

Is Incredulity Self-Defeating?

(1977/June 1980)

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This essay is written for purely heuristic reasons. The technically precise presentations of my philosophy are just "Primary Study" and "The Flaws Underlying Beliefs." These documents exhibit or manifest the juncture at which language "short-circuits" (i.e. is vitiated): the "Is there language?" trap. The reason why I have produced an entire heuristic literature on my philosophy is that in the absence of a heuristic background, my ultimate philosophical result is disregarded as a joke. Evidently it is dismissed for two interacting reasons. The first is the presumption that it is so nihilistic that it yields no benefit whatever. The second is the misconception that the trap is a riddle which can be isolated from the rest of language and cognition, and which therefore nullifies only itself. (In 1966, Steve Reich, who majored in philosophy in college, said in effect that my trap was just a riddle like "I am not here"; and said that Wittgenstein had decisively discredited these philosophers' quibbles.) A third and more sectarian objection comes from graduate-school philosophers, who complain that the trap does not provide a comprehensive logico-syntactical theory to explain what it means by "statement," "true," etc. The only way to forestall such opportunistic witlessness toward my result is to surround it with a heuristic literature.

On the other hand, there is an intellectual disadvantage in attempting to lead the way to my ultimate result through heuristic discourses. A discourse is heuristic because it sacrifices creditability in order to accommodate the predilections of its audience. But I then find myself acquiescing to a number of layers (perhaps interconnected) of conventional assumptions which I am then required to attack, layer by layer. The exercise becomes a Cheshire-cat or bootstrap situation. But if I am to write heuristically, this difficulty is unavoidable.

I must also say that this essay is written to expound just two heuristic ideas which I have not stressed sufficiently elsewhere. In order to explain these ideas, though, I will have to refer to numerous themes which I have dealt with at length in other writings. I will take the liberty of stating these themes in quite telegraphic language.

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With the publication of Feyerabend's Against Method, it has become legitimate in the "rationalist" sector of the academic and cultural world to express irreverence for natural science and the scientific culture. But let us be clear on the character and direction of this irreverence. What Feyerabend and others express is a facetious, sophomoric relativism whose import is that all beliefs are true, a relativism whose goal is the proliferation of superstition or cognitive capriciousness. This generation of academically accredited neo-relativists (or whatever one wishes to call them) has not produced a single result which is both non-scientific and post-scientific: a new result which is outside the boundaries of natural science, yet which is conceivable only in a civilization which is already abreast of scientific culture. No, every

result which Feyerabend, Roszak and others counterpose to natural science is a revival of a historical superstition from the time before the rise of science --a superstition which had fallen into obscurity precisely because science had made a laughingstock of it. Thus, we are given such alternatives to physics as the Hare Krishna cult, astrology, witchcraft, acupuncture (although I'm afraid acupuncture is already passé), and the Carlos Castenada hoax in Esquire magazine. An issue is involved here of personal courage and intellectual autonomy which I cannot avoid mentioning. To produce a new result, as I have defined it, is difficult most of all because it involves facing down the university-educated Western middle class and telling them that all their expectations concerning knowledge and savants are ill-conceived--or more bluntly, that they are ignorant savages. It is easy enough--at least in the beginning and for pundits whose merchandise consists of pranks and fads--to re-sell people on familiar results which have fallen into disuse. (Cf. raw food faddism and the voluntary simplicity industry.) But innovations such as I require must transcend socially comprehensible cognitive procedures and the social reward structure associated with them. A correlative and more specific observation is that astrology, the feats attributed to Yuri Geller, the miracles attributed to Jesus Christ, etc. are not philosophically profound. Since this essay is heuristic, let me begin with a simplistic example. On TV I have repeatedly seen baseball player Dave Concepcion cross himself and then get a hit. But Concepcion's "magic" is not philosophically profound even though it "works"! And ultimately I would make the same contention about physics, and for the same reasons: its feats are not philosophically profound even though they work. To further elucidate my observation, let me remark that the ancient, occult science of astrology is in important respects parallel to natural science in what it wants to do (so much so that astrological research provided much of the preliminary data of modern astronomy). The only difference between astrology and science is, again being simplistic, that astrology doesn't work (or that science's norms of instrumental effectiveness are more sophisticated than occultism's). (Actually, one shouldn't concede so easily that occultism doesn't work: my point in mentioning Concepcion's "magic" was that it does "work.") The matter of principle involved here is that pre-scientific knowledge most definitely pretends (among other things) to discover objectively consequential instrumental procedures; to discover objectively consequential laws of "the world"; and even to discover objective, causal, thing-to-thing relationships. The only drawback is that pre-scientific knowledge doesn't work well enough --or that its validation can be construed as a matter of hearsay, misdirection, and above all suggestibility. Another perspective on pre-scientific knowledge is that to the extent that it allows for humanness and subjectivity, it does so by displacing them into a world of things which do not exist except as chimeras. What pre-scientific cultures could not possibly have done--and what the Feyerabends do not want or dare to do--is to construct a modality to replace the traditional claim to discover an objective world or the traditional claim of the objectivity of language--and the societal function of those claims.

