophical question about meaning, we become seduced by the appearance that the term or proposition carries its significance with it like an aura, that this significance accompanies it automatically into every kind of application.[22] Insofar as the *Tractatus* sought to answer the general question of the nature of meaning by introducing a general account of the logical form of propositions and language, it too committed this characteristic error of reducing the diversity and heterogeneity of uses of a word to a unity co-present with it on each occasion. The search for an explanation of meaning led to the assumption that there must be 'strict and clear rules of the logical structure of propositions', somehow hidden in 'the medium of the understanding'.[23] The assumption of an underlying logical structure of language thereby became an 'unshakable' ideal, an assumption of 'crystalline purity' that dictates the form that the investigation must subsequently take.[24]

Resisting this ideal, 'we see that what we call "sentence" and "language" has not the formal unity that I imagined, but is the family of structures more or less related to one another' (1951: 108). Meaningful language itself is not a region of *praxis* that can be delimited by the introduction of any uniform theoretical standard or criterion. Instead, it is a complex *family* of structures and concepts, interconnected in the most various and diverse ways with the whole variety of material and social practices that comprise a human life. Wittgenstein's heuristic use

of the concepts of 'family resemblance' and 'language games' themselves aim to remind us of this irreducible diversity. In each case, looking to the 'use' of a word – reminding ourselves of how it is actually used – means also reminding ourselves that our understanding of this 'use' is no stable unity, no delimitable totality, but rather an essentially *open* application of the word to ever-new and shifting contexts of significance.

IV

We have seen that, in the opening sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein's investigation of use leads him repeatedly to criticize the characteristic assumption of *totality* that presents the *use of a word* as a theoretically definable whole. Another version of this assumption, in fact, is the main critical target of the skein of interrelated passages standardly described as the 'rule-following considerations'. For Wittgenstein, the 'metaphysical concept of a rule' that he critiques in these passages is itself a *totalizing* concept; its effect is to falsely delimit and delineate the application of words, to foreclose and diminish the heterogeneity and openness of the set of contexts and combinations in which a word may have significant use. Wittgenstein's internal critique of the concept of a rule aims to disrupt this totalizing assumption, removing its distorting influence on philosophical and ordinary *praxis*, and restoring our sense of the radical openness of our language to new situations and contexts.

According to Wittgenstein in the *Investigations*, one of the key sources of the *Tractatus*' positive picture of meaning was the assumption that 'if anyone utters a sentence and *means* or *understands* it he is operating a calculus according to definite rules' (1951: 81). The *Tractatus*' positive appeal to rules of 'logical syntax' underlying the use of language distorted the actual form of linguistic practice, construing the variety and multiplicity of our uses of words as controlled by a uniform underlying system. But this misunderstanding was, for Wittgenstein, just one case of a more general and ubiquitous one that arises whenever we think of our linguistic practices as *constrained* by rules that determine the correct and incorrect application of words in an infinite diversity of cases. Wittgenstein's account of the source of this error echoes his account in the *Blue Book*. Seeing that reflection on meaning is reflection on use, we are tempted to think that the whole use of the word must be, in some sense, *present* in the mind on each occasion of its use.[25] We then think of the rule itself as a superlative item, somehow capable of determining an infinite number of cases, despite being itself a finite item.

The thought that 'in a *queer* way, the use itself is in some sense present' to the mind on each instance of successful understanding is thus

the most characteristic source of what Wittgenstein calls the 'metaphysical picture' of a rule. When we think of the 'entire use' as underlying and determining any specific instance of it, we are tempted to think of it as captured by something – the symbolic expression of a rule, or a picture or image – that *itself* determines each of an infinite number of instances of application, that determines what is, in each of an infinite number of cases, the *right* way to apply the word in question. Against this metaphysical picture of the rule, Wittgenstein reminds us that any finite, symbolic expression of a rule is capable of various interpretations. No such expression suffices to determine or delimit, by itself, the infinite number of cases in which a word is used correctly. When thought of in this superlative way, the symbolic expression is really 'a mythological description of the use of a rule' (1951: 221). In order to remove the mythology, we need to recall to mind the actual openness of the use of a word in any case of its application. This allows us to see the actual complexity and variety of the ways in which the correctness or incorrectness of the use of a word is determined in each particular case, a complexity and variety that are *shown* concretely in our practices, but cannot be reduced by any standard or principle that is thought to operate in advance of them.[26]

