Modernism and the Two Traditions in Philosophy

Michael Rosen

"Nur kein transzendentales Geschwätz wenn alles so klar

ist wie eine Watschen."

Wittgenstein, letter to Paul Engelmann, 16.i.1918

"The fact that analytical philosophers were not interested in history", Hilary Putnam has written, "does not mean that they escaped being a part of it". [1] Putnam's point is obviously true – yet is it a point of any *philosophical* significance?

A received image of the history of philosophy would suggest that it is not. According to this view, philosophy can be understood as an enclosed, self-sufficient intellectual practice – a tradition of argument and engagement whose problems and procedures have been independently developed in the course of the centuries.

To relate a philosophical movement to its social background is interesting enough, no doubt. But the exercise can have no philosophical value, for the issues of philosophy – the nature of its problems and the validity of the solutions proposed to them – arise and should be settled entirely within the discipline of philosophy itself.

In this paper I shall proceed on the basis of a different view. So far from philosophy being self-sufficient and enclosed, there are, I believe, important respects in which philosophy can be said to "point beyond itself".

One reason lies in the nature of philosophical problems. Philosophical problems are not given to us, once and for all, from some timeless realm detached from the world of everyday experience. On the contrary, philosophical problems have their point (and, through them, perhaps, philosophy itself has *its* point) in the fact that they can be related back to views (normally, to the conflict of views) held outside philosophy, whether these be views

---

[1]. Hilary Putnam, "Convention: a Theme in Philosophy", *New Literary History*, 13 (1981-82), pp.1-14, p.11

developed in some specialist field (most commonly science or religion) or simply beliefs which occur spontaneously in everyday life.

Philosophers have taken radically different attitudes towards such beliefs. For some, the fact that non-philosophical beliefs come into conflict with one another is a sign that the philosopher must reject them altogether, that it is the task of philosophy to move us from the illusory "folk" world of *doxa* to the pure and rational realms of *episteme*, while, for others, philosophy can aim at no such privileged vantage point: if our natural beliefs conflict, we must learn to live with the fact and restrain our impulse to steamroller beliefs into rational uniformity. Yet, whether one's general sympathies are with Plato or Hume, in both cases it is the world of non-philosophical belief from which the problems of philosophy emerge.

Does such belief need to be studied historically? It is true that many of the problems of philosophy have retained a recognisable identity over an extraordinarily long period of time (it is a remarkable fact that it is still quite reasonable to start the study of philosophy with a reading of the dialogues of Plato) and we might take this as a sign that the beliefs which lie behind them are sufficiently general to be shared by all human communities. But this is surely not true for all the problems of philosophy.

The point is obvious where philosophical problems arise from discoveries in science; the apparent paradoxes of quantum mechanics, for example, do not lie in the common stock of shared human belief but in beliefs which only come to be taken to be true as a result of scientific progress.

But non-scientific beliefs and attitudes characteristic of a particular form of society can play a similar role in generating new philosophical problems – or, at least, in so far transforming old and very generally formulated problems as to lead them to take on a radically new and distinctive form.

The problem of the existence of the external world, for example, has been taken by many philosophers to be the natural starting-point for epistemology. Yet this very starting-point depends, as Heidegger has noted, upon assumptions about the nature of the knowing subject which are by no means natural or universal. For Heidegger, the "scandal of philosophy" is not (as Kant wrote in the *Critique of Pure Reason*) that no successful proof of

the existence of the external world has been given, but that philosophers should unquestioningly assume the starting-point – the "egocentric predicament" of immediate consciousness – which gives the problem its force. [2]

If philosophical problems result from beliefs specific to particular societies this does not, of course, prove that such problems are not genuine. But where the beliefs which motivate philosophical problems cannot claim the kind of empirical warrant which comes from scientific discovery an alternative possibility presents itself: rather than treat the problems directly, in their own terms, one may call into question the plausibility of the beliefs which lie behind them.

In that case we shall have reached that point at which (as the thinkers of the Frankfurt School insisted) philosophy and social criticism intersect. The study of history and society may show that a belief which is taken for granted is socially specific, and, while this does not refute the belief, it does at least give us good reasons not to regard the problems which it brings with it as natural and inevitable.

Part of my purpose in this paper is to argue for the fruitfulness of this approach by identifying beliefs which are characteristic of modernism and asking to what extent they come to expression in the philosophy of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This period represents a particular challenge, not only because it was a time of great philosophical innovation, but also because it contains the point of division after which the two traditions which we call – unhappily enough in each case – analytical and Continental philosophy increasingly came to go their own ways.

Such a division of the streams obviously fits badly with the image of the history of philosophy as a self-contained rational enterprise – in that case, why should new developments not carry conviction for all to whom they are addressed?

But, equally, the division of traditions seems to contradict an externalist approach to philosophy. If philosophy were no more than the intellectual expression of social tendencies ("its time captured in thought", in Hegel's famous phrase) why should a single milieu give rise to such apparently diverse philosophical products?

[2]. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), p.248.

The suggestion that I shall explore is designed to take account of this and help to explain it. I shall identify two different strands of modernism and argue that, while the one strand is plainly apparent in the analytical tradition, the other, though it clearly comes to expression in Continental philosophy, is not.

To say that these themes are *present* in the traditions is not to claim that they were, as it were, the unconscious governing determinants *behind* the thinkers who founded the traditions in question. Such a claim suggests that "modernism" is the active force to which philosophy passively responds. However, to reject the picture of philosophy as self-enclosed and isolated from its wider culture should not lead us to make the opposite error of reducing philosophy to a mere reflection or epiphenomenon. [3] Indeed, explanation may run in the opposite direction. Rather than philosophy simply *mirroring* the general thought of its period, philosophical argument itself may give philosophers powerful reasons to resist what elsewhere in the culture seems no more than "common sense".

I

Faced with the obvious problems caused by the indexicality of the term (the "*querelle des anciens et des modernes*" cannot but change content as it moves on) writers on modernism have tended to give priority to intension over extension; to set their sights on what they take to be fundamental features of the movement and let its scope be determined in consequence.

I shall feel free to do the same, for my object is not to offer a comprehensive overview of the nature of modernism but simply to draw attention to two aspects of a multi-faceted complex of phenomena. Although both themes are, I believe, characteristic of modernism, I do not claim that they are exclusive to – much less exhaustive of – modernism, however one might draw its boundaries.