Indeed, the pressure to conform to traditional expectations of an objective world with objectively consequential laws is so great that occultism sometimes seizes on authentic anomalous experiences and willfully imagines them to be phenomena of a chimerical thing-world. (Or so I speculate.) [Thus the experience which is called a hypnagogic hallucination by psychology may be called astral projection by occultism.] What nobody dares to do is to refrain from surrounding the anomalous experience with fantasized objectivities. (If I am not as impressed by reports of supernatural powers as people think I should be, it is only partly because I treat all hearsay as a lie. The more important reason is that I frankly scorn the traditional demand for objectively consequential causal relationships as a cognitive modality, whether those relationships are posited in natural science or in occult science.*.) And as I have suggested, the reason why the traditional goal to make objective pronouncements about an objective world has hitherto gone unchallenged is that it is central to what we know as societal regimentation. On the other hand, intellectual modalities which simply renounce all instrumental aims are not satisfactory to me either. What I demand is instrumentally effective procedures which are outside the parameters common to occult science and natural science. Such procedures might be correlative to a community in which the regimentation of reality (as it now operates) would have disintegrated.

Returning to the narrow theme of this essay, the conclusion to be drawn here about the currently emerging academic irreverence toward science is that it all tends in the direction of increasing credulousness. It tends in the direction of making a moral imperative of credulity. For myself, I am devoted to the decrease of credulity (and to the dismantling of natural science through decrease of credulity). I am devoted to instrumental procedures, based on decreased credulousness, which plasticize the determination of reality. From the beginning of my philosophical activity—when I defined truth in terms of absence of self-deception (deception of oneself by oneself!)—I have been devoted to the incredulous end of the philosophical spectrum. Since the fashion of the moment is one of re-legitimation of superstition and credulity, my exploration of incredulousness is profoundly out of fashion.

But the incredulous end of the philosophical spectrum has always been out of fashion. It has always been condemned, or mocked, both in philosophy and in the culture in general. In "From Fundamental Philosophy to Meta-Technology" (hereinafter FPMT) I establish that the history of modern Western philosophy is a history of desperate attempts to fend off "skepticism" or "unbelief," to pull up short of the skeptical abyss. This history extends from Hume's portrayal of the skeptic as a monster cast out by his fellow men, to Kant's avowal in the Critique of Pure Reason that his purpose is to defend religion from the disbelief of the philosophers, to Heidegger's frenzy to "prove the world" by concocting a world which is impossible to doubt.

I will not repeat this material here. Instead, I will examine the attitudes toward philosophical unbelief expressed by an influential modern philosopher whom I did not mention in FPMT. Wittgenstein says in the Philosophical Investigations, §403, "But after all neither does the solipsist want any practical advantage when he advances his view!" In §303, he says

*It is necessary to get beyond cause-and-effect technology.

"Just try--in a real case--to doubt someone else's fear or pain." In §420, he in effect repeats Hume's remark that it is impossible to doubt other minds "outside one's study." Wittgenstein also intimates that philosophical skeptics are like savages bewitched by the forms of language. (Cf. §§194, 109, 111.) In §124, he says that "Philosophy ... leaves everything as it is. It also leaves mathematics as it is"

