WORLDS IN TENSION: PRAGMATISM AND CRITICAL THEORY

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By

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I affirm that I have upheld the honor code in the making of this work.

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Introduction

This essay addresses what might seem a historical non-issue: the encounter in the 1930s and 40s between American Pragmatism and German Critical Theory.[1] Their brief interaction at first glance seems only worthy of a few footnotes in either's biography. After their temporary stay in New York City, the Critical Theorists apparently moved on from any concerns for Pragmatism, a waning American philosophical position. However, when we look more closely, a black-and-white story becomes remarkably vibrant. Looking to the origins of both schools of thought, the questions that drove them were quite analogous. Pragmatism—a philosophy that emerged out of the United States during the late nineteenth century—and Critical Theory—a novel approach to criticism consciously established by a group of German intellectuals known as the Frankfurt School in the 1920s—set out to make sense of an unstable social and intellectual environment. They both confronted worlds that were rapidly changing, saw belief structures that were dwindling, and identified an urgent need for a new kind of philosophy. They saw in both the Enlightenment philosophy of the eighteenth century and the positivist thought of the nineteenth a misplaced confidence of belief that they could not abide. They sought to reclaim agency in a world that increasingly appeared contingent and determined, to reassert reason in an age that had revolted against it.

Emerging from different continents the two schools of course employed different vocabularies and modes of thought in their respective endeavors. Pragmatism developed around a notion of fallible pragmatic truth whereas Critical Theory combined Marxian and Freudian ideas to level a societal critique. Despite their differences of focus, their parallels were

[1] Throughout this essay I capitalize both Pragmatism/Pragmatist and Critical Theory/Theorist as they refer to specific individuals or specific schools of thought.

undeniable although not entirely obvious to the thinkers themselves. Forced to flee from Germany in 1933, the Frankfurt School—officially titled the Institute for Social Research—established a temporary home in New York City where they crossed paths with Pragmatist thinkers. Primarily occurring between Max Horkheimer, director of the Institute, and Sidney Hook, student of John Dewey, their intellectual encounter was fraught with tensions and missed opportunities. In this light, the interaction of the two groups becomes a story worth examining. What did Hook and Horkheimer get right about each other? What did they miss? Why did their ideas form the way they did? What does this reveal about the thinkers themselves and the worlds they witnessed? I argue that these questions become much more meaningful when we see the meeting of the Pragmatists and the Frankfurt School as both a confluence and a conflict.

This essay represents the encounter in three chapters. The first deals with the development of American Pragmatism. I discuss how pragmatic ideas emerged in the early work of Charles S. Peirce, how William James re-tooled those ideas to develop a philosophy of Pragmatism, and finally how John Dewey incorporated Pragmatism into his own theory of democratic experimentation. I hope to show how each thinker contributed to the fundamental goals and assumptions of Pragmatism. Furthermore, I hope to illustrate how many of those assumptions and goals parallel those of the Frankfurt School. The second chapter discusses the creation and exile of the Institute for Social Research. Unlike Pragmatism, the Frankfurt School was a self-conscious organization of intellectuals with a specific agenda. I discuss that agenda as Max Horkheimer, director of the Institute, envisioned it. In the same chapter, I then turn to the encounter between the young Institute and Pragmatism—particularly the conflict between Sidney Hook and Max Horkheimer. I describe the interaction as I understand it: with personal conflicts, misunderstandings, missed opportunities, and fundamental differences. I argue this interaction is

an illuminating way to better understand both schools of thought. Beyond that, it invites interrogation as to why the events happened the way they did. In the third chapter, I discuss various ways of accounting for the failure of communication between the Frankfurt School and Pragmatism. I hope to show how different historical lenses offer different useful, though limited, interpretations of the story. I ultimately contend that the discordance between the two schools reveals something fundamental about their respective speakers' mode of perception.

I believe this is a story worth telling. The remarkable commonalities among our thinkers reveal something about the intellectual milieu around the turn of the century. Their differences speak to the kinds of fundamental assumptions and differences of focus that intellectuals of this period brought to bear on their realities. Pragmatism and Critical Theory's failure to reconcile asks us to reflect on the nature of historical disagreement and conflicting ways of perceiving the world. Furthermore, the ideas of both schools offer relevant lessons to those today who wish to interrogate the role of intellectuals in positive social change. Ultimately, I hope to tell an intellectual history that approaches the contents and origins of ideas with rigor and humility. It is my belief that, carefully considered, the story of Pragmatism and the Frankfurt School has something to teach.

Chapter 1

The Pragmatic Panacea

In an essay on Mathew Arnold, John Dewey articulated a feeling of Arnold's age and his own: "There is absence of any coherent social faith and order, there is doubt whether any theory of life at once valuable and verifiable, true to intelligence and worthy to the emotion, is any longer possible, yet there is also demand for authority and for instruction."[2] Dewey's intellectual era was marked by the deferred dreams of Enlightenment. Confidence in reason and faith had waned amongst intellectuals. For all the progress of the modern era, skepticism, determinism, and nihilism seemed to be its final trajectory. As Nietzsche put it, "admittedly, you climb the sunbeams of your knowledge upwards to heaven, but also downwards to Chaos."[3] With the authority of foundations in question, the western world was looking for alternatives.

One answer emerged in the most unlikely of places. From the philosophical backwater of the United States, Pragmatism rose to meet the challenge of modernism. Highly original and deeply controversial, Pragmatism essentially argued that the value and validity of any idea was inseparable from its practical application. From this general premise, Pragmatism witnessed a range of proponents. The first generation of Pragmatists interpreted their basic assumption and its consequences in distinct ways. From among these various interpretations, those of Charles S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey will be most relevant for my purposes here.

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[2] John Dewey, "Mathew Arnold and Robert Browning," in *Characters and Events: Popular Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. Joseph Ratner, vol. 1 (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929), 3.
[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), 7.

James Presents the Problem

Although he said he was not the inventor of Pragmatism, William James perhaps best articulated the crisis in philosophy that Pragmatism sought to resolve. In the series of lectures that made up his seminal *Pragmatism*, James titled the first lecture "The Present Dilemma in Philosophy." In that lecture, James makes it clear that by "philosophy" he does not mean something exclusively highfalutin and pedantic but more importantly a deep seated "sense of what life honestly and deeply means."[4] Against the common characterization of philosophy as a highly academic and dryly disinterested collection of arguments and systems, James recognizes that "the history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperaments."[5] Although they may pretend to some super-human certainty, philosophers (both canonical and unknown) are always affected by the "cravings and refusals" of their temperaments.[6] This characterization alone tells us something striking about the state of philosophy at the turn of the twentieth century. According to James, the present clash of temperaments is between a kind of tender-mindedness—characterized as rationalistic, idealistic, religious, free-willist, and monistic—and a tough-mindedness—characterized as empiricist, materialistic, irreligious, fatalistic, and pluralistic.[7]

James clearly sees flaws with both kinds of temperaments and laments the harsh binary that has arisen in philosophy. On the one hand, he observes the ascendance of naturalism and positivism in the nineteenth century producing a vision that is "materialistic and depressing" and lacks any spontaneity or room for change. On the other, he is wary of dogmatic intellectualism

[4] William James, *Pragmatism*, in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed. Giles Gunn (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 7. *Pragmatism* was originally published in 1907.
[5] James, *Pragmatism*, 8.
[6] James, Pragmatism, 21.
[7] James, Pragmatism, 11.

more concerned with ideas and principles than real facts. Although remarkably casual, James presents this situation as a real dilemma. He treats the problem with the utmost gravity and urgency. What is absent, he says, is "a system that will combine both things, the scientific loyalty to facts and willingness to take account of them, the spirit of adaptation and accommodation, in short, but also the old confidence in human values and the resultant spontaneity, whether of the religious or of the romantic type."[8] James presents the "pragmatistic philosophy" and its pragmatic method as such a system. But before moving on to James's understanding of Pragmatism, let us first turn to Charles S. Pierce, who James called the founder of Pragmatism, to understand its roots and initial formulations.

Peirce's Pragmatism, Fallibilism, and Critique of Cartesianism

Born in 1839 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Charles Peirce was a brilliant logician, and, at least according to William James, was the founder of Pragmatism. Charles Peirce was the son of an acclaimed mathematician and professor at Harvard where Charles also attended. It was through his father's connections that Chares Peirce for much of his life worked periodically for the U.S. coast survey which supported his philosophical career and exempted him from service in the Civil War. In 1861, while studying at Harvard, Peirce befriended William James who was a year bellow him. James, although he found much of Peirce's work to be over his head, was struck by some of Peirce's core insights. Eventually, Peirce would formulate the logical basis for the ideas of James and later John Dewey. Throughout his career, Peirce wrestled with questions of knowledge and uncertainty. He worked to reconcile the role of chance in the universe with the possibilities of scientific inquiry. Although he ultimately disagreed with James's formulation of a

[8] James, *Pragmatism*, 14.

pragmatic theory of truth,[9] Peirce undoubtedly informed the development of American Pragmatism. While he died in 1914, twenty years prior to the encounter between Pragmatism and the Frankfurt School, Peirce's ideas deeply influenced John Dewey and Sidney Hook and the ideas that they brought to bear on Horkheimer and his group.

Early in Peirce's career, he wrote several articles questioning the fundamentals of modern philosophy and proposing some alternatives. First published in 1868, Peirce's "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities" lays out several assumptions made first made by Descartes and, following him, modern philosophy more generally. Briefly, according to Peirce, these assumptions are 1) philosophy must begin from a place of universal doubt, 2) certainty can and must be found in the individual consciousness, 3) a single line of inference is preferable to "multiform argumentation," and 4) that there are absolutely inexplicable facts.[10] Peirce contrasts this way of thinking with the medieval scholasticism—which left room for mysteries of faith and never questioned certain fundamentals—that modern philosophy supplanted. Peirce asserts that "in some or all of these respects, most modern philosophers have been, in effect, Cartesians. Now without wishing to return to scholasticism, it seems to me that modern science and modern logic require us to stand upon a very different platform from this."[11]

Pierce goes on to deny each of these Cartesian assumptions and proposes alternatives. His denials all stem from a belief in individual bias and fallibility. First, regarding complete doubt, Pierce believes it to be an impossibility. He argues that we all harbor prejudices and assumptions

[9] This disagreement is partially why Peirce preferred to use the term 'pragmaticism' rather than Pragmatism to differentiate his own ideas.
[10] Charles S. Peirce, "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities," in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings,* eds. Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel, vol. 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 28.
[11] Peirce, "Some Consequences," 28.

that, by definition, we do not, or indeed cannot, think to doubt. It is better, Peirce says, to proceed from an acknowledgement of these biases rather any pretention to absolute doubt.

Second, Pierce denies the Cartesian assertion that truth is found only through an individual consciousness. "To make individuals absolute judges of truth," he says, "is most pernicious."[12] While this may be an unsympathetic essentialization of Descartes, it is Peirce's alternative that is more striking. In order to achieve the "ultimate philosophy," Pierce says, a "*community* of philosophers" is required.[13] This idea of the community over the individual subject is critical for Peirce's Pragmatism and his fallibilistic philosophy. I characterize this fallibilism as falling somewhere between relativism and absolutism, skepticism and foundationalism. We *can* know the real, but only in community:

> The real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus, the very origin the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of an indefinite increase of knowledge. And so those two series of cognitions—the real and the unreal—consist of those which, at a time sufficiently future, the community will always continue to reaffirm; and of those which, under the same conditions, will ever after be denied. Now, a proposition whose falsity can never be discovered, and the error of which is absolutely incognizable, contains, upon our principle, absolutely no error. Consequently, that which is thought in these cognitions is the real, as it really is. *There is nothing then, to prevent our knowing outward things as they really are, and it is most likely that we do thus know*

[12] Peirce, "Some Consequences," 29.
[13] Peirce, "Some Consequences," 29. Emphasis in original.

them in numberless cases, although we can never be absolutely certain of doing so in any special case.[14]

Richard Bernstein, in *The Pragmatic Turn*, describes the kind of fallibilism for which Peirce advocates. "Fallibilism," Bernstein says, "means that every knowledge claim—and, more generally, every validity claim is open to challenge, revision, correction, and even rejection." However, "fallibilism is not to be confused with epistemological skepticism."[15] He helpfully illustrates this point by asking us to consider the case of scientific hypotheses: "Any scientist will admit (and should insist) that most of our current hypotheses and theories will need revision in the future. In other words, *strictly speaking*, as they currently stand, they are 'false.' But it would be absurd to conclude that because we will revise or abandon current hypotheses and theories we do not 'really know' anything about the world."[16] In another book, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, Bernstein explores various responses to what he calls the "Cartesian Anxiety." This anxiety, which Bernstein feels underlies much of modern rationalism, is over "not just radical epistemological skepticism but the dread of madness and chaos where nothing is fixed."[17] Clearly, Peirce offers a response to this Cartesian Anxiety. Before he ever formulated the basis of Pragmatism, Peirce already established his thought in stark contrast to the debates of Enlightenment rationalism. I claim that the search for a fallibilistic response to the Cartesian Anxiety is a thread that runs through both Pragmatism and Critical Theory.

Rejecting a third Cartesian assumption, Pierce denies single lines of inference in favor of "multiform argumentation." He argues that philosophy ought to "imitate the successful sciences"

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[14] Peirce, "Some Consequences," 52. Italics added. Capitalization of COMMUNITY in original.
[15] Richard Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 36.
[16] Bernstein, *Pragmatic Turn*, 37.
[17] Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 18.

and trust in a multitude and variety of arguments subject to communal scrutiny rather than put stock in the conclusions of isolated rationalist arguments. He makes an analogy to the strength of a cable as compared to a chain. Rationalist arguments, he says, are like a chain which will break at its weakest link. In contrast, scientific multiform arguments are like the various fibers in a cable which, though they may not be strong on their own, reinforce each other and together hold strong and firm.[18]

As we will see later, the thinkers of Frankfurt School echo Peirce's deemphasis on the individual rational subject in a favor of a more social understanding of intelligence and scientific study. Max Horkhiemer explicitly positions Critical Theory as a project in both understanding the relational situation of human beings and developing a philosophy that is inherently social. Indeed, the Institute for Social Research could be viewed as a kind of instantiation of Peirce's community of inquirers studying and collaborating to describe the world more accurately than they could have as individuals. Horkhiemer contrasts his social view with Kant's isolated subject similarly to how Peirce positions his belief in contrast to Descartes's.

From Peirce's critique of these so-called Cartesian assumptions it becomes easier to understand his later—and more well-known—affirmative philosophy. Ten years after "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities" was published, Peirce more explicitly formulates his theory of Pragmatism in "How to Make Our Ideas Clear." To begin, Pierce first observes the distinction in contemporary logic between clear and obscure conceptions. He sees this to be an important distinction but thinks that many times apparent clarity is often mistaken for true clarity. Peirce sets out to formulate a method for identifying truly clear conceptions. He is interested in what should and should not count as knowledge.

[18] Peirce, "Some Consequences," 29.

To do this, Peirce examines what he believes to be the root of our conceptions: thinking. He argues that thought is a system of relations that can be known through its motive and function. From this teleological approach, he says that for the system of relations that we call thinking, "its sole motive, idea, and function, is to produce belief, and whatever does not concern that purpose belongs to some other system of relations."[19] So, if the purpose of thought is to produce belief, what then does Peirce mean by belief? As an answer, Peirce identifies three properties of belief: "First, it is something that we are aware of; second, it appeases the irritation of doubt; and third, it involves the establishment in our nature of a rule of action, or, say for short, a *habit.*"[20] For Peirce, belief has an essentially negative quality in that it puts doubts to rest, yet at the same time it has a positive quality in that it effects action. This latter property of belief is foundational for Peirce's categorization of clarity and his pragmatistic philosophy: "Since belief is a rule for action, the application of which involves further doubt and further thought, at the same time that it is a stopping-place, it is also a new starting-place for thought….The *final* upshot of thinking is the exercise of volition, and of this thought no longer forms a part; but belief is only a stadium of mental action, an effect upon our nature due to thought, which will influence future thinking."[21]

From this understanding of belief as essentially related to action, Peirce asserts that the proper way to distinguish different beliefs is to evaluate "the different modes of action to which they give rise."[22] He then makes his pragmatistic declaration:

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[19] Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings,* eds. Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel, vol. 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 129. This essay first appeared in 1878.
[20] Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," 129.
[21] Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," 129.
[22] Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," 129-130.

> If beliefs do not differ in this respect, if they appease the same doubt by producing the same rule of action, then no mere differences in the manner of consciousness of them can make them different beliefs, any more than playing a tune in a different keys is playing different tunes.[23]

Although there is often much disagreement over the religious, metaphysical, or scientific foundations of various beliefs, Peirce asserts that, so long as the resultant actions are the same, these are merely "imaginary distinctions."[24] For Peirce, the link connecting thought and action is imperative. Any "thought" that does not effect action is not really thought at all.

Intellectual historian, Leszek Kolakowski, I think helpfully characterizes Peirce's Pragmatism and positions it in relation to a positivistic tradition.[25] Kolakowski emphasizes Peirce's commitment to experimentation over idle speculation. As we saw in his critique of Cartesian assumptions, Peirce comes out against the idea that self-evidence counts as evidence. Thus, philosophy must adopt the experimental and collaborative practices of the natural sciences in its own pursuit of truth. Furthermore, Peirce establishes a stark criterion—relevance to action in the world—for what he considers to be clear and valid knowledge. Kolakowski rightly observes that "the majority of theological and metaphysical controversies turn out to be meaningless in light of this criterion."[26]

Kolakowski sees Peirce as the most traditionally positivistic of the Pragmatists in the way he goes about disambiguating questions about what knowledge should and should not be deemed relevant. Peirce is most concerned with the nominalist project of establishing what is real and

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[23] Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," 130.
[24] Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," 130.
[25] Kolakowski roots what he broadly calls "positivism" in the tradition of European empiricism tracing back to David Hume.
[26] Leszek Kolakowski, *The Alienation of Reason: A History of Positivist Thought*, trans. Norbert Guterman (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1968), 157.

what is merely an imaginary abstraction. In contrast to James and Dewey who would radically break from the positivist search for truth, Peirce maintained an anti-skeptical stance with regards to truth and reality. In Kolakowski's words:

> Pragmatism as he [Peirce] saw it—and this circumstance is basic for grasping the difference between him and the later pragmatists—sought to formulate criteria of meaning, but did not renounce the traditional idea of truth. In other words: Peirce asked that practical effectiveness be treated as a *criterion* of truth, and practical testability as the rule by means of which meaningful statements are to be distinguished from meaningless ones. He did not assert that to apply this criterion creates, so to speak, a situation of truth—he did not define truth as practical effectiveness.[27]

Peirce left some questions unanswered. As Bernstein points out, various challenges have been brought against Peirce and his arguably overly idealistic notions of the community of inquirers operating in a perfect setting.[28] Regardless, Peirce plays a critical role in the intellectual story that I wish to examine. Peirce set the stage for a new philosophical movement that was consciously distinct from Enlightenment rationalism and empiricism. Not only did he greatly influence the development of Pragmatism, he also articulated a type of non-skeptical fallibilism that that would only become more important. Indeed, the need for a philosophy that both recognizes the uncertainty of foundations and does not descend into relativism or nihilism, is in some sense the chief observation of twentieth century philosophy. While they may not explicitly have acknowledged it, the early thinkers of the Frankfurt School too were in search of a fallibilism analogous to the kind Peirce put forward.