---

[3]. This point has been made forcefully by Hans Sluga: "...the existence of a dominant philosophical tradition is not incompatible with the contemporaneous existence of other philosophical traditions in more reduced circumstances. The picture of closed historical periods characterized by uniform systems of ideas which has often guided historiography is merely a product of deficient historical vision and a speculative, Hegelian cast of mind that forever seeks to unify a multiplicity of diverse phenomena into a single pattern." H. Sluga, *Gottlob Frege* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p.33

The first of these is the characteristic modernist view of reality as somehow veiled, hidden or dissimulated. This is a view that has been noted often enough, although never, I think, more clearly than by Carl Schmitt in his essay on political romanticism. Schmitt writes:

> This mode of explanation [in terms of disguise] is exceedingly characteristic for sociological and psychological thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. [4] The economic conception of history, in particular, operates with it quite naively when it speaks of the religious or artistic "disguise", "reflection" or "sublimation" of economic circumstances. Friedrich Engels gave a classic example when he described the Calvinist dogma of predestination as a religious disguise for the remorselessness of the competitive struggle of capitalism. Yet the inclination to see "disguise" everywhere goes far deeper; it does not simply correspond to a proletarian attitude but has general significance. All the institutions and forms of Church and State, all legal concepts and arguments, everything official – democracy itself, since it has taken on a constitutional form – are felt to be empty and misleading disguises: as veil, facade, dummy or window-dressing. The words, coarse and refined, through which this is articulated are both more numerous and stronger than the most closely corresponding expressions of other periods – for example, the expression *simulacra* which the political literature of the seventeenth century took as its symptomatic slogan. Nowadays everywhere the "scenery" is constructed, behind which the true movement of reality is concealed. What is thereby betrayed is the uncertainty of the time and its deep feeling of having been deceived. A time which produces from its own presuppositions no great form and no representation must yield to such attitudes and take everything formal and official to be a deception. For no time lives without a form, however "economic" it may present itself as being. If it does not succeed in finding its own form, it turns to a thousand surrogates from the genuine forms of other times and peoples, only then immediately to denounce the surrogate in turn as false. [5]

---

[4]. Schmitt is writing in the nineteen-twenties.

[5]. C. Schmitt, *Politische Romantik* (Berlin: Dunker und Humblot, 1968), p.19

The attitude to which Schmitt is drawing attention bears some relation to the search for "authenticity" described by Lionel Trilling [6], the felt need for a life which is chosen to reflect and bring out the individual's own particular nature. But while Trilling traces a development which is essentially subjective, Schmitt is drawing attention to a change in attitude towards the nature of the reality the individual faces – of social reality in particular. [7]

The *locus classicus* for the theoretical expression of such a view is Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, with its distinction between the ideological surface reality of capitalist society and its essential exploitative relations (to be revealed by the relentless analysis of political economy). [8]

Yet Schmitt was surely right to point out that this sense that modern society contained (indeed, depended upon) a dirty secret extended far more widely than the adherents of Marxist political economy. It was, for example, an ingredient in the turn to realism in aesthetics. Whereas artists had traditionally turned away from common life as unsuitable material for "high" art, low life now came to be felt to be more revealing of the nature of contemporary reality than more traditionally elevated subject-matter: the artist became a muck-raker. [9]

The nature of the dirty secret varied. For the radicals it was economic exploitation; for others it was the unacknowledged existence of powerful passions - aggression and sexuality -

---

[6]. L. Trilling *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: Oxford U.P., 1974)

[7]. An excellent exploration of this theme, to which I am much indebted, is given by V.J. Guenther, "Der Dichtung Schleier", in *Arcadia*, 13 (1978), pp. 255-67. Guenther makes the point that what is distinctively modern is not the thought that human beings' cognitive capacities are inevitably limited, but that the reasons for such limitations are fundamentally connected to the kind of reality which human beings (now) confront.

[8]. "Hence we may understand the decisive importance of the transformation of the value and price of labour-power into the form of wages, or into the value and price of labour itself. This phenomenal form which *makes the actual relation invisible and indeed shows the exact opposite of that relation* forms the basis of all the juridical notions of both labourer and capitalist, of all the illusions of the capitalist mode of production, of all its illusions as to liberty, of all the apologetic shifts of the vulgar economists." K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, trans by E. Aveling and S. Moore (New York: Modern Library), p. 540, my emphasis.

[9]. A word – and a journalistic phenomenon – which had its birth in this period. This point was emphasized to me by Rob Hopkins

which formed the "heart of darkness" below the regimented surface of modern industrial society.

Nor was this attitude confined to realist art. Imaginative literature, too, gave expression to contemporary anxieties, nowhere more so than in the depiction of the future in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*: an apparently idyllic world populated by graceful and gentle beings, the Eloi, is revealed to be dependent on the ghastly Morlocks who live, significantly enough, concealed beneath its serene surface. [10]

The idea of social reality as self-concealing or hypocritical was extremely pervasive in late nineteeth-century culture, but it was given particular focus by the First World War. From the modernist point of view, the suffering and slaughter of the Great War were to be seen as a direct consequence of a reality which had lost touch with itself. The Great Powers of Europe represented themselves as stable, dignified, imperial and aristocratic; the reality was that their power rested upon a modern, dynamic and ruthlessly expansionist industrial economy. From the reviewing stand on their birthdays the emperors of Europe surveyed armies of dragoons and hussars that would not have been out of place in the eighteenth century; yet the war that they unleashed on each other turned out to be an industrialised hell of mud, machine-guns and barbed wire.

The embrace of functionalism and rejection of ornament characteristic of modernist architecture are frequently represented as a surrender to the anonymity of industrial society and a (perhaps unconscious) bid for power by the architect in the guise of benevolent social planner. There is much truth in this picture, but there was, at least initially, more to it than that. The modernist drive to austerity also includes a moral impulse inspired by this sense of deception and hypocrisy. To reject ornament was to deprive a corrupt society of its means of dissimulation: to refuse to build the palaces and facades from behind which rulers had deceived their people with patriotic pomp and circumstance. The new order would be *transparent*, both aesthetically and politically. [11]

---

[10]. A theme found again rather later in the vertical separation of the workers from the leisured elite in *Metropolis*, Fritz Lang's dystopian vision of the future.