Because Wittgenstein documentation is so fragmentary, a given epigram has to be understood in the context of the whole of the Wittgensteinian documents and of the direction given to Wittgenstein's remarks by his enthusiasts. With this proviso, the above citations have to be understood as follows. Wittgenstein charges that all varieties of philosophical incredulousness--skepticism, agnosticism, disbelief, unbelief, solipsism--are mere jokes or poses. The philosophical skeptic or solipsist is a poseur. Philosophical incredulousness can have no practical consequences; it can never lead to any change in the form of life. Indeed, philosophical incredulousness is just an improper use of ordinary language. (So it is that people trained as Wittgensteinians, such as Steve Reich and James Carse, have repeatedly dismissed the "Is there language?" trap as an improper use of ordinary language which has no importance.) We can gain a more complete understanding of Wittgenstein's attitude if we pay attention to all the memoirs and other documents which disclose that he was a mystic and a theist, and if we note that the Philosophical Investigations, §373, says that theology is the grammar of the word "God." For Wittgenstein, as natural historian of the common man's world-view* and as mystic, to doubt or to deny the existence of God is a mere joke or a pose. It manifests the ignorance of a savage in the face of the forms of language. To doubt or deny the existence of God is simply a misuse of ordinary language. To use ordinary language correctly, one must affirm the existence of God. Doubt or denial of God can have no practical consequences; it can never lead to any change in the form of life. Voltaire, Diderot, Marx were nothing; they were just linguistic incompetants who had no effect on the form of life. You must affirm the existence of God or else you're misusing ordinary language; you must affirm the authority of the Church or else you're misusing ordinary language; you must tithe or else you're misusing ordinary language; you must break infidels on the rack or else you're misusing ordinary language. Whether or not society breaks infidels on the rack has no practical consequences and makes no difference to the form of life. And it makes no difference to the infidels who get broken, of course—they don't mind. (Wittgenstein's attitude recalls what Kant said in the Critique of Pure Reason, that philosophical doubt of God, free will, and immortality will never reach beyond the universities to affect the common man.) Wittgenstein, more than any other thinker, sided forthrightly with the common man's world-view in dismissing philosophical incredulousness as a joke and a pose.* And he surrounded this reactionary philistinism with a fashionably cryptic, elaborately anguished, mystical aura. As such, Wittgenstein has been a major figure in the pro-credulity movement, causing British philosophy after 1950 to become the most precious, impotent, insignificant school of philosophy of all time.

*"Wittgenstein] used the bed-maker (i.e., female college servant) as a measuring rod when traditional philosophical arguments were raised in the class. 'What,' he would ask, 'would my bed-maker say of this kind of abstract talk?'" Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Man and His Philosophy, p. 82.

Another perennial ideology which condemns incredulousness, this time on moral grounds, is Marxism. Contemporary dogmatic Marxism groups together all unwillingness to profess materialism and stigmatizes it as subjective idealism. (Subjective idealism is in turn a product of the narcissistic decadent inwardness of the bourgeoisie—the same narcissistically inward bourgeoisie whose multinational corporations and nuclear technology have brought the world to its knees and provide the model which the Marxist countries emulate.) To be fair to Marx himself, his avowal of materialism was made in response to a specific cultural-political situation, at the time he wrote the German Ideology. Marx was reacting to a generation of publicists who proclaimed themselves to be revolutionaries but who conceived of "the revolution" as limited to the realm of secularist ideas and moral humanism. Marx replied by avowing that ideas and morality were effects of the economic system and that economic oppression was real; and by demanding a revolution in the economic system. But the materialism which Marx espoused on the rebound from bourgeois humanism does not account for the whole of the situation with which we have to cope: already the early Lukács was striving for a better balanced outlook. I do not want to undertake a long response to Marx here; let me just mention that Marx's presumption that materialism and physics are mutually confirming allies in the war against "metaphysics" is pitiful in the age of quantum cosmology. Nevertheless, the Marxist authorities today are irrevocably committed to demanding the avowal of materialism, because of the connection between materialism as an ideology and their mode of societal regimentation.

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With this background, I can now begin to expound the ideas which this essay is specifically written to present. Throughout the history of philosophy, both the recognized philosophers and the cultures in which they lived have found philosophical incredulousness so threatening that they have dealt with it by thrusting it away abruptly and blindly. Specifically, all types of philosophical incredulousness have been grouped together and dismissed as a joke or a pose, or condemned as evil. Everybody has found incredulousness so threatening that nobody has even made a non-tendentious, dispassionate examination of the incredulous end of the philosophical spectrum. Indeed, what the philosophers have to say about incredulousness—such as Kant's remark that skepticism about God, free will, and immortality is only an academic exercise which will never affect the common man—is the strongest evidence that they have not thought about it seriously and extensively. As a final example of the inability of recognized thinkers to pursue incredulousness seriously, I may mention the logician Yessenin-Volpin. Yessenin-Volpin claims to be pro-skepticism (in e.g. his paper in Intuitionism and Proof Theory), but instead of exploring incredulousness at length, he leaves it after a page or two and embarks on a ludicrous attempt to provide an absolute validation of set theory—at the end of which he announces that we should accept our memories as veracious because morality requires us to do so. For Yessenin-Volpin, skepticism is just an excuse to begin, and the goal is to achieve an iron-clad validation of one of society's doctrinal institutions.

If we make a non-tendentious, dispassionate examination of incredulousness, one thing will immediately become clear which the philosophers have never told us. There are a number of different variants of "incredulousness," and some of these variants, perhaps most of them, are not viable philosophical stances for simple, obvious reasons. What is needed is to clear away the trivially non-viable variants of incredulousness, so that we can arrive at the variant or variants which are not trivial and devote the balance of our attention to them. In other words, the task is to uncover the genuine option of the incredulous philosophical modality. If the philosophers had made a non-tendentious examination of incredulousness, then instead of stigmatizing it as an undifferentiated abyss of evil, they would quickly have run through the non-viable options and would have devoted their attention to options which are profound.