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[27] Kolakowski, *Alienation of Reason*, 159.
[28] Bernstein, *Pragmatic Turn*, 112.

Pluralism, Meliorism, and the Pragmatic Theory of Truth

William James, born in 1842 in New York City, was the first to declare that Pragmatism was a philosophy. While James cited Peirce as the progenitor of pragmatic ideas, James was the one to introduce Pragmatism to the world. Although he briefly volunteered for the Union army in 1861, James never saw combat during the Civil War (whereas his younger brother Wilky did and was injured) and instead enrolled in Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard. James's intellectual interests were vast and at times fleeting. He received an M.D. from Harvard in 1869, and in 1973 began teaching physiology at Harvard. After three years he became a professor in the emerging scientific field of psychology. As a psychologist, James attempted to integrate concepts about the human mind with Darwinian biology. James sought to explore the role of evolutionary utility in cognition. Beginning around the 1890s, James's focus shifted from conducting a psychological exploration of cognition to formulating a philosophical understanding of belief and truth.

As a philosopher, James shared Peirce's skepticism regarding the ability of human beings to make completely disinterested rational observations about the world. In his essay "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" first published in 1900, James argues that all of us harbor prejudices and predispositions that lead us to look at the world in certain ways at the expense of other perspectives. To illustrate this point, he recounts a trip he made to rural North Carolina. Somewhere along the way, James observed a clearing made by a homesteader. He was taken aback by the destruction of forest and the construction of a haphazard cabin along with a disordered fence and irregularly planted corn. To James, it was an ugly sight: "The forest had been destroyed; and what had 'improved' it out of existence was hideous, a sort of ulcer, without a single element of artificial grace to make up for the loss of nature's beauty."[29] Confused and

[29] William James, "On A Certain Blindness in Human Beings," in *On Some of Life's Ideals* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1912), 7.

offended, James asked of the mountaineer who was driving him what kind of people make clearings like these. The mountaineer replied, "'all of us… why we ain't happy here, unless we are getting one of these coves under cultivation.'"[30] James was struck by this radically different viewpoint:

> I instantly felt that I had been losing the whole inward significance of the situation. Because to me the clearings spoke of naught but denudation, I thought that to those whose sturdy arms and obedient axes had made them they could tell no other story. But, when *they* looked on the hideous stumps, what they thought of was personal victory. The chips, the girdled trees, and the vile split rails spoke of honest sweat, persistent toil, and final reward. The cabin was a warrant of safety for self and wife and babes. In short, the clearing, which to me was a mere ugly picture on the retina, was to them a symbol redolent with moral memories and sang a very pæan of duty, struggle, and success. I had been as blind to the peculiar ideality of their conditions as they certainly would also have been to ideality of mine.[31]

While neither perspective could be said to be absolutely true in the traditional sense, both seem to be grounded in the facts. So how to make sense of such differing accounts of reality? Is the difference real or merely apparent? In the preface of "The Will to Believe," written ten years before *Pragmatism*, James claims that "the difference between monism and pluralism is perhaps the most pregnant of all the differences in philosophy."[32] This question of unity is one that James explores at length in his *Pluralistic Universe* and to which he devotes a chapter in *Pragmatism*.

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[30] James, "A Certain Blindness," 8.
[31] James, "A Certain Blindness," 8-9.
[32] William James, "The Will to Believe" in *The Will to Believe and other essays in popular philosophy, and Human Immortality* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), viii. The Dover edition contains a reprint of the first edition of "The Will to Believe" that appeared in 1896.

And although he may sympathize with the sentiment behind wanting to rationalize the world as a monism, James clearly comes down on the side of pluralism. He says in preface of "The Will to Believe,"

> *Prima facie* the world is a pluralism; as we find it, its unity seems to be that of any collection; and our higher thinking consists chiefly of an effort to redeem it from that first crude form. Postulating more unity than the first experiences yield, we also discover more. But absolute unity, in spite of brilliant dashes in its direction, still remains undiscovered…. After all that reason can do has been done, there still remains the opacity of the finite facts as merely given, with most of their peculiarities mutually unmediated and unexplained.[33]

For James, to assert absolute monism or idealism is to deny the messy, heterogenous, and spontaneous world that we encounter in experience. For example, we do not experience the world as absolutely good or absolutely bad but as some mixture of the two. Speculation beyond what the facts of experience tell us is meaningless. From his affinity for pluralism, James formulates an account of truth and reality that is similar to yet distinct from Peirce's fallibilism. James's pragmatic pluralism is predicated on his understanding truth that is, in a sense, far more radical than Peirce's.

Like Peirce, James believes that the truth a statement is inextricably linked with its practical effectiveness. Ideas can be said to be different only if they have different practical results. James, particularly influenced by John Stuart Mill, specifies that it is the utility of an idea that indicates its truth. However, unlike Peirce, James sees practical use as being not merely a criterion of truth but as constituting truth itself. In other words, truth is not something "out there"

[33] James, "The Will to Believe," viii.

to which true statements correspond but is instead continuously created by the determined utility of an idea. As James puts it, "Sensations are forced upon us, coming we know not whence. Over their nature, order and quantity we have as good as no control. *They* are neither true nor false; they simply *are.* It is only what we say about them, only the names we give them…that may be true or not."[34] And earlier on he elaborates, "Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity *is* in fact an event, a process: the process namely of verifying itself, its veri-*fication.* Its validity is the process of its valid-*ation.*"[35] Truth is not a thing but a process, reason not an end but a means.

In James's view, truth as a process is a liberating idea offering an alternative to both the fatalistic world of positivism and the fanciful world of rationalism. The idea of truth as a process, for James, means the possibility of having genuine change, improvement, and freedom without sacrificing a scientific allegiance to empirical data. Although he rejects idealistic notions of absolute progress, James firmly believes in the possibility of relative progress, what he calls meliorism, that does not rely on any utopian conceptions of perfection. Furthermore, James's Pragmatism is humanistic in the sense that it elevates human beings to a lofty position as collective arbiters of truth:

> You see how naturally one comes to the humanistic principle: you can't weed out the human contribution. Our nouns and adjectives are all humanized heirlooms, and in the theories, we build them into, the inner order and arrangement is wholly dictated by human considerations, intellectual consistency being one of them. Mathematics and logic themselves are fermenting with human rearrangements; physics, astronomy and biology follow massive cues of preference. We plunge forward into the field of fresh experience

[34] James, *Pragmatism*, 107.
[35] James, *Pragmatism*, 88.

> with beliefs our ancestors and we have made already; these determine what we notice; what we notice determines what we do; what we do determines what we experience; so from one thing to another, although the stubborn fact remains that there *is* a sensible flux, what is *true of it* seems from first to last to be largely a matter of our own creation.[36]

It hard to miss the grandeur that James perceives in this vision of the world. For those who can acknowledge the human blindness regarding absolute truth and can accept the pluralistic nature of the world, human life dawns a new quality of beauty, spontaneity, and meaning. It is for this reason that the British Pragmatist FCS Schiller, greatly influenced by James, preferred to refer to this new kind of philosophy as humanism rather than Pragmatism.

Unsurprisingly, it is easy to take a more disquieted view of James's pluralistic Pragmatism. Such a subjective and anti-foundationalist view appears to endorse a radically relativistic take on reality. Kolakowski articulates these consequences: "One and the same judgement may be true or false depending on the situation in which it is made…. We are entitled to believe anything at all if believing it is advantageous to us or helps us in life."[37] Far from denying these consequences, James openly acknowledges such interpretations of his theory. He observes that many—especially those with a rationalist bent—have criticized pragmatic truth saying, "such truths are not real truth. Such tests are merely subjective. As against this, objective truth must be something non-utilitarian, haughty, refined, remote, august, exalted. It must be an absolute correspondence of our thoughts with an equally absolute reality. It must be what we *ought* to think unconditionally."[38] Rather than attempt to refute this criticism, James simply and

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[36] James, *Pragmatism*, 112.
[37] Kolakowski, *Alienation of Reason*, 162.
[38] James, *Pragmatism,* 34.

pragmatically draws attention to harsh distinction between the rationalist disposition and his own:

> See the exquisite contrast of the types of mind! The pragmatist clings to facts and concreteness, observes truth at its work in particular cases, and generalizes. Truth, for him, becomes a class-name for all sorts of definite working-values in experience. For the rationalist it remains a pure abstraction, to the bare name of which we must defer. When the pragmatist undertakes to show in detail just why we must defer, the rationalist is unable to recognize the concretes from which his own abstraction is taken. He accuses us of denying truth; whereas we have only sought to trace exactly why people follow it and always ought to follow it.[39]

From the perspective of the rationalist, James's response would, of course, be totally unsatisfactory. James, however, finds that to be irrelevant. He allows this disagreement to hang in the air. He is content to direct his critics back to experience, an experience that he feels has more to do with common sense than capital-R reason, more to do with utilitarian decision making and practical consequences than duty and moral absolutes. Pragmatically considered, Pragmatism makes a great deal of sense, and that is enough for James.

However, this is not to suggest that James presents a radical personal relativism and disregards all ethical concerns. James, as his encounter with the mountaineer shows, is deeply aware that human beings are prejudiced and can be mistaken. Some beliefs more effectively and usefully organize the facts of life than others. James's pluralism allows for competing truths to encounter and challenge one another. Like Peirce claimed, James believes that by incorporating multiple perspectives we are able to establish a more robust and accurate account of the world.

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[39] James, *Pragmatism*, 34.

Also like Peirce, James is wary of claims to absolute certainty in any given situation. In the opening lines of "What Makes Life Significant," James observes that acknowledging our blindness is, "the basis of all our tolerance, social, religious, and political," and to forget that "lies at the root of every stupid and sanguinary mistake that rulers over subject-peoples make."[40] James proposes what Bernstein calls an "engaged pluralism," that is not "flabby or sentimental" and instead "calls for a critical engagement with other points of view and with other visions."[41] At bottom James aligns with an American liberalism predicated on Lockean principles of tolerance. However, it is John Dewey who would most explicitly draw out the relationships among freedom, democracy, and Pragmatism.

The last thing I will say here about William James and his pragmatic pluralism is the remarkable space he gives to religion and metaphysics. Against the positivistic project of the total disenchantment of ideas, James insists that Pragmatism leaves ample room for legitimate religious conviction and metaphysical belief—an allowance for which the Frankfurt School would criticize him. With a pragmatic aversion to certainty and dogmatism also comes an aversion to absolute atheism. In a lecture on Pragmatism and religion, James states, "On pragmatic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily…it is true."[42] Kolakowski characterizes James's attempt to revive the possibility of the spiritual: "if the existence of God gives us certainty as to the moral order of the world, if the belief in freedom of the will entails the promise of reward or stimulates creative energies, we may believe the one and the other with the same certainty as the most reliable evidence of the senses."[43] If ideas are useful for us, then

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[40] William James, "What Makes Life Significant," in *Pragmatism and Other Writings,* ed. Giles Gunn (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 286.
[41] Bernstein, *Pragmatic Turn*, 62.
[42] James, *Pragmatism*, 131.
[43] Kolakowski, *Alienation of Reason*

they can be considered true. This principle holds for such metaphysical questions as personal identity or free will and such religious questions as an afterlife or divine justice.

In my view, there is a paradoxical tension between this view of religion and James's argument for pluralism. How can dogmatic belief be allowed under a philosophy of anti-dogmatism? Doesn't James seek to be loyal only to the facts of life and challenge any idealizing tendencies? James is clearly comfortable with this tension. I suppose it again comes down to the notion of "engaged pluralism," which does not allow ideas to go unchallenged. If religious conviction does "work," then, James says, "the problem is to build it out and determine it so it will combine satisfactorily with all other working truths."[44] Religious conviction is not immune from the utilitarian evaluation in which James has so much faith. At the same time, anti-religious ideas must be subject to the same scrutiny and be allowed to engage meaningfully with seemingly contradictory ideas.

Read skeptically, James's pluralism is fraught with tensions and undesirable consequences. For this reason, the Frankfurt School's earliest critiques of Pragmatism centered on James's iteration. Not only was he initially most familiar to the German thinkers,[45] but he also was a fairly easy target (not to mention he was not alive to defend himself having died in 1910). Read sympathetically however, James offers us a view of a universe that is both flawed and improvable. Unwilling to view the world in terms of absolutes, James provides, in the words of Bernstein, "a *via media* between optimism and pessimism."[46] His Pragmatism can illuminate a liberating means of coping with the challenges of modernity.

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[44] James, *Pragmatism*, 131.

[45] Hans Joas has argued that the Frankfurt School misunderstood Pragmatism partially because of the common German identification of James's thought with Pragmatism as a whole. "American Pragmatism and German Thought: A History of Misunderstandings," in *Pragmatism and Social Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 94-121.

[46] Bernstein, *Pragmatic Turn*, 61.

John Dewey's Naturalism

From Peirce and James, who provide a sense of the intellectual foundations of Pragmatism, I turn next to John Dewey. A prolific writer and engaged social critic, Dewey had a public career that spanned over half a century. From politics to aesthetics to education, Dewey's intellectual interests were vast. He not only played an important role in articulating a pragmatic theory of inquiry, but also tried to show Pragmatism's implications for praxis and social reform. Deeply concerned with democracy and society, Dewey's theories of science and inquiry are shot through with questions about understanding and changing the state of the modern world (just as his writings on democracy are shot through with ideas of scientific inquiry). For this reason—along with the coincidental facts that he lived until 1952 and had great influence on certain intellectuals in New York, particularly Sidney Hook—Dewey and his version of Pragmatism eventually came to be most familiar to the Frankfurt School during their exile in America.[47]

Born in 1859 in Burlington, Vermont, John Dewey received a classical education at the University of Vermont where he was introduced to the study of the history of philosophy—particularly German and Scottish thinkers. Upon graduating in 1879, Dewey taught at a high school for two years in Pennsylvania. During this time, he developed a lasting interest in education although his interest in studying philosophy deepened as well. In 1881, Dewey returned to Vermont where he taught and continued his studies in philosophy under one of his college professors. After getting an essay titled "The Metaphysical Assumptions of Materialism" published in *Speculative Philosophy*, Dewey decided to enroll at the recently created graduate school at Johns Hopkin's University to continue his studies. While he did study briefly with

[47] The following chapter discusses the extent of the Frankfurt School's engagement with and understanding of Dewey's ideas.

Charles Peirce, whose work would influence Dewey only later, Dewey was far more drawn to the work of the Hegelian George S. Morris.

It was through Morris, that Dewey found an affinity for Hegel. For Dewey, Hegel offered a compelling and invigorating world view that neither Kant's transcendental idealism nor Scottish empiricism could. In his own words from 1930, Dewey recalls that Hegel's thought,

> Supplied a demand for unification that was doubtless an intense emotional craving, and yet was a hunger that only an intellectualized subject-matter could satisfy. …My early philosophic study had been an intellectual gymnastic. Hegel's synthesis of subject and object, matter and spirit, the divine and the human, was, however, no mere intellectual formula; it operated as an immense release, a liberation. Hegel's treatment of human culture, of institutions and the arts, involved the same dissolution of hard-and-fast dividing walls, and had a special attraction for me.[48]

As a young man, Dewey was drawn to a spirit of freedom and unification that Hegel engendered. This was akin to the attraction that Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School felt in moving away from the late Marx's determinism and rediscovering the Hegelian roots of Marxism. Dewey's early writings indicate his affinity for Hegelian idealism at that time. For example, in his *Psychology* published in 1887, Dewey plainly uses the language of idealism to describe the role of imagination in knowledge: "All products of the creative imagination are unconscious testimonies to the unity of spirit which binds man to man and man to nature in one organic whole…. Imagination deals with the universal in its particular manifestations, or with the particular as embodying some ideal meaning, some universal element. It dissolves this ideal

[48] John Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 7.

element out of its hard concretion in the sphere of actual particular fact, and sets it before the mind as an independent element."[49]

While Dewey admitted that over the course of his career he drifted away from Hegelian ideas, nevertheless, he said, "that acquaintance with Hegel left a permanent deposit on my thinking."[50] Importantly, Hegel's view of the individual as integrated into a social and historical whole rather than isolated was critical for Dewey—as it was for the Critical Theorists. Although he later came to question the necessity or possibility of a foundational system such as Hegel's altogether, Dewey still had respect for Hegel's philosophical accomplishment. As Dewey describes, "The form, the schematism, of his system now seems to me artificial to the last degree. But in the content of his ideas there is often an extraordinary depth; in many of his analyses, taken out of their mechanical dialectical setting, an acuteness. Were it possible for me to be a devotee of any system, I still should believe that there is greater richness and greater variety of insight in Hegel than in any other single systematic philosopher."[51]

After receiving a PhD in 1884 at Johns Hopkin's, Dewey obtained a teaching position at the University of Michigan where he became friends with George Herbert Mead who had been a student of William James. It was during this time that Dewey became introduced to pragmatic ideas which ultimately led him to formulate his own version of Pragmatism or, as he often called it, instrumentalism. From his exposure to James first in James's *Principles of Psychology*, Dewey started to articulate a philosophy with experience at its center. For Dewey, James's psychology and pragmatic theory of truth had successfully inverted and extended empiricism's historic focus on sense data. According to Dewey's reading of James, the human mind is not

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[49] John Dewey, *Psychology*, in *The Early Works: 1882-1898*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 2, *1887* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), 174-175.
[50] Dewey, "From Absolutism," 8.
[51] Dewey, "From Absolutism," 8.

merely a passive sponge for sense data but is an active participant in making meaning in the world. Whereas empiricism historically looked to "antecedent phenomena," Pragmatism looks toward "consequent phenomena." Pragmatism for Dewey, with its understanding that the value of concepts is determined by their consequences, looks towards the future, towards liberated possibility. Reason under empiricism merely played a role of recording and summarizing sense data. In contrast, reason, plays a "real, though limited, function, a creative, constructive function" under a pragmatistic conception of the human mind.[52]

Dewey stayed at Michigan until 1894 when he accepted a position as a professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago. His time in Chicago was critically informative for Dewey politically, intellectually, and personally. Politically, Dewey more fully embraced the need for social reform. While he had written about the shortcomings of *laissez faire* liberalism while at Michigan, in Chicago, Dewey saw more clearly than ever the pitfalls of individualism and unfettered capitalism. He arrived during the height of the Pullman railroad strike, and the violence and the apparent antagonism he saw deeply impacted him. Dewey was also struck by the work of Jane Addams and the Hull House whose dedication to education and reform impressed Dewey greatly. Particularly, Addams's response to the Pullman strike arguably influenced how Dewey would think about collective action for the rest of his life. Unlike some other reformers, Addams did not view the strike as a necessary conflict in the people's struggle for liberation, on the contrary, she saw the strike and the violence as a tragic manifestation of a great misunderstanding, an illusory antagonism. She fundamentally believed in the shared interest of all human beings and believed that violence was never a justified action. After arguing with Addams on this point, while Dewey did not follow her all the way, he conceded and

[52] John Dewey, "The Development of American Pragmatism," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, 50. Dewey's essay was originally published in French in 1922 and then in English in 1925 as translated by Herbert W. Schneider.

adopted something of her fundamental position.[53] Dewey's view on the potential for democracy and collective action, as we will see, reflects this faith in the potential to overcome conflict through intelligent rather than violent means.