[11]. Putnam ("Convention: a Theme in Philosophy", pp.11-12) draws attention to the parallel between architectural modernism and the Vienna Circle. Certainly, both movements can be

Schmitt's diagnosis of the modern sense of deception also provides a good introduction to the second of the modernist themes to which I wish to call attention. According to Schmitt, the sense of the artificiality and deceptiveness of social institutions is the sign of a society which cannot find its own form but which takes its forms instead from the "genuine forms" of other societies and times. "No time lives without a form," he says, "however 'economic' it may present itself as being." [12]

Yet this thought - the thought that intellectual forms have their value (that they are, in Schmitt's words, "genuine") in so far as they are directly associated with their own place and time - is itself a characteristically modernist one. It is part of a theme which I will call (noting that I am making a quite particular use of a much-abused term) *historicism*. Historicism, as I understand it, goes beyond mere awareness of the historical variation of society and culture.

seen as attempts at systematic reform, the one in the sphere of urban life, the other in the realm of thought and language. Yet, as Putnam himself argues, the programmatic, levelling spirit of the Vienna Circle represents only one pole of a dialectic within analytical philosophy. In contrast, there is a more sceptical and pessimistic denial of such utopian aspirations, represented by Wittgenstein.

Brian McGuiness has gone so far as to suggest (*Wittgenstein: A Life* (London: Penguin, 1990)) that the generation gap between the pessimistic temper of those whose intellectual horizons had been established in the world of Imperial Vienna and the more self-confident reformism of those who came to maturity in the post-war Republic was, as much as anything, responsible for the misunderstandings between Wittgenstein and his would-be disciples in the Vienna Circle. In my view, both what one might call the "optimistic" and the "pessimistic" poles are "modernist" to the extent that they share a distrust of ornament and facade.

What we know of Wittgenstein's own interest in architecture seems to show that he was closely identified with such an attitude. In Vienna, Wittgenstein cultivated the acquaintance of Adolf Loos, the teacher of his friend Engelmann (Wittgenstein later named Loos as one of the men who had been most influential on his own thought. See below, note 29).

Loos was a radical modernist who had "declared war on all forms of ornamentation in architecture and design" (A. Janik and S. Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, (New York, N.Y.: Touchstone, 1973) p.98). The very title of Loos's influential essay "Ornament and Crime" (in A. Loos, *Saemtliche Schriften* (Vienna: Herold, 1962)) makes clear the strongly moralistic nature of his attitude towards ornament. The political dimension of Loos's work was apparent to his contemporaries: "[Loos's] identification of culture with simplicity of design is nowhere more evident than in the building he erected on the Michaelplatz, opposite the Imperial Palace in Vienna. When the building was completed, its very simplicity and functionality were regarded as an intentional insult to the Emperor, by virtue of its contrast with the incredibly ornate domed entrance to the Imperial Palace, which it appeared to defy." (*Wittgenstein's Vienna*, p.100).

What is most striking about the house designed by Wittgenstein himself (with Engelmann's help) for his sister Margarete Stonborough is its completely unornamented facade.

[12]. C. Schmitt, *Politische Romantik*, p.19

The eighteenth century saw the growth of the idea that different societies would be characterised by different forms of intellectual, religious and aesthetic life, yet it did not abandon the idea that there were shared standards, applicable to all. The point of transition comes with the idea that the human mind itself is subject to historical change – that such changes are, indeed, the most important kind of change. [13]

As Hegel put it in the introduction to his *Philosophy of Nature*:

[All] development [*Bildung*] reduces itself to a difference in categories. All revolutions, in the sciences no less than in world history, derive from the fact that *Geist*, for its own understanding and self-awareness, in order to possess itself, has now changed its categories, and grasped itself more deeply, inwardly and unitarily. [14]

Historicism is not a simple phenomenon. It divides fundamentally between those who, like Hegel, Marx (arguably) or Habermas, believe that changing forms of consciousness can be integrated into a single, rational history and those – Nietzsche and Foucault would be obvious examples – who hold every form of consciousness to be *sui generis*, with no unifying progressive *telos*.

Then again, historicism may be more or less radical, depending upon how far the potential for change in human intellectual capacities is extended. It is at this point that philosophical considerations (even if not made explicit) are highly relevant. What does it mean to say that the "mind" changes with history? Where the line is to be drawn between the mind's constant and variable aspects raises the most profound epistemological questions – indeed, the very contrast between the mind and its contents is philosophically arguable. [15]

Yet, however difficult it may be to pin down precisely, historicism is, nonetheless, pervasive in nineteenth and twentieth-century thought, particularly so in the German-speaking world.

---

[13]. A forceful discussion of this development is the point of departure for George Armstrong Kelly's *Idealism, Politics and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1976)

[14]. G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopaedie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), para. 246, *Zusatz*

[15]. As is well known, denial of the "dualism of scheme and content" has been fundamental to Donald Davidson's rejection of traditional epistemology.

As far as culture is concerned, historicism presents a clear dilemma: if no trans-historical standards of art are possible then either art must abandon its residual claims to validity or it must, as we saw in the case of Schmitt, historicise those claims themselves – art becomes valid by being the art of its time.

Placing together these two themes – the drive to remove the veil from a deceptive world and the historical limitation of thought – I am now in a position to outline my suggestion with regard to the two traditions in philosophy.

On the one side, one of the *leitmotifs* of early analytical philosophy was the need for philosophy to penetrate a deceptive and confusing surface – the surface of language – to reveal a clear underlying structure. On the other, early analytical philosophy remained strikingly untroubled by the idea of the historical limitations of thought and the relativist spectre it carries with it. My suggestion is that there is a connection between the two: that historicism is reinforced by (although not wholly dependent on) a picture of knowledge which places language or concepts in a kind of intermediary role between mind and the world and that it was just this kind of philosophical picture (which has remained a central ingredient in the Continental tradition) that the analytical critique of language helped to undermine.

This suggestion is, of course, highly schematic and I shall return to ways in which it may need to be qualified at the end of the paper. However, it is now time to descend from the realm of broad cultural generalities to a more narrowly focused philosophical comparison.