Actually, I need to portray the situation more exactly. The philosophers have addressed themselves to incredulousness quite vigorously, but only by way of a hysteria to the effect that they must confute it and "prove the world." Thus, beginning with Kant's "Refutation of Idealism," most modern Western philosophers have advanced one version or another of what I call the "transcendental argument." In summary, they took note that even within experience we comport ourselves to a context of objectivity (intentionality, thrown-projectedness), and they cited this circumstance as proof that the context of objectivity is objectively real. (For further analysis and documentation, see Blueprint for a Higher Civilization, pp. 33-35, and FPMT.) This mode of argument is a classic non sequitur by which prayer would prove the existence of God and dream-worlds would be proved to be more real than the waking world. In addition, most of the celebrated philosophers, again beginning with Kant, have noted that the claim of the reality of the world has a self-confirming character in regard to its semantics. But they construed this self-Confirmatory feedback as an assurance of veracity. It did not occur to them that such feedback might be a symptom of vacuity.

But it is time to leave the philosophers aside and to begin a painstaking examination of the variants of incredulity. Given a thesis or belief--I use the terms interchangeably, appealing to the word "belief" to emphasize that to profess a thesis is a "psychological" act--consider the attempt to doubt the thesis or to deny the thesis (to profess the negative of the thesis). What we find immediately is that the attempt to doubt or to deny a thesis has the effect of giving a degree of credence to the thesis or of attributing a degree of validity to it.

What we also find is that the exact quality of this unintended attribution of validity is highly dependent on the prevailing social attitude toward the thesis. But for my purposes, this last observation is of minor importance. I will expand on it sketchily; but the overall orientation of this discourse is that it is more important to make a crude point which is far-reaching than to preserve a lot of subtleties which are shallow (and indeed which embody assumptions which it is my purpose to refute). Consider, for example, the stereotypical freethinker who doubts or denies the existence of God in a community in which orthodoxy requires belief in God. Somehow, one cannot doubt or deny God in a confrontation with a believer without an implication that one has taken a peek into Heaven and has found God to be absent therefrom. And to whatever extent belief in God is indefensible, this latter implication

is indefensible equally and for the same reasons. The atheist is trapped into a sort of psychical wrestling match with God which gives credence to God by the vigor of the struggle against Him. (And while I burlesque the unwanted implication to underline the point, the atheist's position would be left with just as much of an indefensible implication if I recast the issues in the abstract language of technical metaphysics.) On the other hand, if one denies God in the Soviet Union, a nation where atheism is fostered and even enforced on the common man by police methods (the very eventuality which the high and mighty philosophers said could never arrive), the official approval of that denial gives it a different quality. (The atheist is virtuously denying a belief which has stupefied the masses and reconciled them to oppression.) Nevertheless, the implication is still present that some domain has been explored and has been found to lack God—an implication expressed in so many words by the cosmonaut Titov. And this claim has the same epistemological status as the claim that God exists.

Or take a case in which orthodoxy supports the disbeliever even more firmly: the case of a scientist who avows the untruth of astrology. There is no connection between the changing position of the celestial bodies over time and the personal destinies of humans. If this avowal of disbelief does not seem to yield any credence to astrology, it is because the scientific community is so contemptuous of astrology that disavowal of it incurs no risk of being resented. Nevertheless, the difficulty which I am uncovering is still there. The scientific disavowal of astrology still involves the following implications: astrology claims something that means something; these claims can be investigated; they have been investigated and the investigators have succeeded in proving a negative. Scientists may scoff at the suggestion that these implications concede anything to astrology, or that they have a problematicity of validation which is on the same level as the problematicity of validation of astrology. Nevertheless, that is what I contend. I will go further. The self-reference cosmogenies of Carter, Wheeler, etc. suggest that there is a mutual dependence between the genesis and evolution of the celestial bodies and the human condition at the level of the individual. Like Rasputin crawling back up out of the cellar with seven bullets in his body, the belief which scientific disbelief seeks to kill rises yet again. A more stunning example is the revival of the thesis of the creation of the universe in finite past time. Let the Marxists in particular be informed: physics has proved the existence of God.

I will consider two final examples that to doubt or to deny a given thesis has untenable consequences for the skeptic. The solipsist affirms the thesis that nothing exists except his own mind. But again, there are untenable implications here of two types. The solipsist intimates that he has explored some domain or other where things might exist, and has found them absent; he also intimates that "his" mind has a persisting identity, and that utterances still exist as objectively meaningful language. Then, consider the contraposition of idealism and materialism as Marxists conceive it. The two theses are entirely at parity with each other in regard to the problematicity of their validation. The Marxists make it a moral imperative to avow the untruth of idealism. But the literal claim that one has looked outside of one's own consciousness or one's own experiences and has found solid matter out there is a claim which is as problematic intellectually as the contrary claim.