While in Chicago, Dewey pursued further what he saw as the philosophical and social import of education founding "the laboratory school" in 1896. The school, which embodied Dewey's belief that intelligence could and should be taught to young people, was a testing ground for creative pedagogy. While the school had the support of the community and had a size of over 100 students at its height in 1904, personal conflict and financial strain led to the school's demise and Dewey's resignation from the University of Chicago. He left that year and became a professor of philosophy at Columbia, where he taught until his retirement in 1930.

Over his career as a Pragmatist, Dewey articulated how naturalism and inquiry fit in with James's ideas regarding pragmatic truth. Resulting in part from his exposure to James's ideas while in Michigan, Dewey drifted away from his early attraction to Hegel. He came to emphasize the primacy of experience and the instrumental value of ideas. Dewey, in a sense, exchanged the Hegelian dialectic for a more naturalistic account of change and conflict. Like other intellectuals of his day, Dewey was greatly influenced by Darwin, though not in the social-Darwinian sense often associated with the likes of Herbert Spencer. Dewey firmly believed that philosophy had to (forgive me) adapt to the paradigm shifting implications of Darwinian evolution. Philosophy, Dewey thought, needed to reorient itself away from misguided questions of metaphysics and epistemology and towards inquiry grounded in experience. In an essay titled "A Need for a Recovery of Philosophy," published in 1917, Dewey lays out how new developments in science have left traditional views untenable. Dewey observes that for millennia

[53] Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), 313. Menand reconstructs Dewey's encounter with Addams through letters Dewey sent to his wife Alice.

thinkers have been concerned with questions about knowledge and the self. The knower has been thought of as separate and distinct from the world to be known. This assumption grounds all speculation about if and how a subject gains knowledge of the world *out there*. All the controversy over idealism and realism, rationalism and empiricism has been rooted in this distinction between the self and the world. Based on the time and place, philosophers have termed this "antithetical subject" the "soul, or spirit, or mind, or ego, or consciousness, or just knower or knowing subject."[54] In medieval times, Dewey says, such a distinction had an explicitly religious flavor in its concern with the supernatural journey of the soul gaining knowledge of God. Later, in the modern period, "the theological problem of attaining knowledge of God as ultimate reality was transformed in effect into the philosophical problem of the possibility of attaining knowledge of reality."[55] The longevity of this conception of self and world has made it difficult to imagine its unreality, but Dewey argues that we must.

According to Dewey, Darwinian evolution shows that the long-debated problem of knowledge is meaningless. Rather than isolated subjects, evolution demonstrates that human beings are organisms continuous with their environments. We are constantly responding to and acting in a world that we truly inhabit. Dewey says unequivocally:

> If biological development be accepted, the subject of experience is at least an animal, continuous with other organic forms in the process of more complex organization. An animal in turn is at least continuous with chemico-physical processes which, in living things, are so organized as really to constitute the activities of life with all their defining traits. And experience is not identical with brain action; it is the entire organic agent-patient in all its interaction with the environment, natural and social. The brain is

[54] John Dewey, "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, 74.
[55] Dewey, "Recovery of Philosophy," 75.

> primarily an organ of a certain kind of behavior, not knowing the world. And to repeat what has already been said, experiencing *is* just certain modes of interactions, of correlation, of natural objects among which the organism happens, so to say, to be one. It follows with equal force that experience means primarily not knowledge, but ways of doing and suffering. Knowing must be described by discovering what particular mode—qualitatively unique—of doing and suffering it is.[56]

In this view, the questions of knowledge that have irked philosophers for so long are non-empirical and senseless. The primary human activity is not knowing or reflecting, but rather experiencing, suffering, acting, and adapting.

This view of the human, as an organism within and continuous with the environment, incorporates James's stance that truth is a process in which reason is an instrument. To illustrate this point, Dewey provides the example of a subject interacting with water (bear with me). When I drink, look at, or swim in water, what am I doing? According to Dewey, before I gain knowledge of the water or any of its qualities, I experience it. In a completely non-cognitive process, I undergo an interaction and an exchange with the water just as the water undergoes an exchange with me. As a being with intelligence, once I experience the water, only then do I begin to make mental connections. I remember past experiences with water that allow me to make predictions about the future of this encounter. Through this process the water comes to have meaning for me. In this process of experience, there is no "epistemological transformation" from "reality into unreality."[57] No noumenal veil falls between me and the water. In Dewey's view, I need not speculate about whether the object (in this case the water) is real. Such a question is evidently irrelevant because "an incident of the world operating as a physiologically

[56] Dewey, "Recovery of Philosophy," 78.
[57] Dewey, "Recovery of Philosophy," 85.

direct stimulus is assuredly a reality."[58] Once I experience the water, through my reasoning I come to know the water I am drinking or viewing or swimming in. This knowing does not "*produce* a change," but rather "*is* a change." My knowing and the object of my knowing together constitute a new object with properties that neither of us had before. Dewey says, "because of this change, an *object* possesses truth or error (which the physical occurrence as such never had), it is classifiable as fact or fantasy."[59] If I taste the water and think that it is orange juice, the fact that I am thinking it is orange juice is surely real, but further inquiry would determine that this fact is erroneous. This is all to say that Dewey rejects the epistemological debate over whether the presentation of an object to a knowing subject is real or unreal. He firmly believes that such debate obscures "the actual process of knowing, namely, operations of controlled observation, inference, reasoning, and testing."[60] Similar to James, Dewey argues that it is through these acts that we participate in the truth making process. For Dewey, this is the fundamental principle of what he calls the pragmatic theory of intelligence.

Understood in a pragmatic way, philosophy must reorient itself to be more like the physical sciences. In this new context, a philosophical theory of reality is neither "possible [n]or needed."[61] According to Dewey, philosophy must adopt an attitude of "emancipated empiricism" and return to issues of practical import. Philosophy can learn from science's invention of "a technique of appliances and procedures, which, accepting all occurrences as homogeneously real, proceeds to distinguish the authenticated from the spurious, the true from the false, by specific modes of treatment in specific situations."[62] The difference between truth and falsehood in this

[58] Dewey, "Recovery of Philosophy," 86.
[59] Dewey, "Recovery of Philosophy," 86.
[60] Dewey, "Recovery of Philosophy," 87.
[61] Dewey, "Recovery of Philosophy," 89.
[62] Dewey, "Recovery of Philosophy," 91.

sense is not one of "antecedent fixity" but of practical consequence and compatibility with previous facts.[63]

Dewey is well aware of possible objections to such an elevation of science. Growing up during the aftermath of the Civil War, seeing the potential brutalities of industrial capitalism, and witnessing the outbreak of the first world war and the subsequent rise of totalitarianism, he readily acknowledges the destructive ends to which modern science and technology has been put. To address this concern, Dewey is careful to distinguish between a scientific technique—a specific application of the scientific method—and a scientific temper—a general attitude towards experience, inquiry, and truth. Borrowing this distinction from Bertrand Russell, Dewey explains that the scientific temper is humble and cautious: "It arrives at its general rules through experimental observation of many individual occurrences, and it employs general rules when arrived at as working hypotheses, not as eternal and immutable truths."[64] The scientific temper is fully aware that its hypotheses will be subject to revision and change as inquiry proceeds. Dewey stresses the innate humility in this way of looking at the world. Without the guidance of the scientific temper, the technical advances of science will surely be dangerously exploited.

Dewey argues that the skepticism or outright horror at the brutal applications of technology does not mean we should abandon our faith in science or revive dogmatic metaphysis. On the contrary, Dewey says, the catastrophes of the twentieth century are the result of too much technical science and too little scientific temperament. The rise of totalitarianism is the outcome of a renewed fear of chaos and a new demand for authority. Dewey explains that "because science was not ready to meet the demand, we have the old appeal to external dogmatic

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[63] Dewey, "Recovery of Philosophy," 91.
[64] John Dewey, "Religion, Science, and Philosophy," in *Problems of Men* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), 172.

authority. The appeal is old; it is in accord with the established precedents of history for most of its course. The form of its expression is new and terrific. For it has all the resources of the technical applications of science at its command."[65] While some of these totalitarian appeals may wave a banner of atheism or scientism, they function as new religions. "They have their established dogmatic creeds, their fixed rites and ceremonies, their central institutional authority, their distinction between the faithful and the unbelievers, with persecution of heretics who do not accept the faith."[66] In short the current crisis is a result of scientific technique uninformed by scientific temperament. Totalitarianism is a regressive attempt to satisfy the human need for absolute certainty and ease the Cartesian Anxiety. Pragmatism with its genuinely scientific temper moves past such ends.

Democracy and Creative Intelligence

Along with his critique of totalitarianism, Dewey's Pragmatism informed his staunch defense of democracy. Dewey's concern for democracy spanned much of his career and informed his writing on various subjects. Although, understandably, his defense of democracy became more explicit as much of Europe turned its back on the values of liberal democracy in the decades following the First World War. Much more than a form of governance, Dewey sees democracy as a distinct way of being in the world. Democracy, for Dewey, involves the cultivation of a certain character and a certain attitude towards the possibilities of human nature. It requires both a belief in the fundamental equality of human beings and faith in the great potential of human beings to effect change for the better. In a short essay titled "Creative

[65] John Dewey, "Religion, Science, and Philosophy," 175.
[66] John Dewey, "Religion, Science, and Philosophy," 175.

Democracy—The Task Before Us" written in 1939, Dewey articulates the urgent need for a radical personal democracy. He writes that,

> Belief in the Common Man is a familiar article in the democratic creed. That belief is without basis and significance save as it means faith in the potentialities of human nature as that nature is exhibited in every human being irrespective of race, color, sex, birth and family, of material or cultural wealth. This faith may be enacted in statutes, but it is only on paper unless it is put in force in the attitudes which human beings display to one another in all the incidents and relations of daily life. To denounce Naziism for intolerance, cruelty and stimulation of hatred amounts to fostering insincerity if, in our personal relations to other persons, if, in our daily walk and conversation, we are moved by racial, color, or class prejudice; indeed, by anything but generous belief in their possibilities as human beings, a belief which brings with it the need for providing conditions which will enable these capacities to reach fulfillment.[67]

Democracy is made possible by a pragmatic theory of intelligence that has "faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgement and action if the proper conditions are furnished."[68] That is to say, democracy requires a belief in the ability of reason to assign the proper means to the proper ends and to proceed with humble and open inquiry, not with dogmatic ideology. Importantly, this involves faith in our ability to cooperate and learn with others, a faith akin to Peirce's belief in the community of inquirers. "Democracy," Dewey says, "is the belief that even when needs and ends or consequences are different for each individual, the habit of amicable cooperation…is itself a priceless addition to life."[69] Dewey's democracy

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[67] John Dewey, "Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us," in *The Later Works: 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 14, *1939-1941* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 226.
[68] Dewey, "Creative Democracy," 227.
[69] Dewey, "Creative Democracy," 228.

involves faith in the possibility of peace attained through mutual learning and intelligence rather than violence and coercion. Dewey saw this belief in cooperation exemplified is someone like Jane Addams.

Dewey's faith in power of intelligent organization for social change is indicative of his affinities for the kind of political reform brought about during the progressive era in U.S. history. Dewey had a great deal of respect for the work of reformers like Addams, and during his time in Chicago he himself worked to change educational practices in a more progressive direction. While he called himself a liberal, Dewey was well aware of the injustices wrought in the wake of rapid industrialization, and he argued unequivocally for the need for liberalism and liberal institutions to adapt to new material conditions. In his 1935 essay on "Liberalism and Social Action," Dewey observes the inadequacy of a Lockean or *laissez faire* liberalism to justly manage the new material abundance made possible through technological change—an observation surely shared by Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School. According to Dewey, a new form of "renascent liberalism" is required. Dewey writes that in the modern age the only adequate form of social organization "is one in which the new forces of productivity are cooperatively controlled and used in the interest of the effective liberty and cultural development of the individuals that constitute society."[70] This end cannot be achieved by some invisible hand through the unplanned "actions of separate individuals, each of whom is bent on personal private advantage."[71] Uncooperative means will never result in cooperative ends, and a liberalism that forgets this is doomed to fail. Democracy and pragmatic intelligence are the only path forward for liberalism. Dewey says that "organized social planning" oriented towards creating "an order

[70] John Dewey, "Liberalism and Social Action," in *The Later Works: 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 11, *1935-1937* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 39-40.
[71] Dewey, "Liberalism and Social Action," 40.

in which industry and finance are socially directed in behalf of institutions that provide the material basis for the cultural liberation and growth of individuals, is now the sole method of social action by which liberalism can realize its professed aims. Such planning demands in turn a new conception and logic of freed intelligence as a social force."[72] This is the same logic that Peirce began to formulate and which Dewey set out to fully articulate. For Dewey his work on Pragmatism and instrumentalism was continuous with his political commitment to social action and democracy.

Near the end of his essay on "Creative Democracy," Dewey states plainly how his pragmatic philosophy is inextricably tied to his understanding of democracy:

> Democracy is belief in the ability of human experiences to generate aims and methods by which further experiences will grow in ordered richness. Every other form of moral and social faith rests upon the idea that experience must be subjected at some point or other to some form of external control; to some "authority" alleged to exist outside the process of experience. Democracy is the faith that the *process* of experience is more important than any special result attained, so that *special results achieved are of ultimate value only as they are used to enrich and order the ongoing process*. … All ends and values that are cut off from the ongoing process become arrests, fixations. They strive to fixate what has been gained instead of using it to open the road and point the way to new and better experiences.[73]

Dewey's theories of inquiry and democracy boil down to a belief that value is inherent in the process and nowhere else. Living the democratic life is not good because it works toward some

[72] Dewey, "Liberalism and Social Action," 40.
[73] Dewey, "Creative Democracy," 229.

utopian democratic society but rather because the process of living that way is itself good and points in the direction of future improvement.

Clearly, Dewey feels that his pragmatic and democratic world-view is deeply empowering. Indeed, Dewey insists that Pragmatism with its scientific temper does not endorse a depressingly mechanistic world view. On the contrary, the pragmatic theory of intelligence frees experiences from "routine and caprice" and allows the human mind to boldly and democratically project into the future. "Pragmatic intelligence," Dewey says, "is creative intelligence."[74] Human reason, in this view, determines means to ends that are as-yet-uncertain. Conversely, traditional theories of intelligence see the function of human reason as determining means to ends that are pre-determined and fixed. Although those fixed ends may be called religious or moral, these traditional views are servile and restricting. Creative intelligence, in its rejection of the need for certainty, liberates the mind and orients it towards a free, undetermined, and quite possibly better future.

Conclusion

While this has been a brief and far from exhaustive account of pragmatic ideas, it should serve to set the intellectual stage for the encounter between these ideas and those of the Frankfurt School. Emerging out of a still very young intellectual climate, Pragmatism grew to be philosophy that was distinctly American. Though they of course had their European influences, the Pragmatists were self-consciously formulating a new and distinct philosophy that broke with many of the intellectual debates of the old world. They tried to grapple with a world rapidly evolving technologically, socially, and politically. They saw a world to which old questions did not apply, yet there was still need of answers. In one sense this was the same world that the

[74] Dewey, "Recovery of Philosophy," 94.

thinkers of the early Frankfurt School encountered. They too observed the need for a new philosophical interrogation of a rapidly changing world. However, as we will see, the Critical Theory they developed was certainly very different from Pragmatism. Moreover, during their exile in the United States, some members of the Frankfurt School, Horkheimer and Marcuse in particular, were openly critical of Pragmatism. Rather than a liberating philosophy of the future, they saw Pragmatism as a dangerous theory of instrumentalism that was neither self-reflective nor self-critical. As we will see, this encounter was just as much an interaction between particular people and temperaments as between philosophical ideas. Rather than a purely rational exchange, the meeting between Pragmatism and Critical Theory played out among real individual with their own biases, modes of perception, and limited understandings. The next chapter will deal with how the Frankfurt School came to be aware of pragmatic ideas and the subsequent dispute and ultimately irreconcilable conflict between the two schools of thought.

Chapter 2

An Immanent Critique

Martin Jay identifies three paths that German left-wing intellectuals could take in the years following the First World War.[75] Given the failure of a communist revolution in central Europe and the remarkable success of one in Russia, these intellectuals, once flag bearers of Marx's legacy, were caught in a bind. First, they could follow the moderate reformist socialists who had recently established the Weimar government. Second, they could stick to their revolutionary guns, look to Moscow, and join the German Communist Party working to subvert Weimar reformism. Or finally, Jay argues, there was a third path, a path that led certain intellectuals to reexamine and reapply Marxist theory itself. These intellectuals took a bold step back to look at the state of the modern world and then proceeded with a fresh and incisive new perspective.

In the early years of the short-lived Weimar Republic, a group of thinkers on that last path coalesced around what was named the Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute for Social Research). Since for a time the Institute was affiliated with the University of Frankfurt, the group became informally known as the Frankfurt School, and their novel approach to Marxist theory—through the method of immanent critique—has since become known as Critical Theory. Although often with disparate interests, the thinkers of the Frankfurt School sought to combine the theoretical roots of Marxism with social scientific data to inform a critical view of modern society. The following chapter briefly traces the Frankfurt School's origins, its early direction under Max Horkheimer, and, primarily, the encounter between Critical Theory and Pragmatism

[75] Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 3.

during the Institute's exile in the United States. Situating both groups in this way illuminates some of their foundational assumptions and invites interrogation as to why those assumptions were ultimately in tension. These tensions, as we will see, were just as much the result of conflicting personalities as intellectual differences.