II

At *Tractatus* 4.0003 Wittgenstein makes a famous statement regarding the nature of philosophy. "All philosophy", he writes, "is a critique of language (though not in Mauthner's sense)." In virtue of this typically terse allusion, Mauthner becomes one of the very few philosophers to be mentioned by name in that austere work. [16]

Several writers on Wittgenstein have pursued the reference, most notably Alan Janik and Stephen Toulmin in their *Wittgenstein's Vienna* [17]. Janik and Toulmin were, however,

---

[16]. There are eight – of whom only Frege and Russell are mentioned more than twice.
[17]. A. Janik and S. Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*

mainly concerned to emphasize the existence of a contemporary Viennese tradition of thought about language. The differences between the two thinkers which they note concern only those doctrines – the picture theory of language and the doctrine of logical form – which Wittgenstein himself later abandoned and Mauthner becomes, on their account, a kind of late Wittgenstein *avant la lettre*. [18]

I think that this picture gives insufficient emphasis to the differences between the two, however. What separates their conceptions of *Sprachkritik* is a profoundly different understanding of the way in which language relates to the world, a difference which is characteristic of the divergence between the analytical and the Continental traditions.

In taking Mauthner as representative of the Continental approach I am not suggesting that he was a figure comparable in importance to Wittgenstein himself (although, as Gershon Weiler makes clear in his excellent study, Mauthner's views were quite complex, sophisticated and well integrated). [19] Yet, although Mauthner himself was quickly forgotten, his views on the central issue of the relationship between language and the world bear a striking resemblance to those of a figure of far more durable significance, Friedrich Nietzsche.

Put briefly, Mauthner (and Nietzsche) stand in a particular version of the Kantian tradition of epistemology, according to which the world which we experience – what is, so far as unreflective thought is concerned, just *the* world – is dependent upon (is, in some sense, the product of) our concepts.

---

[18]. "When [Wittgenstein] finally gave up the idea of a direct *Verbindung* [between language and the world] sometime around 1928-29, he gave up also Russell's distinction between "apparent" and "real" logical form; and he was left, as a result, in a position very much closer to Mauthner's than before. True, he did not explicitly share Mauthner's cultural relativism, nor any of the other consequences in which Mauthner was involved as a byproduct of acccepting Machian nominalism. All the same, regarded as a general philosophical critique of language, Wittgenstein's later writings revived many positions and arguments already put forward by Mauthner in 1901..." *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, p.232. For a similar view of Mauthner see also H. Sluga, *Gottlob Frege*, Chapter 6

[19]. They are also, it must be said, notably well expressed. Mauthner had no academic position and worked for many years as a journalist before having the leisure to pursue his philosophical interests full-time.

Of course, for Kant, the point of this picture was to defeat scepticism: to demonstrate the necessary applicability of certain concepts – the categories – and to show that synthetic *a priori* knowledge of nature was for this reason possible. Yet the Kantian picture easily turns into its opposite: the picture of a mind cut off from the world by a matrix of concepts which are not themselves part of the world or a direct reflection of it. Although it may be that a particular set of concepts applies to the world *sufficiently* to generate a coherent system of experience, there is no reason to believe that this set of concepts is unique: a different set of concepts may lead to what is, for those who hold them, a different world.

This, in effect, is Mauthner's position. Unlike Kant, he does not believe that a single set of categories are universally applicable. So there is nothing which could act as the *a priori* foundation of objective science. Mauthner does not give up the distinction between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* but it amounts for him to no more than the distinction between *what* we encounter in the world and the framework *through which* we encounter it and this is a purely relative distinction:

> For us *a priori* is no longer a scholastic concept, for us *a priority* is something relative; the memory of mankind or language became for us the relative *a priori*, which is quite in harmony with its new sense as meaning something preceding; for us *a priority* is to be applied to the greater part of human thought. In our language we should say: the mass of our concepts, the inherited language is *a prioristic*, and as in the concepts there are judgements hidden, so are the judgements themselves *a priori*.[20]

Like Nietzsche, Mauthner took a strongly nominalistic attitude towards the ultimate constituents of reality. There is no such thing as an intrinsic order in nature: laws and causal connections are something which we ourselves impose through language. [21] In this respect, Mauthner comes close to the empiricist tradition (he was particularly influenced by Mach's sensationalism). [22] But Mauthner refuses the standard empiricist move from sensationalism to

---

[20]. *Beitraege zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1901) I, p.174, translated in G. Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1970) pp.173-74
[21]. See Weiler, p.172.
[22]. Studying at the University of Prague, Mauthner attended some of Mach's lectures (Mach was Professor of Physics) and read his *On the Conservation of Energy*. Mauthner later acknowledged Mach as an "unconscious influence" on his own *Sprachkritik* (Weiler, p.335).

naturalism – we cannot look to the facts of science or psychology to mitigate epistemological scepticism. In so far as psychology has anything to say on the matter, it is, in Mauthner's view, that the senses are themselves contingent and historical:

> ... the gates of our reason were not always the same, the development of reason is a consequence of the development of our senses; reason is altogether but an abstraction for the complexity of our sense-impressions, there is nothing in reason which has not been earlier in our developing senses and the development of these senses is a work of reality. The senses are contingent. Everything is in flux. The world comes about through our evolving senses, but the senses too come about through the evolving world. Where can there be a detached picture of the world.[23]

In short, for Mauthner (as also for Nietzsche) our access to the world is always access from a particular perspective, always, albeit unconsciously, historically informed. The important difference lies between those who simply impose their particular world-view unreflectively and those who seek to emancipate themselves from their prejudices. And this is the task of *Sprachkritik*. Traditional philosophy rests on "word-superstition" – the illusion that linguistic conventions and habits have real reference. Its apparently substantive issues are no more than questions of language (ordinary language, that is, with all its contingencies and imperfections). *Sprachkritik*, by a study of the way in which words are in fact used (and have been used in the past) attempts to dissolve the questions of philosophy rather than to resolve them.

At this point, an obvious objection presents itself. Mauthner has put forward a general thesis about the relationship between thought and the world: the world for us is always given through a contingent matrix of sensation and judgement. *Sprachkritik* proposes to study the nature of that matrix and to liberate us in some way from its effects by a historical study of language. But is that not to confuse two different levels: to put it in Kantian terms, to fail to distinguish between the transcendental and the empirical? For if it is true that our world is always in some way pre-formed by the effects of judgement, how can we presume to find a standpoint from which those effects can be traced and measured?

---

[23]. *Beitraege zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, I, p.342, quoted Weiler, p.62

To the extent that Mauthner has an answer to this objection, it appears to be that *Sprachkritik* must operate immanently, from the inside: it cannot presuppose any vantage point from which the relationship between language and the world might be perspicuously surveyed once and for all. But the consequence of that is that the relationship between language and the world must remain – like the Kantian thing-in-itself – ultimately mysterious and beyond our grasp. The only thing that we can say about the relationship in general is that, in the end, we do not and *cannot* know it.