And if one retreats into agnosticism, one is placed in the position of professing that "there is a realm outside of my own consciousness which could contain solid matter, but I am unable in principle to tell whether it does or not." Again, one remains tied to a positive belief which is as problematic as what it seeks to disavow.

In short, doubt and denial, agnosticism and negative belief and solipsism, whether or not they were the occasions of hysteria on the part of the philosophers, are all trivially non-viable. The attempt to disavow any portion of supposed knowledge, if pursued in a naive way, if pursued within the inherited norms which govern cognition, will be trivially self-defeating and non-viable. If cognition were rigged only so as to force credulity in a small minority of theses which are highly reasonable, then the practical course might be to acquiesce to it with no questions asked. But forced credulity cannot be confined to reasonable theses alone. The inherited norms which govern cognition attribute some degree of credence to every thesis, no matter how undesired. Cognition is an activity which is rigged to force some degree of credence (or respect) toward any thesis which comes under consideration. Again, no doubt or denial is viable. But it would be premature for the faithful to leap with joy. They should consider that if no doubt or denial is viable, then honesty requires them to avow everything. They should not avow anything unless they are prepared to avow everything. Materialism, idealism, free will, determinism, God, atheism, archangels, seraphim, cherubim, incubi, succubi, astrology, ESP, the supernatural Creator of quantum cosmology—all accumulate as clutter which cannot be disposed of. Cognition is an interdependent whole, and the whole of it is rigged in favor of credulity. (That is why it can make sense to propose rejecting the whole of it.) And it is the observations of this paragraph that would have been made by the philosophers if they had pursued incredulousness seriously.

Thus, if there is a viable option at the incredulous end of the philosophical spectrum, it is going to have to be a much more ruthless and shocking option than those I have reviewed so far. If one wishes to opt out of any portion of supposed knowledge beyond the possibility of its resurrection, then a maneuver will be required which is much more ruthless and shocking than attempting to doubt or to deny particular theses within the norms which govern cognitive activity. A maneuver is required which is so ruthless that it will be perceived as lunacy, as a betrayal of the very social contract. But of course that is exactly what genuine incredulousness is. Kant, Wittgenstein et al. notwithstanding, genuine incredulousness must immediately become an attack on what we know as societal regimentation and on the inherited form of life. [Genuine incredulousness must go over to a coercive confrontation with schoolteachers, employers, managers, supervisors, bureaucrats ... and those who enforce their edicts ... and those who acquiesce to their edicts.]

But what could possibly have driven me to this level of disaffection? When I first presented the "nihilative" results for which I am now providing a heuristic context, the majority of people I was associated with concluded that I had arrived at a dead end, that I had fallen into an abyss of extremism from which there was no deliverance, that I had terminated my career as a thinker.

Indeed, these people felt that to derive an excessively negative result, even if correct, was treason to the social contract and in particular to the academic world (which was the sector of society they were most anxious to protect). But I am very clear on what my reasons are: I find cognitive clutter intolerable. Feyerabend is right that "to play the cognition game by the rules" more or less requires one to believe everything (given that the alternative of believing nothing is unmentionable). It is quite appropriate that the phrase "crisis of intellectual pollution" turns up in Against Method, for that is the crisis which Feyerabend is exacerbating. Let me characterize the situation in terms of the history of philosophy and of doctrinal conflict generally. The history of doctrinal conflict is basically a history of theories or interpretations each of which is unable to gain a decisive advantage over the others. And often both of two competing doctrines are plausible, and are able to locate real weaknesses and omissions in each other. (Examples are the equally plausible cases that can be made for free will and for the impersonal causation of human action; or the equal cases that can be made for materialism and idealism as abstract metaphysical doctrines.) What is more, it is painfully evident to me that the sort of intellectual innovations which constitute the merchandise of the academic world came about through a ploy which I call discriminatory skepticism or prejudicial skepticism. An academic thinker will create a "new" theory and initiate a new intellectual fashion by doubting one inherited tenet while unquestioningly and unwittingly accepting all other inherited tenets (and the latter may be interdependent with the tenet that is being impugned). In other words, the posture is one of infinite skepticism toward the "positive presumptions" of one's opponents concurrently with infinite credulity towards one's own positive presumptions. Thus, to repeat, what discriminatory skepticism or long-run doctrinal conflict has given us is an endless sequence of interpretations of the world, many of which are plausible, none of which can gain a decisive advantage over the others. It has given us a series of junctures from which the subsequent development is determined by fashion and conformity rather than by any intellectual imperative. Academic knowledge is a game of bandying theories all of which are equally indecisive. It is a game for gentlemen (or more lately, gentlefolk) who have a tacit understanding not to probe each other's beliefs too ruthlessly. The principal quality of academic knowledge is the indecisiveness of mere opinion. John Alten once let slip the remark that "One's acceptance or rejection of a theory is an esthetic choice" (Truth is a matter of taste). Just so, when truth is a matter of the insincerity, cowardice, and careerism of the cultural gentry. There is indeed a social contract to be tolerant toward the proliferation of doctrines; and to be loyal to academic professionalism, to protect achieved statuses. But from the beginning, I found the indecisiveness of academic knowledge--this clutter which devolves from insincerity, cowardice, and careerism--to be intolerable. My attitude was that thinkers who spend their time politely toying with clutter are not taking themselves seriously. They have tacitly established an intellectual regime which rewards failure, not success. But I happen to have a life-long