The First Years in Germany

Founded in 1923, the Institute was conceived and initially funded by Felix Weil, the son of a wealthy Jewish merchant.[76] Weil, like others who would be drawn to the Institute, was a student of the theoretical roots of socialism completing his dissertation at the University of Frankfurt in 1920. He was struck by the political changes brought on by World War I followed by the failure of communist revolution and the sidelining of radical socialist thought after the first years of the Weimar republic. Weil felt moved to be a financial benefactor in support of studies in the Marxist tradition, and thus the idea of an institute was born. With the support of friends, Weil invited Carl Grunberg, a professor of political economy at the University of Vienna, to be the Institute's first director.

Sympathetic to Weil's vision, Grunberg agreed and assumed a post in the Department of Economics and Social Science at the University of Frankfurt in January of 1923. Following a decree of the Education Ministry, the Institute for Social Research was officially founded on February 3, 1923. As director, Grunberg led with strong will and vision. He saw the purpose of the Institute as primarily promoting and utilizing Marxist scientific research methods. He emphasized the critical role of gathering empirical data in the undertaking of sociological research. Differently from Horkheimer, who as director would emphasize the importance of

[76] The introduction of Thomas Wheatland's *The Frankfurt School in Exile* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 1-32, was helpful in writing a biographical introduction of the Frankfurt School.

philosophy, Grunberg was focused on the history and the material conditions of capitalism and class struggle. Though an important step in the development of the Institute, Grunberg's directorship was short-lived. He stepped down as director in 1927 after suffering a stroke.

Fredrich Pollock, assistant to Grunberg and friend to Weil, assumed the role of interim director. Importantly, Pollock was close friends with one Max Horkheimer, who at the time held a post in the philosophy department at the University of Frankfurt. Like Weil and Grunberg, Horkheimer, born in 1895, came from a well-off Jewish family. Although his father, who owned several textile factories, planned for him to enter the family business, Max Horkheimer as a teen became disenchanted with his place in the bourgeoise. When he was sixteen, Horkheimer found a kindred spirit in Fredrich Pollock. As friends, the two young men stoked each other's idealism and dissatisfaction with the status quo. Over time, Horkheimer felt more and more guilty for his social status as he contemplated the world-view of the proletarian workers of his father's factories. He eventually broke with his family and soon after was drafted into the German Army. Though he never saw combat, he did witness the deterioration of German morale and the rapid collapse of the Prussian imperial government.

After the war, Horkheimer, along with Pollock, went to university first in Munich and then in Frankfurt. While his academic interests initially lay in psychology, at Frankfurt, Horkheimer was exposed to Kant, whose commitment to critical reason made a lasting impression on Horkheimer. At the same time, he was also introduced to the ideas of Marx who spoke to the unease and dissatisfaction that Horkheimer felt within bourgeois society. During this time, he not only maintained his friendship with Pollock but also become familiar with the work of recently formed Institute for Social Research. After completing his dissertation on Kant's *Critique of Judgement* in 1925, Horkheimer assumed a post at the University of Frankfurt.

Despite being an outsider to the Institute, Horkheimer's affinity for Marxism combined with his close friendship with Pollock made him a prime candidate for the position of director. In fact, as Wheatland argues, his status as an outsider may have made him an even more attractive candidate as the Institute may have been trying to avoid the appearance of nepotism or radicalism. Regardless, Pollock selflessly stepped aside for his friend, and Horkheimer was made director of the Frankfurt School in January of 1931. As director, Horkheimer, like Grunberg before him, shaped a vision for the Institute. While he was not the most academically active member of the young Institute, Horkheimer consciously articulated its goals and intellectual direction. Under Horkheimer's leadership, the Institute would incorporate some of the great minds of Critical Theory including Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, and Theodore Adorno.

Horkheimer's Institute

In his inaugural address as director, Horkheimer presented his understanding of the tasks ahead for the Institute for Social Research. While empirical research would remain a fundamental activity, Horkheimer emphasized the role that social philosophy must play in situating and comprehending empirical data. The aim of social philosophy, he said, "is the philosophical interpretation of the vicissitudes of human fate—the fate of humans not as mere individuals, however, but as members of a community."[77] Thus, social philosophy is "above all concerned with phenomena that only be understood in the context of human social life."[78] Horkheimer situated this brand philosophy in the tradition of German idealism particularly in Hegel's philosophy and its distinction from Kant's. Whereas Kant emphasized the "closed unity

[77] Max Horkheimer, "The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research," in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 1.
[78] Horkheimer, "Present Situation," 1.

of the rational subject" as the building block of the cultural sphere, Hegel emphasized a "universal dialectical logic" that ungirds the unfolding of objective Spirit in the world.[79] Spirit's "course and its works originate not from the free decisions of the subject, but from the spirit of the dominant nations as they succeed each other in the struggles of history." Horkheimer understood Hegel as constructing a system wherein the individual's actualization is found in the "fate of the universal," and the individual's essence "manifests itself not in personal actions, but in the life of the whole to which it belongs."[80] Hegel preserved critical reason but grounded it in history beyond the individual.

According to Horkheimer, this understanding constituted a truly social philosophy that had fallen out of vogue by the mid-nineteenth century with the rise of positivism and empiricist social science. "The metaphysics of objective Spirit," he says, "was replaced in an optimistic, individualistic society by the direct belief in the preestablished harmony of individual interests."[81] Such optimism eliminated the need for negation and mediation of reality and the consciousness of one's freedom. No longer was there a necessary conflict between the present material existence and a truly human one. Positivism was marked by confidence in the liberating consequences of "linear progress in positive science, technology, and industry."[82]

However, Horkheimer observes that such optimism has become less and less tenable in the modern age, and social philosophy has seen a resurgence. These new attempts at social philosophy are for the most part united in their "effort to demonstrate—above the level of actual empirical events—the existence of a higher, autonomous realm of being, or at least a realm of value or normativity on which transitory human beings have a share, but which is itself not

[79] Horkheimer, "Present Situation," 1-2.
[80] Horkheimer, "Present Situation," 2.
[81] Horkheimer, "Present Situation," 4.
[82] Horkheimer, "Present Situation," 4.

reducible to mundane events."[83] Social philosophy is today confronted with "the yearning for a new interpretation of a life trapped in its individual striving for happiness," and yet at the same time struggles to speak beyond "ideological, sectarian, and confessional terms."[84] This problem of objectivity is fundamental for any undertaking in social philosophy. However, Horkheimer, like Grunberg before him, embraced the indispensable role that empirical evidence and research into material conditions must play in the work of the Institute for Social Research.

In his address, Horkheimer lays out the mission of the Institute to simultaneously incorporate and historicize empirical data and also form and reform the questions of value and normativity so important to social philosophy. "With this approach," says Horkheimer (sounding remarkably like Peirce and Dewey), "no yes-or-no answers arise to the philosophical questions. Instead, these questions themselves become integrated into the empirical research process; their answers lie in the advance of objective knowledge, which itself affects the form of the questions. In the study of society, no one individual is capable of such an approach, both because of the volume of material and because of the variety of indispensable auxiliary sciences."[85]
Like Peirce, Horkhiemer emphasizes the collective gathering and interpretation of empirical data over intuition or self-evidence. However, he departs over the role of philosophy in comprehending empirical evidence. As Wheatland describes, empirical data, while important, "would be understood and interpreted from a theoretical standpoint that was shaped by a notion of critical reason that transfigured historical reality by making it rational."[86] With his speech, Horkheimer rooted the method of Critical Theory in a German idealism characteristic of Hegel and the young Marx, and at the same time he distanced Critical Theory from the scientism and

[83] Horkheimer, "Present Situation," 5.
[84] Horkheimer, "Present Situation," 5-6.
[85] Horkheimer, "Present Situation," 8.
[86] Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 20.

mechanism associated with the later Marx and positivism more broadly. Horkheimer's emphasis on critical reason would play a major part in his criticism of Pragmatism and instrumental reason.

What is Critical Theory?

Critical Theory, as opposed to what Horkheimer would call traditional theory, "makes its own that concern for the rational organization of human activity which it is its task to illumine and legitimate."[87] Rather than merely describing and categorizing the world, Critical Theory sought to expose what it was and stimulate what it could be. Critical Theory, Horkhiemer wrote, "never aims simply at an increase of knowledge as such. Its goal is man's emancipation from slavery."[88]

Fundamental for understanding Critical Theory is recognizing that it was more a method than a specific philosophy or school of thought. As Jay puts it, "at the very heart of Critical Theory was an aversion to closed philosophical systems. To present it as such would therefore distort its essentially open-ended, probing, unfinished quality."[89] The Critical Theorists under Horkheimer attempted to work out sociological questions by way of an immanent critique rooted in the Hegelian dialectic. Specifically, they emphasized the negative aspect of the dialectic: the notion that dominant social forms contain their own negation and that negation can be exposed and mobilized in the process of history. In doing so they distanced themselves from Hegel's notion of a positive totality. In their ideological moment, they argued, to project a totality was impossible. They were skeptical that present conditions allowed for a true vision of the liberated

[87] Max Horkheimer, "Postscript," trans. Mathew J. O'Connell, in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 245.
[88] Horkheimer, "Postscript," 246.
[89] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 41.

society. In the context of such domination of thought, it became necessary to identify divisions and thereby contest them. For Horkheimer, this emphasis on negation gave theory is critical edge and gave the Institute an invaluable purpose. Like the way John Dewey emphasized science as a method or mode of thinking rather than a specific discipline, Critical Theory developed around a Hegelian and Marxian method rather than a particular doctrine.[90] I am borrowing this distinction from Robert J. Antonio who characterizes Critical Theory as a "*method* of analysis deriving from a non-positivist epistemology."[91] He then defines immanent critique as "a means of detecting the societal contradictions which offer the most determinate possibilities for emancipatory social change."[92] Their goal as social scientists was not merely to identify what is; instead it was to carry out a critique that interrogated what could be, asked what obstacles stood in the way, and provoked change.

This emphasis on method explains why the Critical Theorists were not full-bore Marxist-Leninists. They were unwilling to compromise a commitment to historically grounded criticism for the sake of so-called Marxist revolution. They were unwilling to turn a blind eye to the contradictions found in what they came to identify as state-capitalism in the Soviet Union despite its roots in Marxist ideas. Antonio argues that, fundamentally, "critical theorists desire to establish, from the ruins of Enlightenment reason, a basis for valid knowledge that is not fully empirical, purely ideological, or metaphysical. It must provide a basis for considering questions of value, but still maintain the requirement for empirical and theoretical rigor in instrumental matters."[93] By adopting this stance, the Frankfurt school tried to situate themselves outside the

[90] However, the method of Critical Theory was certainly rooted in historical materialism.
[91] Robert J. Antonio, "Immanent Critique as the Core of Critical Theory: Its Origins and Developments in Hegel, Marx, and Contemporary Thought," *British Journal of Sociology* 32, no. 3 (Sep., 1981): 330-345, 330. Emphasis added.
[92] Antonio, "Immanent Critique," 330.
[93] Antonio, "Immanent Critique," 332.

fray of politics or culture to identify the ideological and contradictory elements of the social totality.

Horkheimer declared in his opening address that the Institute should strive to integrate Hegelian dialectical method in both their understanding of empirical data and their critique of society. As Antonio argues, this method is characterized by an understanding that the "critical standards," far from being unchanging and absolute, "are ones given in the historical process."[94] Marx embraced this method to show the contradictions inherent in society—the disconnect between social reality and ideology—in their historical reality. As a historical materialist, Marx did not appeal to a metaphysical or super-historical standard to make his case. Instead he positioned societal contradictions as inherent in a given historical moment and postulated the liberating possibility of their resolution. An example of this is Marx's exploration of the historical development of private property, a symptom of the objectified existence of human beings. In the context of private property, a person who succeeds in producing and acquiring commodities only alienates themselves more. Someone's personal objectification "expresses the fact that the assertion of his life is the alienation of his life."[95] The contradictions of this existence are uniquely contained in this stage of history—the stage capitalism and wage-labor—as are the opportunities for agency and the possibilities for emancipation.

Critical Theory sought to extend this unmasking of contradictions into the modern world. The glaring contradictions that Marx identified in brutal industrial capitalism had become at the same time more covert and ubiquitous. With this fact, Critical Theorists acknowledged and interrogated the success of modern industry and mass culture to produce a more comfortable,

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[94] Antonio, "Immanent Critique," 332.

[95] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978), 87.

complex, and rationalized society. Yet this success had only instilled the system of domination deeper into the fabric of society. "At its most advanced stage," writes Marcuse, "domination functions as administration, and in the over developed areas of mass consumption, the administered life becomes the good life of the whole."[96] Marcuse here echoes Adorno and Horkhiemer who write, "in the unjust state of society, the powerlessness and pliability of the masses increases with the quantity of good allocated to them."[97] Drawing on concepts from Freud and Weber, the Frankfurt School explored the pathologies of repression, rationalization, and bureaucratization. They observed that reason, so exalted during the Enlightenment, had morphed into a tool of domination; not only domination of nature which was an explicit component of the Enlightenment project but also domination, in the name of freedom, of human beings. Adorno and Horkheimer declare that "the absurdity of the state of affairs in which the power of the system over human beings increases with every step they take away from the power of nature denounces the reason of the reasonable society as obsolete."[98] Horkheimer further explores the consequences of the obsolescence of reason in his *Eclipse of Reason*, which I will discuss later as it contains his most full-throated critique of Pragmatism.

A belief in the shift from a *rational* social organization—one that purported to be in alignment with truth and human nature—to a *rationalized* one—that was efficient, bureaucratized, and dehumanized—was critical for the Frankfurt school's extended project of broadly critiquing ideology. They came to understand the tendency of the modern social totality to perfectly *internally* justify its logic and yet does not (and indeed cannot) make claims to being

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[96] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 255.
[97] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), xvii.
[98] Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 31.

reasonable in itself. This tyranny of the internally coherent was exactly the kind of mental slavery that Critical Theory sought to expose to the searing light of critical reason. The Enlightenment rejected religion and myth as irrational, but in doing so had instantiated a new kind of irrationalism undermining and redefining the status of reason itself. According to Marcuse, in contrast to pre-modern forms of social control which plainly encouraged beliefs in the irrational, advanced industrial society has brought about a "*shift in the locus of mystification.*" With the historical development of new modes of production, "the rational rather than the irrational became the most effective vehicle of mystification."[99] Through the method of immanent critique, the Frankfurt School attempted to bring philosophy to bear on a social totality that had hijacked rational thinking itself. They believed that in unveiling contradictions they exposed opportunity for struggle, agency, and resistance.

At its core, Critical Theory sought to ground normative claims in history and critical reason. While this ground is in a sense relative because its criteria is based in history, it had recourse to a theoretical and non-ideological understanding based in social philosophy. In contrast to any kind of metaphysical absolutism, Critical Theory emphasized the relativity of theory because of the dynamic nature of history. The path to resolving social contradictions would mean different things in feudal Europe than it would in modern day Japan. Yet this view is also distinct from the anti-foundationalism of Pragmatism which sought to eliminate the need for theory altogether.

[99] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 189. Emphasis in original.

The Institute and Sidney Hook: Points of Contact and Preconceived Notions

While Horkheimer articulated a new direction of the Institute, its days at the University of Frankfurt were limited. However, before they were uprooted by the rise of the Nazi party, the Institute did publish essays in the vein of Horkheimer's new direction with contributors like Fredrich Pollock who wrote on the development and modern transformations of capitalism or Eric Fromm who worked with Horkheimer to begin integrating Freudian ideas with Marxist ones. During this time, in the early 1930s, Horkhiemer invited Herbert Marcuse, who had been studying under Heidegger in Freiburg to join the Institute. Around the same time, Horkheimer also developed a relationship with Theodor Adorno, who had established himself as an incisive music critic and philosopher on aesthetics. Although Adorno did not officially join the Institute until 1938, he soon became one of Horkheimer's closest collaborators.

When the Nazis seized power in January of 1933, the members of the Frankfurt School, many of whom were Jewish, fled to Switzerland. Having prepared for a departure, the Institute had established connections in Geneva and had moved most of their assets out of German banks. While they were productive in Geneva, continuing work on such topics as authority and the family, it was clear that it only be a temporary stay. Through the diplomacy of Horkheimer and Julian Gumperz, the Frankfurt School, was accepted as an offshoot of the sociology department at Columbia University. It would be in this context, as outsiders in exile, that Frankfurt School would continue to develop their own ideas and evaluate ones developed around them.

Over the course of their exile, the Frankfurt School encountered what they saw as a unique and at times troubling American culture and intellectual landscape. Their interaction with American Pragmatism was one such encounter that played out over the course of several years and ultimately saw no clear resolution. While they may have been familiar with the ideas of

Peirce, James, or Dewey prior to arriving in New York, their most direct exposure to Pragmatism came via Sidney Hook—a young New York intellectual, Marxist scholar, eager polemicist, and staunch acolyte of John Dewey and his brand of Pragmatism.

Born in Brooklyn in 1902, Sidney Hook was the fourth child of Jewish immigrants from central Europe.[100] From a young age he had a taste for debate, argument, and social justice. He antagonized his teachers at his Boys High School. He once got in trouble for supposedly refusing to sing the "The Star-Spangled Banner" during an assembly. As a teenager, Hook was drawn to socialism and political activism. He became interested in Marx as a student at the City College of New York. Shortly after, he began attending John Dewey's lectures while he was a graduate student at Columbia. While he had been unimpressed by his earlier readings of James's Pragmatism, Hook found in Dewey's instrumentalism a compelling synthesis of scientific inquiry and democracy. From the 1920's through the late 1930's, Hook came to formulate a unique understanding of Marxism that embraced the utility of science, the importance of action, and an intellectual touchstone in Dewey's Pragmatism. While the young Hook may have been more radical than Dewey in the sense that he embraced the necessity of revolution whereas Dewey was a committed reformist, Hook saw Dewey's uncompromising commitment to creative intelligence and democracy as radical in its own way and certainly was not a defense of the liberal status quo.[101] Hook saw in Pragmatism a philosophy of social action that complemented his Marxism.

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[100] The first chapter of Christopher Phelps's *Young Sidney Hook: Marxist and Pragmatist* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 16-51, was helpful in researching biographical information on Sidney Hook. Additionally, the third chapter of Wheatland's *Frankfurt School in Exile* titled "John Dewey's Pit Bull: Sidney Hook and the Confrontation between Pragmatism and Critical Theory," 97-139, has been immensely useful in researching for this entire chapter.

[101] Phelps, *Young Sidney Hook*, 56.