Nor does Mauthner shirk this conclusion. Language sets the limits through which we have access to reality: critique of language can only point to those limits, not transcend them. But, in doing so, it also, as Weiler explains, "points to a transcendent reality that has no limits. Critique of language, by this route, leads to mysticism." [24]

Mauthner's, however, is a "godless mysticism" – a philosophically inspired humility at the limitations of human cognitive capacities and a constant yearning to transcend those limitations. Yet this temptation must be resisted: such transcendence is not possible for human beings and the traditional mystic's claims to have knowledge of a transcendent realm commits precisely the fallacy (of hypostatising as objective what are purely subjective phenomena) that Mauthner is opposing. [25]

Janik and Toulmin are right in seeing Mauthner's concern for the limits of language as typical of the time. Its most famous expression is perhaps Hugo von Hoffmansthal's *Chandos-Brief*. This short piece describes an aesthetic crisis – Hoffmansthal's own – in the form of an imaginary letter from a young English aristocrat, Lord Chandos, to Francis Bacon. In the letter, Chandos describes how his sense of the ability of words to capture the world has disappeared. His crisis is as much moral and emotional as epistemological. That is, he has lost the sense that language can properly capture and objectify his own emotional response to the world. He remains either cold and indifferent to reality or is moved to intense feeling by what appear to be insignificant phenomena. Although he turns to the classical authors –

---

[24]. Weiler, p.291

[25]. Mauthner is consciously following Schopenhauer (and the early Nietzsche's) metaphysical understanding of mysticism as an expression of the yearning to overcome the *principium individuationis*.

Cicero, Seneca – he cannot find his own equivalent to their natural acceptance of their own language as an appropriate codification of feeling and judgement.

At this point my two modernist themes come very close together. On the one side, there is the thought that our access to the world is access through a framework of concepts which is historically limited; on the other, there is the sense that just these limitations are deceptive and artificial.

What is important to emphasize, however, is how far the wider implications of Mauthner's doctrine depend upon an epistemological premise: the picture of the mind coming into contact with the world via an intellectual matrix. It is this that gives Mauthner's historicism and his mysticism their plausibility.

III

Turning now to Wittgenstein, it is apparent at once that his conception of *Sprachkritik* is very different from Mauthner's. [26]

Most obviously, Wittgenstein's concern is not to use the critique of language as a way of exploring the historical limitations of thought but with exposing the discrepancy between the misleading surface of language (its "facade") and its true logical form. The fact that section 4.0031 of the *Tractatus*, in which we find the mention of Mauthner, continues: "It was Russell who performed the service of showing that the apparent logical form of a proposition need not be its real one." is enough to make that clear.

---

[26]. I see no evidence for Sluga's claim that Mauthner was the "most important" Austrian influence on Wittgenstein (*Gottlob Frege*, p.183). It is noteworthy that when, in the nineteen-thirties, Wittgenstein listed the chief influences on his thought these included the Austrians Boltzmann, Hertz, Kraus, Loos and Weininger - but not Mauthner (McGuiness, *Wittgenstein: a Life*, p.37).

Weiler's view of the matter seems to me to be more plausible: "... there are only three clear cases of outright similarity of wording in the works of the two men. One is the ladder-image about the self-destructive nature of the critique of language... The other is the comparison between the growth of a language and the growth of a city. The third is the very concept of a *Spielregel* which is central to Mauthner and to Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. What is remarkable is that all three ideas occur within the first thirty pages of Mauthner's *Beitraege*. I therefore conjecture that Wittgenstein read the opening pages of the *Beitraege* with some attention. Beyond that point he was merely browsing and read only what caught his attention." (Weiler, pp. 298-99)

What is less obvious is why Wittgenstein's enterprise and Mauthner's should be seen as competitors. Wittgenstein's ambitions are certainly universal (*all* philosophy is *Sprachkritik*, he writes) but is a doctrine of logical form sufficient to make competing conceptions of the nature and methods of philosophy redundant? Let me put the matter baldly and perhaps naively. In so far as logic is the study of the relations of inference between propositions, logical form has a role to play in allowing the existence of such connections to be formally displayed, an enterprise with obvious philosophical interest. It may help to clarify our understanding of the nature of inference and to explain the nature of *a priori* knowledge. But, on the face of it, this is not the stuff of which thoroughgoing philosophical revolutions are made; these issues appear to be too limited to justify a radical reconception of the full range of philosophical methods and problems – the more so when the logicist project itself has met with apparently insuperable internal difficulties.

My naivety here is only partly rhetorical, for, contrary to what one might have expected of such a crucial issue, it is by no means clear that the analytical tradition has agreed in retrospect upon a plausible explanation of the significance of the doctrine of logical form. [27] Is there an account which would show why those who held that doctrine believed

---

[27]. Two of the most influential recent accounts are to be found in the writings of Michael Dummett. According to Dummett, the doctrine of logical form inspired a revolution in philosophy away from idealism and psychologism.

In the first place, Dummett argues, the doctrine of logical form provides a defence of philosophical realism against idealism because, by means of the distinction between sense and reference (understood as anticipating in this respect Russell's theory of definite descriptions) it provides a plausible account of the meaning of negative existential statements and statements containing bearerless names and so removes the temptation to believe that such statements have meaning by referring to a realm of purely mental entities (See *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (London: Duckworth, 1973), p.197.) Second, it leads Frege and his successors to reverse the traditional order of priority between thought and the thinker: instead of the question being how language could serve as a vehicle for (essentially private) thought, the question becomes that of how individual speakers can come to make use of an essentially public means of communication (See "Can Analytical Philosophy be Systematic and Ought it to Be?", in *Truth and Other Enigmas* (London: Duckworth, 1978).)

Both suggestions are important. Nevertheless, they fail to give a historically persuasive explanation of why the doctrine of logical form should have had the revolutionary impact which it did. Dummett writes that, in the early years of the present century, "it would have been natural to lay emphasis on Frege's realism, seeing his chief importance as lying in the part he played in bringing about the downfall of Hegelian idealism." (*Frege: Philosophy of Language*, p.683) Yet it is difficult to believe that any follower of Hegel (one of the most epistemologically realistic philosophers who ever drew breath) would have been impressed with arguments that might best have been turned against the disciples of Bishop Berkeley. Even if we accept that the doctrine of logical form removes the temptation (or, to be more accurate, removes one temptation) to represent the mind as separated from the world by a

themselves justified in rejecting views such as Mauthner's? I think that there is and that the place to look for it first is in Russell.