Wittgenstein's critique of rule-following therefore seeks to disrupt a characteristic picture of the *totality* of the use of a word; but it also targets a typical way of thinking about identity that tends to hold this picture in place. This becomes evident at *Philosophical Investigations* (214–16), where Wittgenstein responds to an interlocutory suggestion that an 'intuition' must be needed, in each particular case of the development of a series, to determine the correct way to go on. Characteristically, Wittgenstein's response is a *reductio* of the interlocutor's invocation of 'intuition' in this case:

214. If you have to have an intuition in order to develop the series 1 2 3 4 . . . you must also have one in order to develop the series 2 2 2 2 . . .

215. But isn't the same at least the same?
We seem to have an infallible paradigm of identity in the identity of a thing with itself. I feel like saying: 'Here at any rate there can't be a variety of interpretations. If you are seeing a thing you are seeing identity too.'
Then are two things the same when they are what one thing is? And how am I to apply what the one thing shews me to the case of two things?

216. 'A thing is identical with itself.' – There is no finer example of a useless proposition, which yet is connected with a certain play of the imagination. It is as if in imagination we put a thing into its own shape and saw that it fitted.

This appeal to an 'intuition' is one characteristic recourse of the metaphysical picture of the rule. The interlocutor attempts to ground this

picture, ultimately, in what he thinks of as the self-identity of the rule, its sameness to itself across the infinite set of its instances. If the metaphysical picture of the rule were correct, indeed, a rule would be a finite item that determines an infinite number of cases by *repeating itself identically* in each of its instances of application. The selfsameness of the rule, its abstract identity with itself, would provide the ultimate basis for its uniform applicability across an infinite number of possible cases. The application of rules would be thinkable only as the infinite repetition of a selfsame item, even across a great variety of cases and contexts. In challenging the characteristic assumption of totality that leads to the metaphysical picture of the rule, Wittgenstein's critique also challenges this assumption of self-identity. To recall to mind the essential diversity and openness of practices is also to recall that their 'rules' are not the eternally selfsame, sublime entities that metaphysical thinking presents them as being. In this way, the thinking that relies on the self-identity of the rule to foreclose the essential diversity and heterogeneity of the significant uses of language succumbs to immanent reflection on linguistic *praxis*.

V

I have argued that a decisive element of Wittgenstein's critical invocation of *use* is his critique of the assumption of totality that would portray the use of a word as a stable unity of practice. Insofar as Wittgenstein's method directs us to seek the meaning of a word by reflecting on praxis, its aim is not to introduce any kind of unifying theory of linguistic practices, but rather to disrupt the assumption that any such unification is possible at all. The assumption of totality that Wittgenstein criticizes is a characteristic feature of philosophical attempts to theorize meaning positively, including what may seem to be Wittgenstein's own attempt in the positive movement of the *Tractatus*. But the significance of Wittgenstein's critique of totality is by no means limited to its bearing against specialized philosophical theories. Indeed, it is well known that Wittgenstein thought of his philosophical work as relevant to the resolution of cultural, political and social questions, even though it is not always obvious how this relevance should be understood.

Many of Wittgenstein's remarks in *Culture and Value* exhibit his well-known pessimism about the idea of technological progress and his lack of faith in the social and material practices of the modern world. As is also well known, Wittgenstein was at least somewhat sympathetic with Marxism, and his thinking in the *Investigations* may have been significantly influenced by that of the Marxist economist Sraffa. But beyond these personal and biographical connections, Wittgenstein's

central philosophical texts also in fact exhibit a deep concern with the metaphysical assumptions that often underlie contemporary institutions and material practices.