By the time he encountered the Critical Theorists, Hook had established himself in New York as an expert on Marxism and knowledgeable in the legacy of German thought. Over the course the 1920s and 30s, he published several articles on his understanding of German philosophy, Marx, the dialectic, and his impressions of German intellectual culture based on his time studying in Munich and Berlin in the late 1920s. It was his reputation as a Marxist scholar that brought him to the attention of the Frankfurt School. According to Wheatland, Hook was in fact one of Horkheimer's earliest correspondents in the United States with the two exchanging letters and publications in 1935.[102] As I noted in the introduction, there are notable points of contact that make the conflict between Pragmatism and Critical Theory seem less than obvious or inevitable than it may have been. Wheatland observes that their disagreements at first glance may seem like an instance of Freud's narcissism of small differences.[103] Before reckoning with the conflict between these German and American thinkers, it is important to examine the common ground upon which they both stood.

I characterize the similarities between Pragmatism and Critical Theory as being both intellectual and political. In terms of their political similarities both the Pragmatists of that time and the Critical Theorists were wrestling with the rise of totalitarianism and the reform of liberal capitalism. They were both similarly concerned with the obvious barbarism and curtailment of freedom perpetrated by the Nazis and other European fascists. At the same time, as the brutal realities of the Soviet regime came to light, both Hook and the Frankfurt school were grappling with their affinities for Marxist revolution. As mentioned above, for the Frankfurt school, as they had never been focused on political activism, this meant expanding their critique of industrial bourgeois society to include the highly administered society of the Soviet Union. For Hook, this

[102] Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 102.
[103] Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 104.

meant distancing himself from the American Communist party and eventually questioning his own revolutionary impulse.

Additionally, they both saw, though to varying degrees, the negative effects of unfettered capitalism in liberal democracies like the United States, and they argued that their respective theories promoted a more just and equitable society. Broadly construed both groups of thinkers were on the Left insofar as they both recognized the unfulfilled potential for abundance and human flourishing in industrial society and felt that a political reorientation towards justice and equality was both desirable and to an extent possible.

Their intellectual similarities were even more pronounced. Notably, they both drew influence from Hegel albeit to distinctly different degrees. Critical Theory sought to reclaim notions of agency and critical reason to inject life into Marx's determinism. They saw in dialectical theory, a compelling approach to social conflict and contradiction. The young Dewey, as discussed last chapter, and to a lesser extent the young Hook, saw in Hegel a personally compelling method for overcoming the tensions in history. They, like the Frankfurt School, were drawn to Hegel's emphasis on the social dimension of reason and the unifying and liberating sentiments underlying Hegel's logic.

Both schools, in different ways, highlighted praxis as integral if not superior in relation to theory. They saw their role as intellectuals as serving an active role in effecting social change. For the Pragmatists, that emphasis is fundamental: thoughts and theories can only be validated, can only be made true or false by action or experimentation. The realization of practical application is the only way ideas can have meaning. Progress, reform, and social change are achieved in the realm of action not speculation. For the Critical Theorists, their emphasis on praxis came through Marx and the dialectical relation of praxis and theory. Jay defines this

understanding of praxis well stating that in the Marxist sense "in fact, one of the earmarks of praxis as opposed to mere action was its being informed by theoretical considerations. The goal of revolutionary activity was understood as the unifying of theory and *praxis*, which would be in direct contrast to the situation prevailing under capitalism."[104] Furthermore, over time the Frankfurt School came to see their development of theory as itself a kind of praxis.[105]

As post-Enlightenment thinkers, they were critical of the Enlightenment project and yet unmistakably shaped by it. On the one hand, as critics of the Enlightenment, they both responded to the vacuum of meaning that had been left in the wake of the Enlightenment's efforts of disenchantment. They both sought to articulate new philosophies to make sense of a world that seemed more deterministic and less rational or spiritually charged than it had to rationalistic or scholastic thinkers of the past. For the Frankfurt School this meant incorporating principles from psychoanalysis to attempt to explore the sub-rational drives that underlie ideology. It also meant trying to challenge Marxian determinism and salvage the possibility of critique grounded in Hegelian reason. For the Pragmatists, modern rationalism had been a fool's errand. The quest for certainty was a lost cause and a new understanding of meaning and truth rooted in inquiry and common sense was required. Both sets of thinkers displayed an understanding of human beings as being integrally tied to a larger social environment and rejected notions of an isolated subject.

On the other hand, the Enlightenment's emphasis on scientific rigor and empirical methods surely informed both the Frankfurt School's integration of quantitative data and the Pragmatist's overarching emphasis on experimentation and scientific method. Along with elevating the value of scientific rigor, both were critical of what they perceived to be

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[104] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 4.
[105] Martin Jay, "The Frankfurt School in Exile," in *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 35.

irrationalism or metaphysical revivals. With that, both sets of thinkers both sought a middle road between subjectivism and materialism. They were similarly suspicious of both phenomenology and formalized logical positivism.[106] At the same time, both sets of thinkers were hostile to revivals of scholasticism and pre-modern modes of belief. Additionally, both groups shared the Enlightenment's belief in the importance of such concepts as freedom and equality. They saw their work as intellectuals directly relating to the creation of a more free and just society.

Along with their suspicions regarding both revelation and the Enlightenment's elevation of reason, both sets of thinkers developed a kind of fallibilistic meliorism which attempted to move past individual moral certainty while still leaving space for social improvement. With the foundation-shaking consequences of the American Civil War and later two world wars, both wanted to re-articulate the possibility of positive social change. Progress, while neither inevitable nor absolute, was possible. Peirce laid out this notion with the community of inquirers, who collectively and cooperatively discern truths about the world that in any individual case could be subject to future revision. James specifically articulated an understanding of meliorism that complimented his Pragmatism. Dewey and Hook drew on the melioristic ideas of Peirce and James to argue for the potential of democracy informed by creative intelligence to improve society without any certain notions about a utopian future or ideal of justice. Similarly, with their emphasis on historicism, the Frankfurt School understood the historical and, in a sense, relative nature of values. They saw that their critique, grounded in the dynamic process of history, would develop and change over time. Yet, this was not an endorsement of a radical historical relativism since it took values seriously while also applying critical reason to the contradictions present in a given historical moment. Ultimately both groups were concerned with how limited human beings

[106] Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 104.

can assert agency in the world. For the Frankfurt School this meant interrogating how agency was being dominated repressed by ideology. For Dewey and Hook this meant empowering human beings to achieve their communal potential by reorienting philosophy in an open-ended, experimental direction.

Despite these apparent similarities, Pragmatism and Critical Theory remained at odds over the former's emphasis on experimental method and the latter's emphasis on negative dialectics. To the Frankfurt School, particularly to Horkheimer himself, Pragmatism was a symptom of radical positivism and the logical consequence of the elevation of purely instrumental reason (although the latter critique would not fully emerge for several years). To Hook, the Frankfurt School's unwavering commitment to dialectical theory reeked of tendermindedness and absolutism in disguise.

The distinct degree of Hegel's influence is a good place to begin exploring the split between our American and German thinkers. While the young Dewey was drawn to Hegel albeit for the spirit rather than the letter of his system, by the time the Frankfurt School arrived in the U.S., he had little affinity left with Hegelian idealism. In his 1922 essay on "The Development of American Pragmatism," Dewey explicitly distinguished his instrumentalism from Neo-Hegelian idealism writing:

> According to the latter logic, thought constitutes in the last analysis its object and even the universe. It is necessary to affirm the existence of a series of forms of judgement, because our first judgements, which are nearest to sense, succeed in constituting objects in only a partial and fragmentary fashion, even to the extent of involving in their nature an element of contradiction. There results a dialectic which permits each inferior and partial type of judgement to pass into a more complete form until we finally arrive at the

> total judgement, where the thought which comprehends the entire object or the universe is an organic whole of interrelated mental distinctions. *It is evident that this theory magnifies the role of thought beyond all proportion*. … Instrumentalism, however, assigns a positive function to thought, that of *re*constituting the present stage of things instead of merely knowing it. As a consequence, there cannot be intrinsic degrees, or a hierarchy of forms of judgement. … A limited perceptual judgement, adapted to the situation which has given it birth, is as true in its place as is the most complete and significant philosophic of scientific judgement.[107]

Dewey's position on idealism perhaps indicates why Hook and Horkheimer did not see Hegel as a common ally. However, Dewey's quote points to an opportunity missed by both the Pragmatists and Critical Theorists. While Dewey's criticism may have held for Hegel, it was not necessarily true of the Frankfurt School. They too were skeptical of the "total judgement" that Dewey disliked in Hegel. It is unfortunate that these nuances over the dialectic never materialized in conversation between Dewey or Hook and the Frankfurt School. Regrettably, by the time the Institute arrived, Dewey had retired from teaching and was likely not directly privy to their work. Despite this missed opportunity, Dewey's words also reveal a real tension between his version of Pragmatism and Critical Theory. He clearly showed distaste for over-emphasizing theory at the expense of scientific judgement.

Additionally, William James and later Sidney Hook were even less sympathetic toward Hegel than Dewey had been. James devotes several chapters of *A Pluralistic Universe* to ridicule the rigidity and absolutism that he saw in Hegel's idealism. He did not perceive the same emotional appeal, the room for growth, change, and life that Dewey had. For James, German

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[107] John Dewey, "The Development of American Pragmatism," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 54-55.

Idealism was antithetical to Pragmatism. While he did not live to encounter the Frankfurt School, I think it is safe to assume his belief would have held for them as well. Similarly, Sidney Hook, while he encountered many interesting ideas while studying in Germany, was not taken fully with German intellectual culture or the legacy of Hegelian idealism. To one degree or another, his early impressions of German philosophy prefigured his ultimate (and perhaps unfair) conclusions about the Frankfurt School.

In a 1930 essay for the *Journal of Philosophy*, Hook recounts his thoughts on the philosophical scene in Germany. He remarks on the privileged position that philosophy enjoys in the German university. Every student, regardless of discipline, is "made to look to philosophy for the cultural status and ultimate meaning of his professional activity."[108] According to Hook, while the most significant intellectual advancements in Germany have been made in the natural sciences, there is still demand that philosophy interrogate, legitimize (or de-legitimize), and subsume that science. Whereas "the scientist's truths are only tentative, the truths of the philosopher of science, deduced from the idea of what science should be, are final and absolute."[109] He notes that often philosophers look down upon the tentative, particular, and ultimately unimportant truths with which science concerns itself. Furthermore, Hook found this hierarchy of thought to be elitist and fundamentally conservative. In general, German philosophers, says Hook, constitute "one great idealistic family" and they do not care to engage in discourse outside the parameters of their ideological patrimony. Supposedly new ideas do not "attempt to sweep the board clean with fresh criticism" but are more concerned with adapting the great ideas of the past to the present moment.[110]

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[108] Sidney Hook, "A Personal Impression of Contemporary German Philosophy," *Journal of Philosophy* 27, no. 6 (March 13, 1930): 141-160, 143.
[109] Hook, "Contemporary German Philosophy," 143.
[110] Hook, "Contemporary German Philosophy," 144.

Over the course of the 1930's Hook, as he distanced himself from Communism politically, also turned away from dialectical theory altogether. Although he had reservations regarding of German idealism as a whole, in his early writings he displayed great interest in the meaning and application of the dialectic.[111] The young Hook was drawn to certain aspects of Marx and his emphasis on praxis. As a Pragmatist, emphasizing the primacy of action over theory was of primary concern for Hook. From the 1920's through the mid 1930's, Hook articulated a side of Marx and the dialectic less focused on immanent critique and more so on activity and social engagement.[112] Over time however, Hook became less and less confident in the coherence or utility of dialectical theory. Over the course of the 1930s, Hook came to completely exchange the dialectic for Dewey's instrumentalism. By the time he met with Max Horkheimer and other members of the Frankfurt School in 1936 and 1937, Hook had almost completely made this transition. Such a turn on the need for theory, surely informed how he and the Frankfurt School mutually viewed each other.

Horkheimer's Understanding and Early Critique of Pragmatism

Horkheimer's first criticism of Pragmatism, prior to his meeting Sidney Hook, is found in his article "Notes on Science and the Crisis" published in 1932. In it, Horkheimer characterizes Pragmatism as a symptom of larger crisis in science namely its integration into the means of production and its justification of the bourgeois status quo. Science had limited itself to the observation of phenomena, "to being and not becoming."[113] While clearly participating in the

[111] For examples, see Sidney Hook, "What is Dialectic? II," in *Journal of Philosophy* 26, no. 5 (February 28, 1929): 113-123; and Sidney Hook, "The Marxian Dialectic," in *New Republic* 74, no. 955 (March 22, 1933): 150-154.
[112] Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 107.
[113] Max Horkheimer, "Notes on Science and the Crisis," trans. Mathew J. O'Connell, in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, 5.

making of social reality, science lacks the tools to postulate an alternative. In fact, Horkheimer says, "science as a social function reflects at present the contradictions with society."[114] Horkheimer asserts that a "correct theory" of the present situation is needed to understand the crisis in science. Pragmatism, as Horkheimer understands it, is symptomatic of the larger crisis in science and thus is in no position to critique it. Horkheimer states:

> The fact that science contributes to the social life-process as a productive power and a means production in no way legitimates a pragmatist theory of knowledge. The fruitfulness of knowledge indeed plays a role in its claim to truth, but the fruitfulness in question is to be understood as intrinsic to the science and not as usefulness for ulterior purposes. The test of the truth of a judgement is something different from the test of its importance for human life. It is not for social interests to decide what is or is not true; the criteria for truth have developed, rather, in connection with progress at the theoretical level.[115]

While this first critique may have been underdeveloped as Horkheimer's understanding of Pragmatism was limited to a certain reading of James's theory of truth, it foreshadows objections that Horkheimer would develop later. In "Notes on Science," Horkheimer expresses what would come to be his primary objection to Hook and Dewey namely that scientific inquiry establishes no normative grounds to evaluate and thus improve the social situation of human beings.

Three years later, in an essay titled "On the Problem of Truth," Horkheimer further articulates his understanding of Pragmatism which he describes as a school of philosophy postulating that the truth of an idea "is decided by what one accomplishes with it."[116] Recent

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[114] Horkheimer, "Notes on Science," 9.
[115] Horkheimer, "Notes on Science," 3.
[116] Max Horkheimer, "On the Problem of Truth," in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, 195.

developments in Pragmatism, he says, place the "principle emphasis…on the promotion of human activity, liberation from all sorts of internal restraints, and the growth of personality and social life."[117] While these may be noble goals, Pragmatism lacks any critical or negative edge to determine the real obstacles to such ends or any theoretical criteria to articulate what those ends actually are. Thus, Horkheimer states:

> The pragmatic concept of truth in its exclusive form, without any contradictory metaphysics to supplement it, corresponds to limitless trust in the existing world. If the goodness of every idea is given time and opportunity to come to light, if the success of the truth—even if after struggle and resistance—is in the long run certain, if the idea of a dangerous, explosive truth cannot come into the field of vision, then the present social structure is consecrated and—to the extent that it warns of harm—capable of unlimited development.[118]

Any pragmatic theory of truth that lacks a particular theory of society—which pure Pragmatism by definition does—has no negative power and is unable to define its terms. Without such a theory, words like promotion, life, improvement etc "remain vague and indefinite."[119]

These early critiques of Pragmatism were informed mostly by Horkheimer's impressions of William James and his version of Pragmatism which emphasized the relationship between utility and truth. While Horkheimer's concerns over James's ideas may have been legitimate, it is safe to say that his exposure to Pragmatism was incomplete prior to coming to the United States. Indeed, Dewey's Pragmatism consciously went beyond the notion of utility to formulate a theory that was in its own way more radical and critical than Horkheimer would acknowledge. Later on

[117] Horkheimer, "Problem of Truth," 195.
[118] Horkheimer, "Problem of Truth," 196.
[119] Horkheimer, "Problem of Truth," 197.

in the 1930s, as Horkheimer and other members of the Frankfurt School became more acquainted with Pragmatism particularly Dewey's Pragmatism via Sidney Hook, they broadened their critique. Intellectually, the Frankfurt School thinkers were working to position themselves in opposition to, not only Pragmatism, but Logical Positivism, metaphysical revivals, and strains of irrationalism as well. This came at a time when the Frankfurt School was attempting to mount a more comprehensive critique of Nazism, state capitalism, and totalitarianism. Pragmatism, earlier thought of by Horkheimer as merely symptomatic of a larger crisis in science, came to be a major target in his broad assessment of what he called instrumental rationality. As Wheatland writes, for the Critical Theorists, "the critiques of Positivism and Pragmatism grew to become entwined with the theoretical formulation of a new social totality. Instrumental rationality grew to become a transhistorical critique of modernity that functioned as the ideology of state capitalism."[120]

It is likely that Horkheimer gleaned a different understanding of Pragmatism through a pair of meetings that the Institute hosted and to which they invited Sidney Hook along with others including Positivist, Otto Neurath. Although unfortunately the transcripts of these meetings, the first in 1936 and the second in 1937, have not survived, we can infer that Sidney Hook's understanding of Dewey's ideas and his own regarding science and the dialectic was discussed. At this point in his career, Hook had almost completely dismissed the necessity or utility of dialectical methods in favor of experimental methods modeled on the natural sciences. In his article, "Dialectic and Nature," published in the spring of 1937 and a topic of discussion during his meeting with the Frankfurt School, Hook challenged the notion that dialectical theory could offer any insights that scientific methods could not. To do this Hook, analyzes the various

[120] Wheatland, "Frankfurt School in Exile," 115.

meanings of dialectical logic, specifically in Engels' thought, and proceeds to show how they are either contradictory or insufficiently defined. He concludes that, at best, the dialectic "is an abbreviated synonym for scientific method."[121] He argued that while dialectical theory posited an unfounded concept of totality, science actually had the tools to interrogate legitimate hypotheses about the relatedness of certain things in the world.[122] In his meetings with the Frankfurt School, Hook probably elaborated upon his naturalistic Pragmatism and defended his deemphasis on the dialectic. Coming away from these meetings, the nature of Hook and Dewey's Pragmatism and experimental logic, would have become clearer to Horkhiemer and his colleagues.