At the start of his philosophical career, Russell had held, as he later described it, a "semi-Kantian, semi-Hegelian metaphysic" [28]. He overcame it, he said, as part of his and Moore's "revolt into pluralism", the central feature of which was the denial of F.H. Bradley's claim that all relations are internal. [29] Why, one might ask, should the rejection of internal relations lead us to reject idealism? In his essay "Philosophy in the Twentieth Century" Russell gives an argument to explain the connection:

> Ever since Kant, knowledge had been conceived as an interaction, in which the thing known was modified by our knowledge of it, and therefore always had certain characteristics due to our knowledge. It was held (though not by Kant) to be logically impossible for a thing to exist without being known. Therefore the properties acquired through being known were properties which everything must have. In this way, it was contended, we can discover a great deal about the real world by merely studying the conditions of knowledge. The new philosophy maintained, on the contrary, that knowledge, as a rule, makes no difference to what is known, and that there is not the slightest reason why there should not be things which are not known to any mind. Consequently theory of knowledge ceases to be a magic key to open the door to the

---

realm of private mental objects, this hardly deals with problems such as Mauthner's: Mauthner's scepticism concerns the objectivity of our concepts, not the external origin of our ideas.

In the case of Dummett's second suggestion, the problem is that, while the doctrine of logical form may point towards anti-psychologism, it by no means establishes it. Anti-psychologism, in Dummett's sense, involves more than the idea that the signs of language in their material aspect are part of the public world (that, after all, would be agreed by everybody); linguistic meaning must be something public too. The interpretation of the logical constants in terms of truth-tables might act as a model for this kind of public account (their meaning can be demonstrated not to be something private and ineffable) but anti-psychologism must go farther. Anti-psychologism must give a public account of *both* the non-logical *and* the logical expressions of language, and it is by no means obvious that (despite analytical philosophy's long love-affair with behaviourist psychology) this can be done. At best, it would seem to be a daring venture with uncertain prospects of success rather than a solid achievement on which to base a new philosophical tradition.

[28]. Bertrand Russell, *My Philosophical Development* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985), p.30

[29]. This is the title of Chapter 4 of *My Philosophical Devlopment*.

mysteries of the universe, and we are thrown back on the plodding investigations of science. [30]

In other words, if all relations are internal and knowledge is a relation, it makes no sense to speak of knowing the object as it is in itself because the relation to a subject is an essential part of the object's nature – part of the *esse* of objects is *cognosci*. To reject this, for Russell, was to leave the way open for realism. [31]

Now this is not a semantic argument (about the nature of meaning and judgement) so much as a metaphysical one and it leaves unclear just what role (if any) is played by considerations of logical form.

Before suggesting how the connection might arise, it would be as well to remind ourselves of what is at stake. The central Kantian doctrine at issue is the idea that our perception of the world involves the application of concepts to particular data. As far as Kant himself is concerned, this thesis connects back to an account of the nature of language. [32] Because Kant believes that all perceptions are judgements, it follows that the structure underlying language must be the same as that which underlies perception and that this, in turn, governs the structure of reality – what is perceived. There is in this way a kind of homology between language (the subject-predicate structure of the judgements we make about the world) perception (our encounter with external reality consists in applying universal concepts to particular intuitions) and ontology (our world – albeit a world of appearances rather than things in themselves – is made up of objects and their properties).

To recognise that relations are real, however, appears to create insuperable problems for traditional theories of judgement. For subject-predicate accounts of judgement, judgements are true if the predicate truly belongs to the subject; that is, if the property

---

[30]. Bertrand Russell, *Sceptical Essays* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1977), p.55
[31]. "In the first exuberance of liberation, I became a naive realist and rejoiced in the thought that grass is really green, in spite of the adverse opinion of all philosophers from Locke onwards. I have not been able to retain this pleasing faith in its pristine vigour, but I have never again shut myself up in a subjective prison." *My Philosophical Development*, p.48
[32]. This is, perhaps, a rather un-Kantian way of putting the matter: it suggests that Kant's views about perception were derived from his views about language. In fact, Kant believes that he is dealing with a single topic - judgement - whose implications extend in both directions.

designated by the predicate is part of the object referred to by the subject-term. [33] But there is no single subject-term to which a properly external relation could be said to belong – hence there is a natural pressure to count relations which apparently hold externally between two individual things as being in fact the internal property of a single, more inclusive subject: propositions which do not take up that final standpoint are, at most, partial or incomplete aspects of the truth. This is the monism against which Russell revolts.

On the other hand, what might seem to be the most obvious alternative to the subject-predicate theory of judgement is no better. On this view – call it empiricist or nominalistic – judgements are simply collections of ideas which are true if they correspond to the impressions of the senses. But such a theory of judgement is hopelessly flawed. For the truth of our judgements depends not merely on the existence of a correspondence between the elements which give judgements their content and what is given from the outside world in perception; judgement and perception must share the same order (the same individual notes can be used to compose many different tunes). But then where does the order within judgements (their relatedness) come in? Order cannot be an item in what is given, for that would only lead to a regress (how is *that* item related to the other items which it is supposed to relate?) So this view, too, is led to deny the reality of relations: relations are mind-introduced and, if there should be anything in external reality to which they correspond, then that is not something of which we could have knowledge. [34]

---

[33]. It is often assumed that this implies that, on the subject-predicate theory, all true judgements are analytic. However, the idea that the predicate part of the judgement is contained in the subject does not mean that it is contained in *the concept of* the subject-term of the judgement. As I understand Kant, the concept of the object (which serves as the subject-term in judgement) gives the "rule for the synthesis of the manifold" (that is, in simple terms, it tells us how we should go about classifying experience) while the process of synthesising gives us the materials by which to judge which further predicates truly apply to it. Thus "the ball is round" would be an analytic judgement (roundness being part of what it takes to recognise any ball as a ball) while "the table is round" would not.