In particular, Wittgenstein was undoubtedly well aware of the dominance, in the 20th century, of a regime of thought that tends to assimilate individual, concrete acts of reasoning and communication to a unified field of abstract, formal logic. His own *Tractatus* was misread – most significantly by the Vienna Circle logical positivists – as a contribution to the theory of this field. And over the period of his interactions with the circle, Wittgenstein became acutely critical of the motivations of those who saw in logic the key to a new 'construction' of the world.[27] Wittgenstein was also, doubtless, aware of the way in which this regime of thought supports dominant cultural practices of technology, systematization and calculation. Characteristically, these practices treat individual actions as significant only insofar as they can be evaluated and repeated from the standpoint of abstract rationality, which itself is conceived as a system of universal rules.

Commentators have long speculated about the political implications of Wittgenstein's work, but it is only recently that a significant number of interpreters have begun to see his practice of linguistic reflection as supporting a practice of critique that is radical and potentially liberatory with respect to prevailing social practices and norms. McManus (2003), for instance, has argued that Wittgenstein's consideration of prevailing practices of measurement and calculation, particularly in the context of the philosophy of mathematics, can actually support a far-ranging critique of our tendency to treat these numerical practices as referring to substantial realities in themselves. Without such a critique, McManus suggests, we tend to 'reify' the relevant practices, giving them an unquestioned and otherwise undeserved value. Similarly, Janik (2003) suggests that one target of Wittgenstein's critique of rule-following might be the kinds of *regularity* that a certain conception of rule-following in fact tends to produce in our political and social practices of legislation and authority, and accordingly that Wittgenstein can be read as a critic of some of these practices.

For these commentators, then, Wittgenstein's critical reflection on rules offers a position from which it becomes possible both to question the assumptions of regularity and fixity that underlie typical practices of calculation and legislation, and to criticize these practices themselves on that basis. When, in particular, large sectors of social practice and prevailing institutions become governed by deeply held assumptions of regularity and uniformity, such a critical reflection on the sources of these assumptions becomes particularly important. If the current analysis is correct, in fact, these particular suggestions for the application of Wittgensteinian critique are simply isolated examples of a much more

general and far-ranging critical method, bearing not only against partic-
ular practices of calculation, automation and legislation, but also against
the whole complex of deeply held metaphysical assumptions that make
these practices possible.

The Frankfurt School's concept of 'reification' offers other terms for
thinking about prevailing social practices and their foundation in total-
izing patterns of thought, including the 'identity-thinking' that Adorno
criticizes in *Negative Dialectics*.[28] The critique of these linked concepts,
in fact, targets not only particular instances of injurious or oppressive
practice, but the whole cultural style of an entire historical period. For
the early Frankfurt School, the critical examination of socially domi-
nant characterizations of reason and rationality provides a particularly
important critical index of such a style, one that Wittgenstein himself
occasionally characterizes as the 'spirit' of modern, western civilization.
Wittgenstein's own critique of the metaphysical concept of the rule
strongly resembles the Frankfurt School's sustained criticism of the
regime of thought and practice that construes rationality as formal,
symbolic ratiocination. Against this regime, Wittgenstein, like Adorno
and Horkheimer, seeks to reinscribe in our thinking a disruptive sense
of the openness of everyday practices to novelty and difference, and of
the necessary failure of any attempt to enclose this difference within a
totality of theory or explanation. Beyond simply echoing the Frankfurt
School's critique of reification, however, Wittgenstein's self-reflexive
philosophical method also offers to give us the terms in which we can
formulate this critique as a *linguistic* one: that is, as a critique of assump-
tions and habits of thought that lie deeply concealed in language itself,
and that only linguistic self-reflection offers to remove.