After their meeting, Horkhiemer published two essays, "The Latest Attack on Metaphysics" and "Traditional and Critical Theory" both published in 1937, wherein he criticized positivism and defended a critical theory informed by dialectical logic. While these works focused more on attacking positivism more broadly and less on Pragmatism specifically, they were precursors to Horkheimer's critique of instrumental reason which would target both Pragmatism and positivism. Importantly, in these essays, Horkhiemer argues that science absent theory is incapable of self-reflection or self-evaluation. He claims that for the radical empiricist there is "no mode of thought adapted to the methods and results of science and entwined with definite interests which may criticize the conceptual forms and structural pattern of science."[123] Thus the "structure of knowledge and consequently reality…is as rigid for him [the empiricist] as it is for any dogmatist."[124] Positivism, in its attempt to banish metaphysics, becomes just as dogmatic—and in a way metaphysical—and loses any ability it might have to critique society. It is impossible, Horkhiemer thinks, for scientific optimists to evaluate not to mention prove any

[121] Sidney Hook, "Dialectic and Nature," *Marxian Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1937): 253-284, 281.
[122] Wheatland, "Frankfurt School in Exile," 120.
[123] Max Horkheimer, "Latest Attack on Metaphysics," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, 145.
[124] Horkheimer, "Latest Attack," 146.

link between scientific progress and real human emancipation. Unlike Dewey who staunchly defended (renascent) liberalism and its capacity to use scientific method to re-form society in spite of the obvious challenges, Horkheimer attributes the "naïve harmonistic belief" underlying "the ideal conception of the unity of science and…the entire system of modern empiricism" to the "passing world of liberalism."[125] In contrast to the optimism of liberalism and the supposed objectivity—though actual blindness—of scientific method, dialectical theory "apprehends reality in conscious connection with a definite historical activity."[126] The goal of dialectical theory is to understand the role of history and circumstance in the development of science to understand it in a deeper way unavailable to scientific method alone. Horkhiemer gives the example of the Copernican Revolution which cannot be understood purely through the principles of science. The Copernican system did not win out over the Ptolemaic one simply because of observation and correct scientific logic but rather because of dynamic historical circumstance. Likewise, the present connections between science, industry, and social-life are largely impenetrable absent an historical-theoretical lens like the one given in dialectical theory.[127]

While these essays were not leveled directly against Pragmatism or with Pragmatism solely in mind, they do mark a significant progression in Horkheimer's encounter with pragmatic ideas. Through this encounter, the Frankfurt school was forced to clarify their understanding of the dialectic and why their critical theory offered something qualitatively different than traditional scientific theory. In was during this period that Horkhiemer began to formulate his argument that, in Wheatland's words, "both Positivism and Pragmatism revived metaphysics." Horkhiemer began to confront squarely what he saw as "the unproven correlation that Positivists

[125] Horkheimer, "Latest Attack," 147.
[126] Horkheimer, "Latest Attack," 182.
[127] Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," trans. Mathew J. O'Connell, in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, 195-196.

and Pragmatists saw between scientific progress and the emergence of a more just and improved society."[128]

Marcuse's Critique

In 1941, several years after Hook's in-person meeting with the Frankfurt school, Herbert Marcuse further developed a critical response to Pragmatism in a review of John Dewey's *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, a thick text in which Dewey articulated his experimental logic and expanded on themes he developed earlier in works such as "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy." While Marcuse tried to give a more accurate and nuanced account of Pragmatism distinguishing it from positivism, he remained true to Horkheimer's belief that Pragmatism, like positivism, cannot offer a satisfactory theory of social practice because it lacks a critical capacity.

In his review, Marcuse examines the kind of logic that Dewey puts forward. Prefiguring points Horkheimer would highlight in his *Eclipse of Reason*, Marcuse notes that in Dewey's logic, logical forms arise and change through the process of inquiry itself. In Marcuse's appraisal, "there are no unchangeable, universally valid and fundamental propositions or categories; the rationality of logic is exclusively a concern of the relationship of means and consequences."[129] He observes that Dewey's logic is progressive insofar as it changes and with the progress of research. He sees that Dewey's is a naturalistic theory in the sense that human scientific behavior participates in the biological process of adapting means to ends. Simultaneously it is a social theory as scientific research is "conditioned by the total 'culture' of

[128] Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 122.
[129] Herbert Marcuse, review of *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, by John Dewey, trans. Philip Deen, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 46, no. 2 (2011): 258-265, 259.

a time."[130] The subject of research is never an isolated I—a point that Critical Theory would concede—and instead a living subject constantly interacting with its environment.

Furthermore, Marcuse identifies a pragmatic theory of truth at the heart of Dewey's logic. He sees that for Dewey, "truth and falsity are not qualities of propositions," and as propositions are only means to the end of reaching a judgement, they are instead only useful or useless. Indeed, Marcuse says, "truth is not the regulative principle of this logic."[131] Given this basic position of Dewey's logic, Marcuse sees theory reduced to "mere method." In his concern for praxis, Dewey goes so far as to show "that theory does not genuinely do anything other than what everyday praxis—only unmethodically—does as well." It is this point more than anything that Marcuse, echoing Horkhiemer, cannot abide:

> Such hasty unification of theory and praxis must deliver theory in the whole over to a theory-less praxis. Theory is in truth more than methodological doctrine for scientific research. It always transcends the given praxis of what can be—can be not according to the ruling of research alone, but to Reason, Freedom, Right, and similar 'metaphysical' authorities. Theory's fate depends on not covering up the chasm between 'empirical values' and Reason, between thought and reality, but on maintaining it and unrepeatably opening it wide until it is closed by a praxis escorted by unmutilated theory. Then alone would it be possible to no longer see a gulf between the highest flights of theory the control of everyday praxis.[132]

Marcuse does concede that Dewey treats "social goals" and normative questions seriously regarding them as hypothesis that must be verified.[133] Marcuse rightly observes that this

[130] Marcuse, review of Dewey's *Logic*," 260.
[131] Marcuse, review of Dewey's *Logic*," 262.
[132] Marcuse, review of Dewey's *Logic*," 263.
[133] Marcuse, review of Dewey's *Logic*," 264.

significantly distinguishes Dewey from the logical positivists, but this quality is far from redemptive. Unequivocally, Marcuse does not share the same optimism about the eventual verification of the right social goals. "History," he says, "has long shown that the verifiability of a hypothesis is not as important as its directive power." Dewey's logic, concludes Marcuse, "remains (in its decisive moment) idealistic" in a way that removes its critical and negative edge.[134] This conclusion reveals the fundamental intellectual split between Marcuse and Dewey. As Philip Dean, who translated Marcuse's review, puts it, "Marcuse's review of Dewey's *Logic* then takes us deep into the basic commitments of each thinker. Fundamentally, Marcuse and Dewey divide on the issue of whether science can reflect on its own orientation. If not, science embodies an uncritical application of technological efficiency to the dominant cultural ends."[135] Like Horkhiemer, Marcuse sees the lack of a historicizing theoretical foundation in Dewey's theory to be an ultimately fatal flaw. Dewey's theory of inquiry in the end remains impotent in the face of the current social reality.

New Failure of Nerve and Anti-Naturalism in Extremis

Partially in response to the Frankfurt School's critiques and partially to launch criticism of their own, Hook and Dewey articulated and defended their philosophical positions. For the sake of brevity, I will only discuss a few of them here to illustrate how they made their defense. Seeing as there was no clear resolution between Pragmatism and Critical Theory after Hook's 1937 visit with the Institute, it was only a matter of time before the Pragmatists struck back at their critics.

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[134] Marcuse, review of Dewey's *Logic*," 264.
[135] Philip Deen, "Dialectical vs. Experimental Methods: Marcuse's Review of Dewey's *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 46, no. 2 (2011): 242-257, 259.

Not long after Marcuse's review of Dewey's *Logic*, Hook wrote a review, published in the *New Republic*, of Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*. This review, while somewhat telegraphic and polemical, is telling because it reveals just how unconvinced Hook was by the Critical Theorists and how far he had come in terms of disavowing the dialectic in favor of more pragmatic approaches. In his review, Hook portrays Marcuse's book as essentially an apologetic for Hegel insofar as he selectively interprets Hegel to seem like a progressive liberal. Hook derides Marcuse's claim that the historic refusal to adopt some form of Hegel's idealistic elevation of reason is "either accommodation to the status quo or mere reformism."[136] Hook finds such a claim to be both vague and inaccurate showing that "he [Marcuse] does not come within hailing distance of understanding positivism." Hook argues that positivism does not simply accept the facts of the status quo as they are given and instead seeks to understand "by scientific, not dialectical, methods" what the facts really are. Ultimately Hooks sees a great irony in Marcuse's criticism of positivism and claims that in fact idealism's "use of the ambiguous term Reason makes it easy to sanctify the status quo." Far from defending the Enlightenment ideal of critical reason, Hook claims, Hegel reinterpreted it to mean "historical survival." Likewise, Freedom, is reinterpreted to mean "subordination to authority."[137] At this point in his career, Hook clearly had no patience left for romantic notions about the liberating potentials to be found in dialectical theory, and, quite to the contrary, viewed it with hostile suspicion.

In a longer essay titled *The New Failure of Nerve* published in 1943, Hook further articulates his defense of scientific method and his criticism of the tendermindedness and

[136] Sidney Hook, review of *Reason and Revolution*, by Herbert Marcuse, *New Republic*, vol. 105 (July 21, 1941): 90-91, 91.
[137] Hook, review of *Reason and Revolution*, 91.

absolutism that rejects it. In his essay, Hook compares present cultural tendencies with what Gilbert Murray called the "failure of nerve" that overtook the classical world around 300 BC. In this period, Murray identifies a decline of hope and confidence in human efforts and a resultant rise in mysticism and desire for divine revelation. Hook draws comparison between that period and his own claiming that a new failure of nerve has spurred a revitalized fear of uncertainty, a new desire for absolute authority, and an abdication of personal responsibility and self-confidence. While politically, Hook sees this trend most evidently in the widespread authoritarian challenge to liberalism, he witnesses the failure of nerve across the western world. He decries the "refurbishing of theological and metaphysical dogmas" concerned more with the mysterious than the verifiable; a "frenzied search" for the bedrock of values; "a veritable campaign to 'prove' that without a belief in God and immortality, democracy—or even plain moral decency—cannot be reasonably justified."[138] Hook sets out to show that these revivals, far from bringing back something valuable that has been lost, threaten to undermine the very basis of creative intelligence and social advancement.

Hook sees the failure of nerve evident in a loss of confidence in the scientific method. He calls out those who "invoke the claims of some rival method to give us knowledge of what is beyond the competence of scientific method."[139] It seems hard to believe that Hook did not have Critical Theory at least partially in mind when he wrote those words. While these tenderminded threats to science may seem innocuous, Hook argues that they are "gateways to intellectual and moral irresponsibility." Echoing Dewey's claim that the present chaos is more attributable to a dearth of scientific temperament than an excess, Hook argues that it is anti-scientific dogmatism

[138] Sidney Hook, "The New Failure of Nerve," in *The Quest for Being* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1963), 74.
[139] Hook, "New Failure of Nerve," 75.

that more readily justifies "violent prejudice" against non-believers.[140] It behooves those in power, Hook says, to undermine the openly verified process of science in favor of the "relative validity" of emotional appeals and other non-scientific methods.[141] He finds assumption that science is responsible for Hitlerism to "border on fantasy."[142] He argues that no truly scientific response to social ills uncorrupted by social interests could lead to totalitarianism.

Dewey reinforced Hook's defense of scientific method in his essay "Anti-Naturalism in Extremis" published in the same year. Like Hook in his essay, Dewey's main focus are the theological attacks against science, but he does spend a moment to criticize "non-theological anti-naturalists" as well. The thinkers of the Frankfurt School would likely fall in this category. According to Dewey, while this brand of anti-naturalism is likely to deny that they share "that quality of fanaticism" with the religious anti-naturalists, it is no less dogmatic or hostile to scientific method. However much this brand may deny its roots in religious belief, "it is an essential part of their doctrine that above the inquiring, patient, every-learning and tentative method of science there exists some organ or faculty which reveals ultimate and immutable truths, and that apart from the truths thus obtained there is no sure foundation for morals and for a humane order of society."[143] Dewey argues that this kind of secular anti-naturalism is contradictory and self-deluding. It's adherents, says Dewey, behave as if the standards and ideals of a humane social order were all agreed upon. Yet were they to see that this is surely not the case, they would be better off grounding their claims in divine authority. For Dewey, there is not an acceptable middle ground between religious dogmatism and inquiry. Either, one posits the

[140] Hook, "New Failure of Nerve," 76.
[141] Hook, "New Failure of Nerve," 77.
[142] Hook, "New Failure of Nerve," 80.
[143] John Dewey, "Anti Naturalism in Extremis," in *The Later Works: 1925-1953,* ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 15, *1942-1948* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 58.

existence of a non-material order to ground values, or one accepts the power of intelligence and scientific method to form, test, and re-form values.

From the perspective of the Pragmatists, any non-scientific method of inquiry, dialectical or otherwise, is less effective than science itself. Rather than upholding the status quo, it is scientific inquiry that best challenges patterns of belief and works to promote tolerance, humility, and progress. Often, as both Hook and Dewey argue, belief in knowledge and inquiry beyond science opens the door for fanaticism, persecution, and totalitarianism. Belief in such inquiry is tenderminded and unnecessary at best and downright dangerous at worst. These essays—particularly Hook's—reveal the degree to which Horkheimer and the Pragmatist were defining science differently. Without a common set of definitions of science, technology, and inquiry, a certain degree of misunderstanding was inevitable.

Eclipse of Reason

Although Hook's "New Failure of Nerve" and Dewey's "Anti-Naturalism in Extremis" were not exclusively or even directly leveled against the Frankfurt School, Horkhiemer clearly took their words as antithetical and hostile to the Institute's project of immanent critique informed by social philosophy. In a series of lectures delivered in English in 1944 and published as his *Eclipse of Reason* in 1947, Horkhiemer gives his final word on Pragmatism characterizing its relation to what he describes as the cultural crisis stemming from the rise of formalized instrumental reason. To level his critique, Horkhiemer begins with the observation that the definition of reason has changed in recent times. The current definition of reason, what Horkheimer calls subjective or formalized reason, is primarily concerned with "means and ends, with the adequacy of procedures that are more or less taken for granted and supposedly self-

explanatory."[144] The adjective reasonable then simply refers to the degree to which means fit already given ends. Subjective reason, according to Horkhiemer, sees little merit in questioning "whether the purposes as such are reasonable."[145] The notion that ends are reasonable or unreasonable in themselves is not present within this understanding of reason.

Horkhiemer contrasts this understanding with the view of reason that had dominated western thought for centuries. This traditional view of reason that Horkheimer brands objective reason, asserted that reason was "a force not only in the individual mind but also in the objective world—in relations among human beings and social classes…and in nature and its manifestations." This view postulated a rational order or hierarchy within the world, and the reasonableness of an idea or action is determined by its correspondence with this "totality." Subjective reason, while not excluded from this understanding, was regarded as "only a partial, limited expression of a universal rationality."[146] The Enlightenment, writes Horkhiemer echoing claims made in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, though not always intentionally, broke down this concept of reason. In their attempt to shed reason of its authoritarian and superstitious elements, Enlightenment thinkers sent reason down a path of subjectification. While they sought to free reason from religion, "what they killed was not the church but metaphysics and the objective concept of reason itself, the source of power of their own efforts."[147] Disenchantment could not be paused arbitrarily at natural reason but instead left it behind as another metaphysical remnant of a superstitious past. This development has set civilization on a trajectory towards domination, a core concern for Critical Theory, and nihilism, a fact that Nietzsche perhaps most clearly observed.

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[144] Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 3.
[145] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 3.
[146] Horkheimer, Eclipse, 4.
[147] Horkheimer, Eclipse, 18.

In a world of formalized reason, Horkhiemer argues, there is no standard of social good beyond efficiency and utility, standards that simultaneously give rise to and are reinforced by the modern industrial apparatus. The shift to a world of purely "means rather than ends, is itself the consequence of the historical development of the methods of production."[148] Any cultural or artistic activity that may have once called forth critical reflection, has become a "cultural commodity" in a process of "reification."[149] Ideals of democracy and majority rule are good not because of their rationality but because of their usefulness which is entirely contingent on material circumstances subject to control and change. In short, democracy has no theoretical recourse to object to dictatorship or any other form of social domination. Rationally organized irrationality, the fullest expression of which is Nazism but which is present throughout industrial societies, is sanctioned in a world of subjective reason.[150] The human craving for authority was not dispelled only changed with the rejection of religion and later of objective reason. Horkhiemer sees Hitler's successful appeal to unconscious and religious urges as indicative of the decline of objective reason and the way Enlightenment dialectically reappears in a new mythological form.[151] The present situation of course calls for answers, for meaning, and for understanding.

Horkhiemer identifies two conflicting but similarly flawed responses to the expulsion of objective reason in favor of subjective reason. The first response, also ridiculed by Hook and Dewey, is the attempt, exemplified in neo-Thomism, to revive past metaphysical systems and standards of objective truth. Horkhiemer agrees with the positivist attack on "artificial revivals" of "authoritarian systems of thought that under modern conditions prove infinitely more naïve,

[148] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 102.
[149] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 40.
[150] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 121.
[151] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 120.

artificial, and untruthful than they were originally."[152] Unlike Hook, who portrayed such revivals as mere tendermindedness (though dangerous nevertheless), Horkhiemer sees the justifications for bringing back old systems as in reality complying with the world of subjective reason. The neo-Thomists offer their metaphysics as tools to preserve the foundation of values that are under threat. They offer a pragmatic justification for objectivity which Horkheimer believes is untenable:

> The philosophies of the absolute are offered as an excellent instrument to save us from the chaos. Sharing the fate of all the doctrines, good or bad, that pass the test of present-day social mechanisms of selection, objectivistic philosophies become standardized for specific uses. Philosophical ideas serve the needs of religious or enlightened, progressive or conservative groups. The absolute becomes itself a means, objective reason a scheme for subjective purposes, general as they may be.[153]

Rather than posing a real alternative, absolutist revivals uncritically operate within the established ideology of subjective reason. Horkhiemer agrees with Hook and Dewey that as a tool of practical means, theoretical dogmatism can be used to fit whatever political ends, democratic or authoritarian, that the powers that be desire.

According to Horkhiemer, Pragmatism and positivism, unlike neo-Thomism, openly embrace the current instrumental nature of reason arguing that the chaos identified by the neo-Thomists is actually the result of a metaphysical hangover in the supposedly scientific age. However, like Marcuse in his review of Dewey, Horkhiemer maintains that science being inextricably linked to the social process is unable to evaluate the ends to which it is put. He says:

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[152] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 61.
[153] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 62.

> The positivists seem to forget that natural science as they conceive it is above all an auxiliary means of production, one element among many in the social process. Hence, it is impossible to determine *a priori* what role science plays in the actual advancement or retrogression of society. Its effect in this respect is as positive or negative as is the function it assumes in the general trend of the economic process.[154]

While they may vocally reject dogmatism, the Pragmatists proselytize an equally dogmatic faith the community of inquirers and the process of experimentation to bring about positive social change. "To read Hook," Horkhiemer says, "one would never imagine that such enemies of mankind as Hitler have actually any great confidence in scientific methods." According to Horkheimer, Hook naively ignores the historical fact that "like any existing creed, science can be used to serve the most diabolical social forces, and scientism is no less narrow-minded than militant religion."[155] Ultimately, scientific inquiry and common sense must fall back on presuppositions and self-evident principles if it is to make claims about social betterment.