contempt for self-deception. (It is this trait of mine which gets stigmatized as Anglo-Saxon, and if the abhorrence of self-deception is peculiar to Anglo-Saxons, so be it.) I am sincere; and I have no intention of avowing everything. I have never promised to make life easy for academic careerists and the gentry. As for the question of how I could sin against the proletariat by dallying with philosophical skepticism and withholding assent to the Marxist credo, a good enough answer was given by Adorno in the opening sentences of Negative Dialectics:

"Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed. The summary judgment that it had merely interpreted the world, that resignation in the face of reality had crippled it in itself, becomes a defeatism of reason after the attempt to change the world miscarried. ... Perhaps it was an inadequate interpretation which promised that it would be put into practice. ... A practice indefinitely delayed is no longer the forum for appeals against self-satisfied speculation; it is mostly the pretext used by executive authorities to choke, as vain, whatever critical thoughts the practical change would require. Having broken its pledge to be as one with reality or at the point of realization, philosophy is obliged ruthlessly to criticize itself."

As Marx once rebounded from the bourgeois humanists because they fell so far short of their pretensions, we now rebound from Marx. And all apologies aside, given that the candid alternatives are to believe everything or to reject everything, I resolved to explore the latter alternative.

The first intimation that there is a way to opt out of belief which goes beyond doubt and negative belief was provided by Carnap's 1931 proposal that metaphysical theses or disputes are literally meaningless. But the force of Carnap's proposal has been overlooked for several reasons, two of which I want to comment on immediately. First, Carnap made the ludicrous and pathetic supposition that his principle of meaning could distinguish between metaphysics and natural science, and could simultaneously discredit the former and vindicate the latter. Thus, Carnap devoted most of his career efforts to advocating scientism. He also anticipated Hennix by making ludicrous attempts to devise artificial languages which were supposed to be free of metaphysical assumptions, ambiguities, and paradoxes. As a result, Carnap managed to incur the contempt of everyone who saw the weakness of scientism, and who realized how unlikely it was that a critique could exactly discredit metaphysics while leaving science unscathed. Secondly, Carnap's work was misperceived by some as an inferior imitation of the Wittgenstein of the Tractatus. As a matter of fact, the Wittgenstein-Carnap relationship is an object-lesson to the effect that a blunted imitation can be far more significant than the original; and that the main quality which distinguishes Wittgenstein--namely chic--is an extremely shallow virtue. When Wittgenstein said that "whereof one cannot speak, one must remain silent," he meant not to decapitate metaphysics, but to discourage

rationalist metaphysics in order to make way for a chic mysticism. Anyone who takes the trouble to peruse the Wittgenstein documentation in full will find that Wittgenstein was religious, was theistic, was mystical—and even applauded the inquiry into the mystery of Being in Being and Time (see Heidegger and Modern Philosophy, pp. xii, 82). As for Carnap, he began with [redacted] tentative misgivings towards metaphysics à la Mach. Then he read the Tractatus; and thereafter he began to call prophetically for the extinction of metaphysics. In comparison with Wittgenstein's fashionably cryptic, anguished, mystical rejection of metaphysics, Carnap seems like a clumsy peasant who cures the metaphysical headache by chopping off the head.

But Carnap was not too insensitive to arrive at this insight himself. In his own words,

"[Wittgenstein's] intellect, working with great intensity and penetrating power, had recognized that many statements in the field of religion and metaphysics did not, strictly speaking, say anything. In his characteristic absolute honesty with himself, he did not try to shut his eyes to this insight. But this result was extremely painful to him emotionally, as if he were compelled to admit a weakness in a beloved person. Schlick, and I, by contrast, had no love for metaphysics or metaphysical theology, and therefore could abandon them without inner conflict or regret. Earlier, when we were reading Wittgenstein's book in the Circle, I had erroneously believed that his attitude toward metaphysics was similar to ours. I had not paid sufficient attention to the statements in his book about the mystical, because his feelings and thoughts in this area were too divergent from mine. Only personal contact with him helped me to see more clearly his attitude at this point. I had the impression that his ambivalence with respect to metaphysics was only a special aspect of a more basic internal conflict in his personality from which he suffered deeply and painfully." Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Man and His Philosophy, p. 36.