In suggesting that we can read Wittgenstein as critical of the ideo-
logical support of prevailing social practices, I do not mean to suggest
that he himself thought of this kind of social critique as a prevailing,
or even an explicit, goal of his philosophical practice. It is true that
Wittgenstein says little about the social implications of his own work.
But as we have seen, this has not prevented commentators from inter-
preting the social and political implications of his view of language.
Indeed, it seems obviously appropriate to interrogate the critical conse-
quences of Wittgenstein's practice, given the evident Kantian, critical
background of his project of reflection. What I have offered in this
article is an alternative interpretation of these consequences, one that
shows that Wittgenstein need not be construed as a social conservative
or as contributing to the dominance of entrenched conceptions of
reasoning and rationality. Instead, I have argued, we can read him as
offering new terms for the identification, diagnosis and interrogation of
the deep ideological foundations of these dominant and entrenched
conceptions.

If this is correct, then another benefit of the kind of reading I suggest
here is that it can begin to open, in a new way, reflection on the question
of the relationship of analytic philosophy to the larger historical contours
of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought. In particular, it
begins to show how the characteristic analytic turn toward language
can yield a kind of critical thought that continues the Enlightenment
project of demystification, of identifying and criticizing the illusions of
metaphysics, while nevertheless resisting the reified and standardized
forms of rationality that have so often resulted from this project. For
most of its history, analytic philosophy has been perceived by its prac-
titioners and its opponents alike as a field of inquiry largely innocent of
historical and political thought, content to pursue its atemporal prob-
lematics with something like the self-containment and autonomy of the
physical sciences. But the interpretation of Wittgenstein's practice of
linguistic reflection against the backdrop of its historical parallels offers
grounds to challenge this perception by revealing the significant politi-
cal implications of one of the most prominent of the many forms of
reflection on language that characterize analytic philosophy. This not
only points to new ways of situating the contested legacy of the tradition
and the enduring significance of its determinative turn toward language,
but also suggests within it vibrant new possibilities of liberation and
change.

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Notes

1 *Gebrauch* or 'use' in this sense ought to be distinguished from cognates
 like *Benutzung* ('employment'), which Wittgenstein uses generally of occur-
 rences of words in the speaking of a language, and *Anwendung* or 'appli-
 cation', which Wittgenstein uses most often in reference to the use of a
 word or a rule in a *new* case. Section 43 of the *Philosophical Investigations*,
 the section that is most often cited to support the usual interpretation of
 Wittgenstein as holding a 'use-theory' of meaning, in fact turns in large
 part on these distinctions, holding that 'for a large class of cases' of the
 employment [*Benutzung*] of the word 'meaning', this word, [i.e. 'meaning']
 can be explained [*erklaren*] by saying that the 'meaning' of a word is its
 use [*Gebrauch*] in the language.
2 A 302/B 359.
3 A 305/B 361.

4 'Thus the pure concepts of reason, now under consideration, are transcendental ideas. They are concepts of pure reason, in that they view all knowledge gained in experience as being determined through an absolute totality of conditions. They are not arbitrarily invented; they are imposed by the very nature of reason itself, and therefore stand in necessary relation to the whole employment of understanding. Finally, they are transcendent and overstep the limits of all experience; no object adequate to the transcendental idea can ever be found within experience' (A 327/B384).

5 A 323/B 379.

6 '[Wittgenstein's] philosophy was a critique of language very similar in scope and purpose to Kant's critique of thought. Like Kant, he believed that philosophers often unwittingly stray beyond the limits into the kind of specious nonsense that seems to express genuine thoughts but in fact does not do so. He wanted to discover the exact location of the line dividing sense from nonsense, so that people might realize when they had reached it and stop. This is the negative side of his philosophy and it makes the first, and usually the deepest, impression on his readers. But it also has another, more positive side. His purpose was not merely to formulate instructions which would save people from trying to say what cannot be said in language, but also to succeed in understanding the structure of what can be said. He believed that the only way to achieve this understanding is to plot the limits, because the limits and the structure have a common origin. The nature of language dictates both what you can and what you cannot do with it' (Pears, 1970: 2–3).

7 E.g. Gellner (1959). For an interesting commentary on the origin and endurance of this line of response, see Uschanov (2002). Philosophers within the tradition of critical theory have also often rejected Wittgenstein's thought as fundamentally conservative and apolitical; see, especially, Marcuse (1968).