While they may deploy analogy between the ideal democratic process and collective community of inquirers, such connections are more rhetorical than actual. Although Horkheimer of course believes in the value and utility of the experimental procedures, he maintains that Hook and his allies "seem to confuse such procedures with truth itself" adding that "by denying an autonomous philosophy and a philosophical concept of truth, positivism hands science over to the hazards of historical development."[156] Reiterating his belief expressed over a decade earlier in his opening address at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Horkhiemer holds firm in his belief that only philosophy can offer science a non-dogmatic intellectual justification.

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[154] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 59.
[155] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 71.
[156] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 73.

Without philosophy, Pragmatism, for all its pretentions to optimism and progressivism via creative intelligence, ultimately remains pessimistic and is forced to concede any criteria that could "lead to a better reality."[157]

As an alternative to these two "conflicting panaceas," Horkheimer provides a defense—one of his last during his exile in America—of a critical social philosophy, one that refuses either to embrace subjective reason or artificially revive objective reason. Any attempt at an inert definition of philosophy in this sense, Horkheimer says, would be to misunderstand it, and thus he instead focuses on the uniquely liberating role philosophy must play if domination and the hegemony of subjective reason are to be overcome or at least understood. "Philosophy," says Horkhiemer, "is neither a tool nor a blueprint."[158] The situation today, he says, is marked by the existence of still unrealized potentialities for freedom and uninhibited thought. What is still needed are "men who understand that they themselves are the subjects or the functionaries of their own oppression."[159]

This understanding can only be reached through an examination of the dialectical tensions—nature and spirt, subject and object—playing out in the world. Regarding the two kinds of reason, subjective and objective, Horkheimer explains that "the task of philosophy is not stubbornly to play one against the other, but to foster a mutual critique and thus, if possible, to prepare in the intellectual realm the reconciliation of the two in reality."[160] Given the hegemony of subjective reason, philosophy should proceed with an emphasis on objective reason. However, the ultimate goal should be an understanding of "both the separateness and the interrelatedness of

[157] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 83.
[158] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 164-165.
[159] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 163.
[160] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 174.

the two."[161] While the two kinds of reason are apparently hostile to one another, they are in fact mutually invaluable. A critical philosophy, neither acquiescing to subjective reason nor attempting to turn back time to a dogmatic objective reason, understands that "only a definition of the objective goals of society that includes the purposes of self-preservation of the subject, the respect for individual life, deserves to be called objective."[162]

The failure to recognize these dialectical tensions, says Horkheimer, is at the root of the disease affecting reason, a disease that predated the Enlightenment, a disease "born from man's urge to dominate nature."[163] The task now involves probing the historical depths of reason, of the domination of both human beings and nature, to level a true "self-critique" of reason with the presupposition that even "at this stage of complete alienation the idea of truth is still possible."[164] The challenge for philosophy is, in a way that cuts across the social reality, to "knit all our knowledge and insight into a linguistic structure in which things are called by their right names."[165] With regards to ideals like justice, freedom, and equality, presently veiled though they may be, philosophy must take a "dual attitude" to articulate their true significance.[166] First, philosophy must negate any pretentions to universal truth and expose the historical relativity of so-called eternal principles. Second, it must take real cultural values seriously and "measure them against the social background from which they emanate" negating the void between ideas and reality. Horkheimer claims that this double negation gives this philosophy its positive

[161] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 175.
[162] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 175.
[163] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 176.
[164] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 177.
[165] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 179.
[166] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 182.

character which is neither skeptical nor absolutist. It postulates a theoretical whole which "takes existing values seriously" but also "reveals their relativity."[167] Something of value is salvaged.

Ultimately, Horkheimer's last word on Pragmatism echoed his early commitment to critical reason and showed that his early impressions of Pragmatism never entirely dissipated. While it is unlikely that this series of lectures was meant to convince Hook or other Pragmatist sympathizers of their error, it does lay bare the intellectual ground on which Horkheimer would not budge. Far from conclusive, *The Eclipse of Reason* indicates just how little was resolved, how little common ground was identified between Critical Theory and Pragmatism.

Conclusion

Like the Pragmatists, Horkheimer displayed a certain faith in human beings to improve their lot without the promise of a utopia and without unchanging principles to guide the way. For Horkheimer, philosophy—far from providing all the answers—serves as "mankind's memory and conscience."[168] Its insights do not relieve human beings of their burden but render them freer to carry it. Unlike the Pragmatists, Horkheimer's immanent critique of the present state of reason calls first for reflection not action, theory not experimentation. However, this is not to say that Horkheimer was trying to articulate some abstract philosophy. His goal all along was to develop concepts that might help wrestle with the challenges of living. Unfortunately, Horkheimer's emphasis on negation seemed entirely alien to Dewey's faith in creative intelligence revealing what I see as their fundamental difference. Despite all of their similarities, this split over the necessity of a philosophy that articulates contradictions in a dialectical way appeared to be an insurmountable barrier particularly to Hook and Horkheimer. Since both the Pragmatists and the

[167] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 183.
[168] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 186.

Critical Theorists emphasized method, the fact that they may have shared similar diagnosis of the political and intellectual situation and agreed essentially on the ends of political action was ultimately subordinated to their differences regarding to role of reflection and philosophy in informing action.

Although there were certainly major philosophical differences, there were also missed opportunities. While Horkheimer and Hook may have disagreed on the respective merits of negative dialectics and experimentation, this can be seen as a difference in focus rather than an absolute incompatibility. It is unfortunate that Dewey was not more engaged in the encounter. Perhaps if he had been, he would have seen that his project with the school was in a way similar to the project of an Institute for Social Research. They both sought to reclaim agency and intelligence in a world that limited critical thinking and creative action. The question then, which I turn to in the next chapter, is how do we account for this missed opportunity? What if anything can history offer us to explain this brief but fraught encounter between these American and German thinkers?

Chapter 3

The Worlds that Form Us?

How can we account for the differences that separated the Pragmatists and the Critical Theorists? The commonalities and missed opportunities between the different schools became more apparent to later thinkers. However, the moment of disagreement which I examined last chapter saw no effective resolution. Thinking back on his encounter with the Frankfurt School decades later, Sidney Hook's mind was little changed: "When requested to give a specific illustration of some truth discovered by Reason or the dialectic which was beyond the reach of scientific method…, they [the Frankfurt School] were unable to do so. Instead they delivered themselves of a criticism…of positivism."[169] Hook's opinion of their critique of positivism was also the same recalling that "the Frankfurt School's characterization of positivism and pragmatism is a caricature."[170] As a result, Hook's conclusion remained unequivocal: "I conclude that although not everything the Frankfurt School stands for is false, it cannot be regarded as a legitimate Marxist school; nor can any of its non-Marxist analyses of our culture solve any problems that Marx himself failed to do."[171]

In the 30s and 40s, neither Hook nor Horkheimer could look beyond the apparent ideological rift that separated them. In their encounter, there was more talking past than talking together. Ultimately their arguments remained circular and isolated. There are, I think, at least two kinds of plausible stories to be told about why a reconciliation proved impossible. The first considers ideas and intellectual heritage, and the second considers the political, social, and

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[169] Sidney Hook, "Reflections on the Frankfurt School," in *Marxism and Beyond* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1983), 122-123.
[170] Hook, "Reflections," 123.
[171] Hook, "Reflections," 129.

historical contexts that presented themselves to our thinkers. This approach raises contested historiographical questions, but the ultimate disagreement between the Pragmatists and Critical Theorists provides a valuable opportunity to ask them.

Conflict of Ideas

The first explanation, which would likely be most obvious to the traditional intellectual historian or historian of ideas, argues that the fundamental differences between the Pragmatists and the Critical Theorists lie in the content of their thought—how their ideas related to other ideas. Since they were thinkers actively positioning their ideas in relation to those of other thinkers, this frame is seemingly very important. Our thinkers asked similar questions, read some of the same authors, and came to the some of the same conclusions about the role thought plays in promoting real action. However, their respective approaches to those questions and their understandings of those authors were distinct. Critical Theory, rooted in the legacy of German idealism and particularly in Hegel, was primarily concerned with exploring the apparent rift between idea and reality. In Hegel's view, the continual mediation of that difference is the driver of world history. The idealist suspicion of reality informed how the Critical Theorists viewed and critiqued the world around them.

In contrast, the Pragmatists fit less neatly into an intellectual narrative. Born into a setting with far less of a distinct philosophical tradition, the Pragmatist were informed by a fraught combination of empiricism, Transcendentalism, and idealism. Peirce perhaps fits most neatly into the legacy of Anglo-empiricism with his rejection of Cartesian rationalism and his skepticism of certain knowledge in any specific situation. Peirce's influence on Pragmatism explains its fallibilistic outlook and its rejection of certain non-empirical knowledge as

meaningless. James too was influenced by empiricism and also utilitarianism. James went a step further than Peirce in his attempt to position his philosophy as an open-ended pluralism free of the rigidity he perceived in monistic idealisms. Similarly, Dewey's transition away from Kant's transcendental idealism and later Hegel's absolute idealism accompanied his reception of pragmatic truth. Drawing new influence from Darwin, Peirce, and James, Dewey developed his experimental logic. While his emphasis on direct experience shows his debt to empiricism, Dewey consciously strove to break with the epistemological debates of the old world and to re-orient empiricism in a forward-looking, creative direction.

Conversely, Horkheimer's idealist bent explains why he was continually so concerned that positivism sanctified the status quo. Without a theoretical suspicion of the given reality and a conscious emphasis on the negating principle of the dialectic, he argued, one cannot hope to make a better world. As the Frankfurt School developed their concept of the irrational social totality—the ubiquitous form of ideology—their belief in the need for negation and critical thinking became more and more entrenched. For them, only a critical theory could expose the contradictions, the incongruences between reality and ideology that pervaded the industrialized world. For Marcuse and Horkheimer, the Pragmatists, in their rejection of the value of theory, were giving up their only means of really producing the positive social change that both schools wanted to see. So, they at times accused Pragmatism of a blind faith in science and progress.

For Dewey, what he called creative intelligence was an alternative preferable to theory. Arguably, his vision of democracy as incorporating a diversity of perspectives offered a critical edge that Horkheimer left unnoticed or unacknowledged. However, Dewey's focus on experimentation was certainly different than Horkheimer's emphasis on the dialectic. Although Dewey had been drawn to Hegel when he was younger for his dynamic and social elements, he

never found an intellectual home in dialectical theory. More compelling, for Dewey, was the Darwinian account of change and the notion that organisms are continuous with their environments. Darwinian evolution also undoubtedly influenced James as a psychologist and as a self-identified philosopher of Pragmatism. The pragmatic notion that truth is only validated in success has obvious Darwinian parallels. Dewey combined James's affinity for Darwin with Peirce's notion of the community of inquirers providing a model for thinking about both scientific method and democracy.

As a reformer, Dewey saw the need for liberalism to expand its definitions beyond those given by John Locke and Adam Smith. However, he did not question liberal values of fraternity and equality. On the contrary, he doubled down on the capacity of human beings, so limited as individuals yet with such powerfully cooperative potential, to overcome the need for certainty and work collectively toward a truly better world. His radical democracy aimed to push against ideology, a goal Horkheimer surely shared. In support of Dewey, Hook defended scientific method against what he perceived as the tenderminded and potentially authoritarian attacks on faith in collective experimental reason.

Notably, both sets of thinkers had a similar negative response to what they perceived as either metaphysics or irrationalism. In their encounter, both Hook and Horkheimer strove to show that their method was more rigorous and rational than the other's. In this sense, while both the Pragmatists and the Critical Theorists were critical of the Enlightenment, they could not escape its influence. The stamp of Enlightenment is clear too in their mutual regard for ideas like freedom and equality. Both were trying to wrestle with the implications of Enlightenment and at the same time preserve its value. Neither was looking for a way back out of disenchantment but instead a way to make sense of the world and improve it as it is.

Broadly speaking, the intellectual milieu in the early twentieth century was unmistakably marked by a concern for meaning yet a skepticism towards authority. In this context, both sets of thinkers saw in the regressive developments of authoritarianism a dogmatism stifling rational thinking. They were living in an age that was unmistakably ideological, and as such they each sought to identify the ideas that had taken root as ideology. For this reason, they were both deeply suspicious of any claims that sounded dogmatic or rested on self-evident principles. However, they directed that suspicion in opposite directions. They met each other with different understandings rationality, different definitions of science and dogmatism, and as a result, different diagnoses of the root cause of authoritarianism.

The mutual disagreement of the Pragmatists and the Critical Theorists suggests that the split over experimental versus dialectical methods was at least in part influenced by an intellectual context. Horkheimer missed some of the critical potential in Dewey's diverse democracy. Conversely, Hook and Dewey failed to see how Horkheimer and his group had reoriented Hegel away from totality and monism, a shift they surely would have supported. However, personal egos and misunderstanding are only part of the story. The disagreement was marked by a real tension between ideas about knowledge, truth, and action. No doubt negative dialectics and experimentation are fundamentally distinct. While the preceding two chapters have only just scratched the surface of the traditions of Pragmatism and Critical Theory, it is apparent that while they may have been asking some of the same questions and sometimes reading the same authors, the way they brought those questions and texts into conversation with other texts was distinctly different.

Our thinkers would perhaps prefer us to tell an intellectual history simply because it takes their ideas seriously. For example, such an account sees value in exploring Dewey and Hook's

transition from dialectical to experimental methods not because of what those ideas tell us about the social or class contexts they inhabited but instead because those ideas themselves are important. It says that the meaning of ideas really lies in their content not just their social context. Rather than investigating personal or social differences, it is important to ask about the extent to which the ideas themselves were incompatible.

A history of intellectual difference leaves room for speculation about some distinction between the American and European minds.[172] Francis Golffing, for example, takes this approach in an essay written in *Commentary* in 1959. He claims that generally American and European intellectuals structure their ideas differently. Whereas Europeans' ideas are organized hierarchically, Americans' are generally "patterned in a lateral, 'democratic' manner."[173] Golffing claims that Americans have a "native distrust" of European system-building and "abstractive language" while Europeans "show a corresponding allergy to the realm of the concrete."[174] Golffing concludes by saying that Americans and Europeans have different senses of time with Americans generally orienting themselves towards the future and Europeans toward the past. Golffing suggests these differences might be traced back to the United States' literal rebellion against European political rule. In a crude sense, it would be fairly easy to map the disagreement between Hook and Horkheimer onto this understanding of the tensions between the American and European mind. Golffing's evaluation is reminiscent of James's claim that the history of philosophy is the history of a clash of temperaments. Because they met each other with

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[172] According to Laurence Vesey, this nationalistic potential contributed to the dominance of intellectual history in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. Reflecting the ideology of American exceptionalism, intellectual historians of that time could point to texts that articulated and informed distinctively American thought. Laurence Vesey, "Intellectual History and the New Social History," in *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore: The John's Hopkins University Press, 1979), 3.

[173] Francis Golffing, "The American and European Minds Compared: An Essay in Definition. *Commentary* 28, no. 6 (December 1959): 1, https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-amerian-and-european-minds-comparedan-essay-in-definition/. Page numbers refer to online version.

[174] Golffing, "American and European Minds," 4.

preconceived notions and distinct backgrounds as intellectuals, a resolution between Hook and Horkheimer was impossible. Their personal understandings and articulations of ideas exacerbated real tensions between the ideas themselves.

As I might have betrayed by the fact that I devoted the bulk of this essay to laying out relationships among ideas, I have an affinity for this kind of intellectual history. However, it certainly seems limited. As attractive as it is to believe that ideas stand in their own uncontaminated realm of history, ideas are not formed in vacuums, they are formed by people—specifically, people who exist in certain times, places, and social circumstances. Hook and Horkheimer were clearly not what we would call objective in their appraisals of one another. Given that fact, it would seem almost naïve to assume that a story about a conflict of ideas or continental ideologies adequately explains the historical encounter described.

Conflict of Context

A second historiographical frame we could offer to explain the unresolvable differences between our German and American thinkers would be to examine the roles played by the social and political contexts surrounding them. As John Dewey wrote in 1930, "Upon the whole, the forces that have influenced me have come from persons and situations more than from books—not that I have not, I hope learned a great deal from philosophical writings, but that I have learned from them has been technical in comparison with what I have been forced to think upon and about because of some experience in which I found myself entangled."[175] Taking Dewey at his word, this second approach, in contrast to a formalized story of ideas, examines the historical context more broadly and uses an author's texts to as clues to explore an underlying social

[175] Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, 9.

reality. This kind of story would be favorable to, what Daniel Wickberg calls, the social historian of intellectuals. Wickberg draws this distinction over the way in which a historian approaches a written work or historical artifact. In his words, "whereas the historian of thought is interested in written text for the patterns of meaning they reveal, the social historian is interested in them as registers of experience. Where the historian of thought looks at texts, ideas, cultural representations in relationship to other texts, ideas and cultural representations, the social historian of intellectuals looks at them in relationship to social institutions."[176] In the context of the Frankfurt School and Pragmatism, this latter approach calls for examination of the of the social context of the disagreement. It asks questions about how disparities in the experienced worlds of our thinkers manifested themselves in a conflict that was ostensibly only about ideas.

A good place to begin operating in this modality of social history is in examining the differing responses to totalitarianism given by the Pragmatists and the Critical Theorists. Whereas the Pragmatists juxtaposed liberalism guided by creative intelligence with totalitarianism, the Critical Theorists saw the potential for totalitarianism lurking even in the most liberal of establishments. The Frankfurt School, though of course concerned about Nazism, was also critical of the mass culture and rationalized social order that permeated the United States. For them, the logic of domination driving totalitarianism had no regard for the official political ideologies functioning, albeit differently, in the United States, Nazi Germany, and Soviet Russia. Their critique was meant to bring to bear the negating force of the dialectic against a logic manifesting itself in a culture thriving both in officially liberal and illiberal societies. To some Americans, including Sidney Hook, this attitude betrayed an elitist and authoritarian streak underlying the position of the German thinkers. According to Hook, unlike

[176] Daniel Wickberg, "Intellectual History vs the Social History of Intellectuals," *Rethinking History* 5, no. 3 (2001): 383-395, 384.