(And this statement hardly supports the image of Carnap as a brute totally unaware of the phenomenon of religious anguish.)

But it is exactly Carnap's blunted, intolerant reformulation which is profound. Heuristically, what we need is not an exhaustion with metaphysics and anguish over the loss of God which makes way for ineffable theosophical vapors, but an unapologetic, unregretful masterstroke which challenges the right to exist of every mode of cognition except mathematical physics. (And if it is objected that this step leaves us unprotected against thingification and depreciation of the experience-world, the answer is that classical metaphysics and religion are not the viable correctives to the perversions of scientism.) If Carnap could have foregone his loyalty to science, if he could have acknowledged that his early, blunt masterstroke was as incompatible with science as with metaphysics, then he would have begun to anticipate my philosophy.

Therefore, let us at least restate Carnap's proposal without representing it as an apologia for physics. Does God exist? Does God not exist? Are we unable to know whether God exists or not? Is consciousness the only reality? Is matter the only reality? Carnap said that since these propositions are not semantically connected to our sensations in any way which makes them experientially testable, they are literally meaningless. The language in which these grand disputes are embodied is literal nonsense. In this light it is perhaps the position of an agnostic (such as Kant) which is the most objectionable, because he elaborately professes ignorance in regard to issues which are plain nonsense. It is the presumption that the disputants' language means something which has to go.

Carnap's critique of metaphysical language on the basis of empirical testability is also far more educative than Wittgenstein's later doctrines. The later Wittgenstein took the ordinary use of ordinary language as a primitive (or ultimate reality) exempt from all criticism, including immanent criticism; he completely relinquished natural science to the experts; and he rejected "philosophy" solely on the grounds that it was an improper use of ordinary language (albeit a use as historic as ordinary language itself). As I have said, Wittgenstein's "rejection of philosophy," while chic, is also utterly confirmatory of the intellectual status quo, and makes ordinary credulity obligatory. Carnap's trust in artificial language had one beneficial consequence: it allowed him to refuse to accept ordinary language as a primitive exempt from all critique.

Carnap, then, was the first to suggest a mode of incredulousness more ruthless than skepticism or negative belief. Do you believe in materialism, or do you believe in idealism, or do you admit your inadequacy to know which is true? Carnap would say that he is certain that the language in which these positions are embodied is meaningless. There is no hesitation, no doubt in this stance. In the 1931 paper, Carnap said that even a god could not give us metaphysical knowledge, because there is just no way to inject knowledge into misbegotten concatenations of human words. So far as I am concerned, what I have just written is the statement which Carnap should have made. Properly edited, Carnap's unregretful, intolerant masterstroke is a quantum jump in insight.

But Carnap's stance is still not nearly good enough to constitute the viable option of incredulousness. I have said that Carnap's criterion of testability is as inimical to natural science as to metaphysics, but how is this so, and how does this compel us to abandon Carnap's formulation? Let me explain as briefly as possible. In Carnap's rationale for science, the most elementary scientific fact has for its empirical content an infinite number of propositions about immediate sensations (protocol-sentences). Needless to say, only a very small number of the latter propositions receive actual verification (as opposed to imaginary verification). If we sever the actually verified protocols from the infinite conjunction of protocols, what remains is as effectively blocked from verification as any metaphysical proposition. A scientific fact is a fabrication which amalgamates a few trivially testable meanings with an infinite number of untestable meanings and inveigles us to accept the whole conglomeration at once. Further, beyond the realization that natural science is just as inexperiential and meaningless as metaphysics (apart from a trivial collection of protocols), there is some sort of tactical

flaw in professing that only experience is real, or that all trans-experiential propositions are meaningless--as if these formulations could be stable positive truths. Carnap wanted to propound a theory of meaning by which a proposition would be meaningful precisely if it had some implication which was experiential. But once it is clear that only the actually verified protocols accord with the principle which Carnap invoked, then the theory of meaning is itself not viable as a stable positive creed. If "only experience exists," then there is no basis to say so. Once again, there turns out to be something self-defeating or non-viable in the attempt to adopt an incredulous stance.