8 See, for example, Nyiri (1982).

9 Thus, Winch (1958) argues on Wittgensteinian grounds against projects in anthropology and social science that attempt to interrogate social practices 'from without', holding that the only way appropriately to practice social science is reflexively, from within the very practices that are investigated.

10 Along similar lines, Cerbone argues that we should resist the temptation to interpret Wittgenstein as holding any view according to which '"our form of life" serves as a boundary, a set of constraints, in short a limit, "within" which our concepts can be legitimately applied' (2003: 44). The thought that such limits could be described is itself, Cerbone argues, one of Wittgenstein's favored critical targets. Like Crary, Cerbone suggests that the deepest object of Wittgenstein's criticism is in fact the illusion of a position outside our practices from which we could draw a stable line between sense and nonsense.

11 See Livingston (2004).

12 Diamond (1991: 155–6).

13 See, for example, Wittgenstein (1993).

14 *Philosophical Remarks* (1975: 109–10).

15 Wittgenstein (1958: 5).

16 '"It is as if we could grasp the whole use of the word in a flash." Like *what* e.g.? – Can't the use – in a certain sense – be grasped in a flash? And in what sense can it not? – The point is, that it is as if we could "grasp it in a flash" in yet another and much more direct sense than that. – But have you a model for this? No. It is just that this expression suggests itself to us. As the result of the crossing of different pictures' (1951: 191).

17 *Philosophical Investigations* (1951: 11).

18 *Philosophical Investigations* (1951: 3, 4).

19 *Philosophical Investigations* (1951: 4).

20 *Philosophical Investigations* (1951: 13), *Philosophical Investigations* (1951: 22).

21 'It is interesting to compare the multiplicity of the tools in language and of the ways they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of words and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language. (Including the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*)' (1951: 23).

22 *Philosophical Investigations* (1951: 117).

23 *Philosophical Investigations* (1951: 102).

24 *Philosophical Investigations* (1951: 103, 107).

25 'When someone says the word "cube" to me, for example, I know what it means. But can the whole use of the word come before my mind, when I understand it in this way?
Well, but on the other hand isn't the meaning of the word also determined by this use? And can't these ways of determining meaning conflict? Can what we grasp in a flash accord with a use, fit or fail to fit it? And how can what is present to us in an instant, what comes before our mind in an instant, fit a use?' (1951: 139).

26 *Philosophical Investigations* (1951: 201).

27 In 1930, Wittgenstein wrote in his foreword to the *Philosophical Remarks* of his opposition to 'the spirit . . . which informs the vast stream of European and American civilization in which all of us stand'. That spirit, he said, 'expresses itself in an onwards movement, in building ever larger and more complicated structures'. He probably had in mind, at least in part, the Enlightenment rhetoric of Carnap's *The Logical Structure of the World*, which had sought to show how the concepts of science could be logically 'constructed' from a basis of immediate, individual experiences.

28 Recently, some commentators have begun to explore the possibility of reading Wittgenstein in a way that shows the relevance of his commentary to Marxist critique. Andrews (2002), for instance, argues that Marx's description of the origin of value in *Capital* can be read, in Wittgensteinian terms, as a critical description of the 'language-game' of value in bourgeois society. Along similar lines, Rossi-Landi (2002) suggests that the forms of philosophical language that Wittgenstein criticizes as 'language on a holiday' can be read, within a Marxist critical register, as 'alienated' forms of linguistic *praxis*. Pleasants (1999) argues on Wittgensteinian grounds *against* the very idea of a 'critical social theory'. As Pleasants argues, Wittgenstein in fact submits the idea of a *theory* of social practice to devastating critique. This significantly problematizes the kind of use that

contemporary critical theorists – for instance, Habermas (1987) – have sought to make of what they take to be Wittgenstein's theory of language. But it leaves open the possibility of an entirely critical, practical and *non-theoretical* application of reflection on language to contemporary political and social problems, a prospect that is much more reminiscent of the work of Adorno, Horkheimer and other members of the early Frankfurt School.

PSC

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