Marx who at the end of his career disavowed the "dictatorial seizure of power by enlightened minorities for the sake of others," the Frankfurt School betrayed no such restraint: "The attitude that pervades the entire corpus of writings of the members of the Frankfurt School is different from that of Marx. Rather it is one of contempt for the choice of the masses from a privileged cultural elite. This is illustrated especially in the unbridled attack on popular or mass culture."[177] Ultimately, Hook concludes that the Frankfurt School's "undisguised paternalism is incompatible with any conception of a democratic polity."[178] Against this claim, someone like Marcuse would have argued that the total reification of society is perpetuated by "the illusion of popular sovereignty."[179] In his view, an unexamined faith in democracy is equally as susceptible to authoritarianism as a faith a demagogue.

From the perspective of the social historian of intellectuals, this disagreement over the perceived anti-democratic elitism of the Frankfurt School is not difficult to explain. Forced to flee from their home country by the rise of an insidious popular mass-movement, it is no wonder that the Frankfurt School was less eager to put their faith into some community of inquirers exercising their so-called creative intelligence. Horkhiemer, for instance, felt that the cultural crisis brought on by the domination of nature and instrumental rationality contained a repressed barbarism that flimsy democratic institutions could not hope to contain. Horkhiemer says in the *Eclipse of Reason* that, in its present condition, "culture can count on few of its self-proclaimed devotees to stand out for its ideals."[180] He describes "the tragic impotence of democratic arguments whenever they have to compete with totalitarian methods." Horkheimer continues:

[177] Hook, "Reflections," 127.
[178] Hook, "Reflections," 129.
[179] Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 256.
[180] Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, 119.

> Under the Weimar Republic, for instance, the German people seemed loyal to the constitution and a democratic way of life as long as they believed that these were backed by real power. As soon as the ideals and principles of the Republic came into conflict with the interests of economic forces that represented a greater strength, the totalitarian agitators had an easy time of it. Hitler appealed to the unconscious in his audience by hinting that he could forge a power in whose name the ban on repressed nature would be lifted. Rational persuasion can never be as effective, because it is not congenial to the repressed primitive urges of superficially civilized people.[181]

Given the world Horkheimer and the other Frankfurt School members saw prior to their exile: a world of violence waged by ostensibly liberal nation-states, followed by the failure of a workers' revolution, followed by a tenuous democracy straddled with political conflict and immense economic strain, followed by the successful rise of an anti-Semitic demagogue, it is little wonder that their ideas did not mesh nicely with Dewey's call for a renascent liberalism. However, this is not to say that the Frankfurt School rejected the values of democracy; indeed, the goal of Critical Theory, as Horkheimer says, is "man's emancipation from slavery."[182] Yet, unlike the Pragmatists, the Frankfurt School believed that emancipation could only follow from a theoretical critique of society. For them, achieving a truly human existence marked by the kind of peace and cooperation that Dewey so prized, was neither easy nor inevitable.

The Frankfurt School was unsure of the link between scientific and social progress.[183] Again, this skepticism was seemingly validated with the technologically elaborate destruction

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[181] Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason,* 120.
[182] Horkheimer, "Postscript," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, 246.
[183] Importantly, Dewey was also skeptical of the link between science and social progress, and thus he sought to redefine science as properly guided by the democratic community. Hook and Horkheimer's disconnect over the meaning of science marks a major failure of understanding on both sides.

leveled during the First World War. Furthermore, according to the Frankfurt School, the Nazis fully embraced technological rationality in their domination of both nature and human beings. Whereas Dewey argued that a humble scientific temper was required to curb the dangers of scientific method, the Frankfurt School identified the problem with the logic of domination that pervades science itself. Science alone could not reflect on its own contradictions and destructive tendencies. Horkheimer found Dewey and Hook's claim that the response to totalitarianism should be a more scientific temperament to be absurd:

> To read Hook, one would never imagine that such enemies of mankind as Hitler have actually any great confidence in scientific methods, or that the German ministry of propaganda consistently used controlled experimentation, testing all values 'by their causes and consequences.' Like any existing creed science can be used to serve the most diabolical social forces, and scientism is not less narrow-minded than militant religion.[184]

The world Horkheimer experienced seemed to align with this assessment. While Dewey may have acknowledged the various abuses of technology, he never saw it or heard it as his German counterparts did. Whereas Dewey had seen the positive effects of democracy and government regulation to more equitably distribute the fruits of technological progress, the Frankfurt School had no such experience.

As intellectuals in exile, the German thinkers did not feel as if they were a part of American society or its history. They felt no special affinity for any supposed achievements of the progressive era in the United States. On the contrary they had seen the progressive dreams of the early Weimar republic dashed. Perhaps as a result, when they invoked images of change and

[184] Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, 71.

resistance, they were not of intelligent social reform, they were instead of a seething disenfranchised amalgam of the oppressed. In Marcuse's words:

> Underneath the conservative popular base is the substratum of outcasts and outsiders…. They exist outside of the democratic process; their life is the most immediate and the most real need for ending intolerable conditions. Thus their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not. Their opposition hits the system from without and is therefore not deflected by the system; it is an elementary force which violates the rules of the game and, in doing so, reveals it is a rigged game.[185]

Speaking earlier of those who truly resisted the irrationality of fascism, Horkheimer similarly writes:

> The real individuals of our time are the martyrs who have gone through infernos of suffering and degradation in their resistance to conquest and oppression, not the inflated personalities of popular culture, the conventional dignitaries. These unsung heroes consciously exposed their existence as individuals to the terroristic annihilation that other undergo unconsciously through the social process. The anonymous martyrs of the concentration camps are the symbols of the humanity that is striving to be born. The task of philosophy is to translate what they have done into language that will be heard, even though their finite voices have been silenced by tyranny.[186]

Given the world they inhabited and the terrifying social order they witnessed, it is little wonder that the Frankfurt School felt that criticism, resistance, and negation were necessary before any kind of construction was possible. It was not that they did not believe in democracy or progressive reform, rather they were intensely aware of the obstacles in the way.

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[185] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 257.
[186] Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, 161.

As for the Pragmatists, their experiences in late nineteenth century America surely informed their different takes on science, democracy, and totalitarianism. Emerging out of a hugely destructive civil war, Peirce and James were particularly concerned with individual human blindness and fallibility. However, while their faith in individual human beings was shaken, their faith in society's capacity for improvement was not. A weary yet resolute hope remained for the tested United States. Walt Whitman perhaps best described this hope in the first pages of his "Democratic Vistas":

> Today, ahead, though dimly yet, we see, in vistas, a copious, sane, gigantic offspring. For our New World I consider far less important for what it has done, or what it is, than for results to come. Sole among nationalities, these States have assumed the task to put in forms of lasting power and practicality, on areas of amplitude rivaling the operations of the physical kosmos, the moral political speculations of ages, long, long deffr'd, the democratic republican principle, and the theory of development and perfection by voluntary standards, and self-reliance.[187]

While neither Whitman nor Peirce nor James can speak for all Americans, their writings are signs that tell us something about the world they inhabited. It was a world that had changed and was still rapidly changing. Some changes were destructive, but others were clearly progressive. Indeed, while the war exposed the dangers of individual certainty the post-war world presented the potentials of human cooperation. It is difficult to understate how rapidly technology was developing in the nineteenth century ultimately transforming the world of everyday existence. In the years between the Civil War and the First World War, human beings figured out how to harness electricity, build gasoline powered engines, synthesize steel, sterilize surgical tools,

[187] Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," in *Specimen Days, Democratic Vistas, and Other Prose*, ed. Louise Pound (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1935), 261-262.

communicate via telephones and radio signals, fix nitrogen, and construct flying machines. It would seem appropriate to borrow Vaclav Smil's description of these technological developments as "the astonishing concatenation of epochal innovations that were introduced and improved during the two pre-WWI generations and whose universal adoption created the civilization of the 20th century."[188]

With transformations in technology, the nature of work relations was changing as more people migrated from rural areas marked by agricultural labor to urban areas marked by factory labor. The ownership of the means of production was shifting. It was the era of robber barons and monopoly capitalism. As progressives like Dewey pointed out, the incredible growth of wealth had to be consciously oriented towards a more equitable and just society. Like most U.S. progressives of that era, Dewey was not a staunch anti-capitalist, and he instead he believed in extending the innovation and cooperation that had produced so much wealth to its distribution.

Dewey was struck by the conflict between the workers and bosses during the Pullman Strike upon his arrival in Chicago. Perhaps because of his experience as a student, educator, and academic rather than a laborer, Dewey felt more affinity with Jane Addams than Eugene Debs. Dewey was drawn to Addam's belief that the conflicts raging between rich and poor, capital and labor were artificial. Cooperation without conflict was for her the only path forward. Dewey's connection with Addams perhaps adds context to why he did not adopt the Frankfurt School's focus on societal antagonisms and contradictions. He instead continuously advocated for inquiry grounded in democratic diversity and scientific temperament to reform society. Dewey believed that human beings could be educated to act with intelligence, creativity, and a democratic

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[188] Vaclav Smil, *Creating the Twentieth Century: Technical Innovations of 1867-1914 and Their Lasting Impact*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 303.

attitude. His unwavering faith in cooperation is what made Dewey's democracy so radical—and what convinced Hook that Dewey's Pragmatism was compatible with his own Marxist ideas. At the same time, it is understandable why Horkheimer, who also adopted Marxist ideas around the same time as Hook, was less inclined to recognize their compatibility with Dewian ones.

Broadly speaking, it seems intuitive that a philosophy developed around the turn of the century United States would be distinctly different than one developed in 1920s Germany. While both schools may have overlapped in time and place in New York in the 1930s, both sets of ideas came out of two truly different worlds. The relative optimism of Dewey and Hook, while maybe less assured by the 1940s, remained firm. Horkheimer and Marcuse's relative pessimism, formed in the ill-fated Weimar Republic, was similarly confirmed. Through the lens of the social historian, our thinkers clearly responded to the worlds around them. Their response tells us something about the vastly different nature of those worlds. This lens allows us to treat our thinkers in their particularity: to point out their biases and misconceptions, their unconscious frames of reference.

A historiographical frame like this offers something that intellectual history alone does not.[189] Rather than speculate about what characterizes the intellectual mind of the European or American, this kind of historian looks for evidence about the economic and social realities that thinkers disclose in their writings. Dewey's exchanging the ideas of Hegel for James and Darwin tells us something about his position as an intellectual progressive in Chicago in 1900. Hook's transition away from Marxism and the dialectic tells us more about the changing social reality of young intellectuals in New York in the 1930s than it does about Marxism. Similarly,

[189] The practice of this kind of social history rose to prominence in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s because of perceived deficiencies of traditional intellectual history. Veysey, "Intellectual History," 5.

Horkheimer's equation of Pragmatism with scientism says more about his position as a German-Jewish intellectual in exile than it does about the nature of Pragmatism.

Epistemic Challenges and Paths Forward

Ultimately these differing approaches to telling the story of the Pragmatists and the Critical Theorists raise questions about historical causality and the very nature of the human mind. Such questions are of course beyond the scope of a paper such as this, however, the act of reflecting on what we as historians mean by explanations, contexts, mentalities, and realities is surely not wasted effort. For better or worse, the historian inevitably raises questions in terms of "why." In the words of Marc Bloch, "the historian cannot escape this common law of the mind."[190] It seems clear that both perspectives—the history of ideas and the history of intellectuals—offer real insights into addressing that question of why.

However, it appears to me that both modes of history—explored here in the context of Pragmatism and Critical Theory—leave us wanting. On the one hand, a history of ideas remains abstract and ethereal. It venerates the work of elite intellectuals as somehow qualitatively different than other historical documents. This mode makes judgements declaring that *these* are the ideas that matter. It stays disconnected from the real relationships, anxieties, and personalities that distinguish a thinker as an individual and a member of a society. On the other hand, a history of intellectuals treats ideas as mere instruments. In this mode, ideas are clues—akin to census data or tree rings—that allow the historian to make inferences about the realities of the past. Ideas here have no meaning in themselves. While intellectuals of the past may have fancied

[190] Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Joseph R. Strayer (New York: Vintage Books, 1953), 190.

themselves debating the merits of ideas, they were simply responding to external stimuli.[191] In their attempt to give agency to the those left out of intellectual history,[192] the social historian runs the risk of reducing historical actors to historical automata.

While single answers to the question 'why?' may be unsatisfactory or difficult to prove, that does not mean they are meaningless. As Bloch writes, "history seeks for causal wave-trains and is not afraid, since life shows them to be so, to find them multiple."[193] It is my aim to explore the merit of both historiographic frames by employing what Wickberg calls an "ideational history of the social."[194] This third frame takes both ideas and the social realities of thinkers seriously by rejecting the dualism between ideas and material reality altogether. This frame assumes that human beings in history experience the world through a particular mode of perception. By this I mean that ideas continuously form and reform what is meant by social reality. Historical texts—whether they are hymnals, meeting minutes, newspapers, letters, or philosophical texts—convey something about the mode in which their authors perceive the world around them. For anyone in history, the ideas they inherit through observation and language influence their mode of perception.

The advantage of framing a historical narrative as an "ideational history" is that it gets away from circular questions of the causal relationship between ideas and historical reality. Thought is neither caused by material conditions nor the cause of them. Instead, historical reality is itself ideational. Furthermore, this kind of history does not frame ideas as either elite abstractions or mere expressions of social reality. In Wickberg's words, "ideas are not tools, nor

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[191] Veysey argues that Marxist and Freudian influence on historiography beginning in the 1960s contributed to shift in focus towards the unconscious and class-based underpinnings of ideas. "Intellectual History," 4.
[192] As Wickberg argues, the rise of social history was an attempt to give agency to "previously excluded groups." "Intellectual History vs. Social History of Intellectuals," 387.
[193] Bloc, *Historian's Craft*, 194.
[194] Wickberg, "Intellectual History vs. Social History of Intellectuals," 393.

pale reflections of something else, nor smokescreens to hide interests; they are the stuff of reality itself."[195] While this essay has focused on the work of intellectuals, I did not do so because philosophical texts are somehow more important or more informative than other kinds of documents. Rather, the Pragmatists and the Critical Theorists offer a certain articulation of their particular modes of perception. As well-read intellectuals their modes were certainly more influenced by formal systems of thought than the average person of their time. However, their encounter with formal ideas are surely not the entire story. They incorporated an ideational milieu, an intellectual zeitgeist. In is hardly coincidence that Dewey and Horkheimer were raising similar questions and identifying similar problems despite their vastly different worlds of experience. Their modes of perception also incorporated their own biases, unquestioned assumptions, and personal narcissism.

While none of these historiographical aspects on their own make for a compelling history, together they form a complex and layered narrative. Treating our thinkers' perceptions in all their complexity recalls William James's encounter with the mountaineer in North Carolina. We should be humbly aware of what James called the "peculiar ideality" of each person. We should keep in mind the potentially myriad different ways of interpreting the same scenes, the same actions, the same words. James's account calls forth humility and diligence when telling the stories of people who are different from us. In the present case, a particular story of a relatively brief and unsatisfying encounter between intellectuals becomes a story of what happens when historical actors with distinct modes of perception overlap in time and space. How are they challenged? What about their modes are revealed? What is concealed? How did they accommodate each other, and how did they fail to? What motivated them and how can we

[195] Wickberg, "Intellectual History vs. Social History of Intellectuals," 394.

know? While I have answered these questions incompletely, I argue that taking the path of ideational history provides the optimal lens to consider the encounter described in this essay. This lens opens up more fruitful possibilities for future historians to form an ever more detailed, though never finished, picture of the past.

Conclusion

This essay has shown how an apparently one-dimensional exchange among intellectuals can also reveal ideas in tension—misunderstandings and missed opportunities, incongruous worldviews and diverse modes of perception. At first glance, the story seemed inconsequential. When Max Horkheimer and his Institute for Social Research arrived in the New York in 1933, Pragmatism was falling out of fashion among American intellectuals. John Dewey, who had come to be seen as a spokesperson for Pragmatism, was in his seventies and retired. Horkheimer would probably not have bothered with addressing Pragmatism at any length had it not been for Sidney Hook, Dewey's young acolyte. Ultimately, when their exile at Columbia was over, Horkheimer and his group moved on from New York and seemingly from any concerns they had for Pragmatism. They left with an impression of an American philosophy that glorified action, ignored criticism, and remained antithetical to their own project. Hook watched them go with an impression of an elitist, tenderminded, and idealist philosophy that was Marxist only in name.

However, as I have shown, the story of the Pragmatists and the Frankfurt School has much more to offer. My account is revealing both in terms of the foundational assumption of Pragmatism and Critical Theory and also in terms of the fraught concerns and anxieties of intellectuals of the early twentieth century. I argued that they both set out from a common point of concern over the fallibility of human beings and a skepticism over the foundations of authority. They both sought to re-orient philosophy and ask questions anew in a way that didn't return philosophy to an earlier, safer shore. On the contrary, they sought to creatively reclaim human agency in the face of modernity. I showed how their responses to each other highlighted their mutual refusal to embrace dogmatism or absolutism. At the same time, this representation has been as much about particular individuals as it has been about intellectual movements. To

recount these events as an ideational history is to consider how a set of ideas, a physical environment, and a social situation all inform a certain mode of perceiving the world. The encounter between Sidney Hook and Max Horkheimer, I have argued, is an example of two multifarious modes of perception converging. The issues they identified with each other reveal something about the distinct worlds they perceived.

Beyond that, I must confess, that I simply find both the ideas of the Pragmatists and Frankfurt School fascinating and relevant in their own ways. I am struck by the creativity and ambition with which they refashioned older ideas to cope with new challenges of modernity. On a personal level, I am sympathetic to their progressive goals of reforming society, articulating contradictions, and attempting as intellectuals to effect a better world. In my opinion, the Left today could glean much from examining the ideas and shortcomings of the classical Pragmatists and the early Frankfurt School. In recent years Dewey's radical democracy has seen new, well-deserved attention. His notion of democracy as a way of living predicated on the diverse community is far more compelling than atomized liberalism. Similarly, the aim of unveiling contradictions pursued by the early Frankfurt School is as relevant as ever. The information age has arguably fostered a new quality of alienation in need of examination.

I will conclude by saying that I think the Left can also learn from the perceived weaknesses of each school. On the one hand, the weakness of Pragmatism is its difficulty in justifying the ends of action; emphasis on results is vulnerable to attacks of relativism. It is important to articulate the reason for action, to justify ends, and to talk about values. Action for the sake of action will not effect positive change. Conversely, Critical Theory is vulnerable to obscuring the importance of action in pursuit of theory. Criticism must be accompanied by action. Construction must follow deconstruction. Richard Rorty has claimed that in the U.S. the

post-sixties Left lost sight of political action in its zeal for intellectual criticism. I agree. Incisive criticism, if it does not speak to the needs and values of real people, is impotent. Considering their weaknesses, the emphases of Pragmatism and Critical Theory effectively complement each other. Their consonance speaks to our agency as intellectuals and political actors.

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