[34]. Such a theory of judgement was taken to be characteristic of classical empiricism by the British Idealists and the critique of it formed a crucial starting-point in defence of their own positions. (See, for example, the first chapter of T.H. Green's *Prolegomena to Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883)). As Peter Hylton argues it, Russell initially endorsed the Idealist argument against traditional empiricism's inability to deal adequately with relations, only to find the holistic consequences drawn by Green and Bradley increasingly unpalatable. (See P. Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford

From this point of view, classical empiricism and Kantianism arrive at very similar conclusions. For both, relation is something mind-dependent: although Kantianism can allow that order is something objective, this is only because objects themselves are the product of the synthesising activity of the mind. The price of overcoming empiricist scepticism is that reality itself becomes mind-dependent. [35]

We can now construct an account which places the doctrine of logical form at the centre of early analytic philosophy. For if it is the case that, by adopting an analysis of the structure of the proposition other than the traditional subject-predicate form, we can allow relations to be both real and external, the antinomy which leads either to Kantianism (and, beyond that, to Bradleian holism) on the one hand or to scepticism on the other can be disarmed. If there is a way of representing the structure of propositions such that their content can be shown to correspond to relations in mind-independent reality, there is no need to suggest that order is somehow human in origin. On this interpretation, it becomes plain why the prospects opened up by the doctrine of logical form should seem so philosophically liberating.

The actual development of Russell's views was, however, by no means so neat as he himself represented them in retrospect. Although Russell (in his book on Leibniz) did indeed make the connection between the rejection of the subject-predicate theory of judgement and the abandonment of monism, this did not at that time lead directly to realism in any traditional sense. Russell (and Moore's) first post-Hegelian position was what Peter Hylton has called "Platonic atomism". [36] On this view, terms (including relations) are taken to be real in themselves (hence "Platonic") and, in combination, to constitute propositions (hence "atomism"). Propositions are true (if they are) in virtue of the way in which the terms themselves combine, not because of their relation to something non-propositional beyond them. It was only later (for example, in *Problems of Philosophy* and in the work on the

U.P., 1990) Part I.) My account in this section of what was at issue is also indebted to the discussion given by Robert Stern in his *Hegel, Kant and the Structure of the Object* (London: Routledge, 1990).

[35]. The similarity of empiricism and Kantianism in just this respect would not have been lost on Mauthner.

[36]. P. Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy* Part II.

Theory of Knowledge that he abandoned) that Russell tried to develop what one might think of as a traditionally realist kind of account of our knowledge of the external world.

Yet it is still not wrong to see Russell's embrace of the reality of relations as part of a move *towards* realism. According to "Platonic atomism", propositions are simply, flatly true or false (antinomies are not, as in the holistic world of Bradleian monism, partial aspects of a greater truth) and access to the objects of knowledge is direct and unmediated (concepts are themselves the directly known ultimate constituents of reality; they are not something which stands between us and reality). If Russell's rejection of the subject-predicate theory of judgement did not lead directly to realism, it did at least provide two of its preconditions.

IV

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is often said (and, surely, rightly) to be a very Kantian work – the idea that the limits of language *mean* the limits of my world reminds us necessarily of Kant's "Copernican Revolution" while Wittgenstein's remarks on the coincidence of solipsism and realism seem to echo Kant's equation of transcendental idealism with empirical realism. Yet, seen in its contemporary context, the message of the *Tractatus* is in another sense an anti-Kantian one. For it is a fundamental part of the significance of the *Tractatus*'s theory of language that it rejects the Kantian idea of the dependence of order on the knowing subject. [37]

Wittgenstein agrees with Russell in denying that sentences can be treated as if they were mere collections of names:

A proposition is not a blend of words (*kein Wortgemisch*). – (Just as a theme in music is not a blend of notes.)

A proposition is articulate.

(*Tractatus* 3.141)

---

[37]. The point is: if, in some sense, reality cannot be separated from the subject ("the world is my world" *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), 5.641) that subject is not to be thought of as a psychological subject - as a perceiving subject or a constituting subject in the neo-Kantian sense. The world depends upon – is inseparable from – the subject, but this does not mean that the subject "forms" or "constructs" the world in a particular (perhaps arbitrary) way.

Propositions, according to Wittgenstein, are pictures. As such, they have a structure which depends upon logical form (logical form gives propositions the possibility of having the structure which they do). It is logical form, Wittgenstein says, which a proposition must have "in common with reality in order to be able to depict it" (*Tractatus* 2.18). So logical form is something shared between language and reality – it creates the possibility that our thought corresponds to the world.

What we must do in order to depict the world is to hold up against it a fact (and propositional signs are facts, Wittgenstein says) of the same structure. Propositions can represent the world realistically, just as it is. There is no sense for Wittgenstein that we are cut off from the world by some intermediary realm or that reality is given to us indirectly, refracted or distorted in some way. And yet, although "propositions can represent the whole of reality", Wittgenstein asserts,

> they cannot represent [*darstellen*] what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it – logical form.
>
> In order to be able to represent logical form, we should have to be able to station ourselves with propositions somewhere outside logic, that is to say outside the world.
>
> Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them.
>
> (*Tractatus*, 4.12, 4.121)

At this point the mystical and the realistic aspects of the *Tractatus* seem puzzlingly to coincide. Not only does Wittgenstein appear to be committed to a wildly idealistic metaphysical thesis (logical form is a feature not just of language but of reality itself) but this form is ineffable – "What expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot express by means of language" (*Tractatus*, 4.121). If this is realism, it is realism of a very strange kind.

But for Wittgenstein the doctrine that logical form cannot be represented is more than just mysticism: it provides the coherent resolution of the problem of relations. In order to be able to represent structure itself (rather than simply incorporating structure into propositions in order to depict reality) we would have to reify it, to turn structures into objects or items *in* reality – and in that case how could they play their role of giving the elements of reality

articulation? The fact that such matters can only be shown, not said, need not make them mysterious. In a sense, the showing of structure is the most natural thing in the world – we do it all the time. It is only when, as philosophers, we try to turn structures into things – quasi-objects – that we go wrong.

Reifying relations is a constant temptation, however, because of the misleading way in which language presents itself to us. Language *disguises* thought, Wittgenstein says, and it is not possible to infer from the outward form of the clothing the form of the thought underneath (*Tractatus* 4.002). Although propositional signs are *facts* (that is to say, objects in a certain configuration) they look on the surface more like mere collections of names – "in a printed proposition, for example, no essential difference is apparent between a propositional sign and a word" (*Tractatus* 3.143). But this is wrong, for if propositions were simply composite names they could not depict the structure of what is named by them:

Situations can be described but not *given names*.

(Names are like points; propositions like arrows – they have sense.)

(*Tractatus* 3.144)

For Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, then, the relationship between thought and the world is something direct and unambiguous – and this can be appreciated once we turn our attention away from language's misleading facade. While for Mauthner *Sprachkritik* aims to show the human limitations of all cognition, the historically conditioned intermediary role played by language in our encounter with the world, for Wittgenstein language can depict the world just as it is: what gives order to the elements of reality is itself part of reality and can be pictured. Rather than highlight the subjectivity of language, as in Mauthner's case, the point of Wittgenstein's *Sprachkritik* is to clear away the illusions – philosophical illusions encouraged by surface appearances – which obscure the fact of language's objectivity.

V

What, then, does this comparison show us about the relationship between philosophy and modernism?

The *Tractatus* clearly exemplifies the modernist desire to penetrate a misleading surface – in this case the surface of language. Its conception of *Sprachkritik*, however, unlike Mauthner's, is fundamentally non-historicist. It would be reductive to make the fact that Wittgenstein embraces one of the central themes of contemporary modernism while at the same time rejecting another simply a matter of temperament or biography. Although Wittgenstein personally was intensely committed to the rejection of facades – socially and aesthetically as well as philosophically – it is possible, as I have argued, to reconstruct the position reached in the *Tractatus* so as to show a rational connection between the two attitudes.

In outline, the argument goes as follows. The inability of empiricism to provide a theory of judgement which accounts for order as part of the given matter of perception points towards the view that order is subjective: imposed by the subject by some kind of synthetic process. A proper theory of the structure of the proposition, however, establishes the possibility that judgements can mirror structures to be found in reality (even if the price of this is that the nature of that mirroring cannot itself be described). Such a theory, therefore, gives reason to reject the view that the source of order is subjective. But to reject the idea that order is subjective is to remove one of the central props of historicism: the idea that, because we encounter the world through categories which are essentially subjective, those categories themselves may be historically and socially variable. Hence to penetrate the surface of language in pursuit of its logical form is at the same time to give grounds for rejecting historicism.

This account, leading as it does in an unbroken line from (say) Hume, via Green, to Russell and Wittgenstein, might seem on the other hand to give support to the narrow view of philosophy, as a self-sufficient argument extended through time, canvassed at the beginning of this paper.

But this impression would also be misleading. Although it seems illuminating to look at the development of Russell and Wittgenstein's theories about the nature of judgement from the point of view of the idea of a direct relationship between language and reality, we should not lose sight of how far for the philosophers themselves such considerations were at the time

interwoven with – to some extent lost behind – concerns in logic and the philosophy of mathematics seen more narrowly. As Hylton points out, Russell and Moore initially regarded questions of epistemology (so far as these involved questions regarding the nature of experience) as "psychological" rather than philosophical; only later did Russell become concerned with questions concerning knowledge of the physical world. [38] In any case, Russell's concerns in the philosophy of mathematics (in particular, the reduction of mathematics to logic) provided him with strong independent reasons to reject holistic notions of "relative" truth and falsehood. [39] Does this mean that the account which I have presented is simply a retrospective rationalisation, without purchase on the real motivations of those who took part in the development?

I think that this would be too drastic. The interplay of – and dislocation between – surface motive and underlying development is exactly what one might expect, given the nature of what was at issue. What made belief in the subjective origin of order important was not that it occupied a place in the foreground of philosophical debate so much as that it formed an implicit background (and in this way provided a link between the arguments of the philosophers and beliefs held more broadly in society). Such background beliefs can be an important part of the way in which we understand a philosopher's work even though they are not explicitly formulated and endorsed (a good example from an earlier period would be the Cartesian theory of the mind). But because of their implicit character, changes in background beliefs typically do not take place as the result of debates which are targeted upon them directly; shifts in background belief are woven into wider controversies – disputes which serve both to challenge received orthodoxies and, at the same time, to bring them to light.

As Russell later presented it, the rejection of the mind-dependence of order which was part of his "revolt into pluralism" was a move towards common sense, bringing philosophy into line with what sensible people would naturally think were they not caught by the wiles of the metaphysicians. As we have seen, this is a considerable oversimplification of his own trajectory. But, what is more, it significantly misrepresents the nature of the background

---

[38]. P. Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*, pp.108, 362.
[39]. P. Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*, p.180

beliefs against which philosophers in the twentieth century have operated. For very many people in our culture – in Russell's day and in our own – direct realism is far from being the view of uninstructed common sense. For modernist culture it is historicism – the sense that the human mind is subject to change – which is the natural attitude.

Indeed, so far from representing a return to common sense from the excesses of metaphysics, there is some temptation to regard the realism of early analytic philosophy as an aberration: an attempt to expel history with a pitch-fork, only to have it return later with a vengeance (not least in the later philosophy of Wittgenstein himself). Certainly, the questions associated with historicism – How objective is our view of the world? Are radically different views of the world possible, in principle or in practice? If so, could we ever recognise that people held them? – are central to modern analytical philosophy.

Yet there is more to it than that. The philosophical framework within which the issues of historicism are articulated in modern analytical philosophy is a new one. We have seen how, in Mauthner's case, historicism goes together with a kind of neo-Kantian perspectivism: the idea that we encounter reality through a culturally-determined matrix. Such a model has remained an important ingredient in the Continental tradition (for example, in the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School). [40] For contemporary analytical philosophy, however, the context in which these issues are raised is no longer that of some kind of a transcendental subject imposing its order on an unordered (or, at best, unknowably ordered) reality. In the world of "language-games" and "radical translation" historicist questions have come to be transformed; they are now questions about the arbitrariness (or otherwise) of linguistic practice and interpretation rather than about the matrix through which the mind encounters

---

[40]. The connection is spelled out most explicitly in Max Horkheimer's famous article "Traditional and Critical Theory?" (in P. Connerton (ed.), *Critical Sociology* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1976)). In Horkheimer's view, the transcendental subject is a social subject – the product of a particular form of social organisation. In consequence, epistemology comes to be connected to political practice in the form of *Ideologiekritik*, a conception which has obvious similarities to Mauthner's earlier *Sprachkritik*. For a critical assessment, see my paper "Critical Theory: Between Ideology and Philosophy" in S. Mitchell and M. Rosen (eds.), *The Need for Interpretation* (London: Athlone, 1983), pp. 90-117.

the world. [41] To this extent, Russell and Wittgenstein's rejection of the mind-dependence of order has done its work. [42]