And this is the point at which I began to philosophize, in 1959-60. It is necessary to utilize the conclusion which I stated in this essay before I reviewed Carnap's contribution. Cognition is an activity which is rigged to force some degree of credence (or respect) toward any thesis which comes under consideration. It is necessary to focus this insight precisely; and to embody it in a text which does not need to function as a stable positive creed, but can rather perform a bootstrap or Cheshire cat function. I will give the briefest of sketches of how this is done. The decisive insight is that there must be "a realm beyond my immediate experience" if the reference to such a realm is even meaningful. But this is no proof that "a realm beyond my experience" exists. It is a proof that the assertion that "There is a realm beyond my immediate experience" is too true to be meaningful; that it is self-validating nonsense. And since the ultimate consideration here is the meaningfulness of language, the question "Is there a realm beyond my immediate experience?" should be replaced by the question "Is there language?" as the ultimate question of philosophy. [Cf. FPMT for an extended exposition of what the claim of the existence of (some meaningful) language, as a contingent fact, includes.] And the statement "There is language" must be true if it can be avowed. Again, this is no proof of the existence of language; it is a proof that we are inside a rigged activity--that the assertion of the existence of language is self-validating nonsense. The genuine option in the incredulous philosophical modality --finally--cannot be a stable positive thesis at all. It must be a Cheshire cat manifestation of the juncture at which language "short-circuits." Thus it was that by 1964 my complete works consisted in a single page which makes no social or historical references. (And which provides no explicative theory of language, truth, and cognition--or of logic, identity, and existence.)

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I began with a determination to escape the academic game of bandying theories which are all equally indecisive, to escape intellectual fashions concocted by means of discriminatory skepticism, to escape intolerable cognitive clutter, to escape self-deception. I began with a determination to escape the idiocy expressed in the advertisements which urge us to "Believe a religion today--it doesn't matter which one." And this determination has finally led me to a Cheshire-cat manifestation that language short-circuits, and that cognition in its entirety is a charade. This outcome is just what my former associates were afraid of; it is the outcome which they said could yield no benefit whatever.

But before the faithful leap with joy because the unbeliever has ended in a void, they had better consider how many myths their faith is prepared to engorge. What is more, people who warn that there can be no advantage to understanding the ultimate inconsistency and gratuitousness and inanity of cognition are fools. (Even the philistines who manufacture advertising realize that you don't have to use a product in order to sell it.) On the other hand, everything which is worth saying about the uses of my nihilative insight has to be elaborated at great length--and this is exactly what I do in my many post-1964 manuscripts. I will finish out this essay by giving only the briefest of hints as to what the subsequent development encompasses.

The applications of my nihilative insight which lend themselves to lengthy elaboration all come under the classification of shrewd hypocrisy. The academic bandying of mere interpretations, based on the tacit prohibition of all ruthless probing, manifests a shallow, trivial non-uniqueness of knowledge. But my shrewd hypocrisy explores the non-uniqueness of "reality" in a profound way: by engineering novel views which must be accepted in consequence of accepting established views; and by "making reality malleable" (by unraveling it from within). I potentiate hypocrisy to the level of a sorcery. One shows that one understands by one's ability to depart from the prevailing belief-system in several compelling directions.

I may characterize this same range of applications in a somewhat different --and narrower--way. Through my researches on the evaluational processing of experience, etc., I show that the application of diminished credulity (among other things) can produce a whole spectrum of alternate "determinations of reality" which satisfy the norms of rationality, empiricism, and cognitive parsimony at least as well as natural science does. The reason why I would want to respect these latter norms is that I am not interested in credulity fads: in occultist fads which are not consequential, not compelling, which cannot outcompete and overmaster natural science, which are quickly relegated to the status of recreational superstition. As for the significance of these alternate determinations of reality, they would be important if they did nothing else but provide counter-examples to science's claim to be the only rational belief-system.

But the considerations in this essay, and my final nihilative result, also raise the issue of an escape from forced credulousness--including the credulousness of disbelief--to a condition of radical unbelief. What about directly exploring radical unbelief as a "condition of consciousness"? For whatever it is worth, I may say that I am not challenging one's "sensations," only one's "belief-interpretations" of them. But this raises the whole issue of belief-interpretations of sensations or imputed contexts of objectivity in experience, and the issue of the critique of descriptive language and its compartmentalizing presuppositions. I may say that my early post-philosophical creations, such as "Energy Cube Organism," were meant precisely as intellectual activities for a situation in which cognition is no longer respected. I may also say that I have written extensively about issues posed by radical unbelief, in such essays as "Superseding the Life-World," "Philosophical Aspects of Walking Through Walls," and "Determination of an Objectivity by Reciprocal Subjectivity." Radical unbelief indeed poses such issues as "Would you walk out of a tenth-story window?"; and these issues have to be minutely re-examined to locate the junctures at which they "pull a swindle." I already gave one pertinent hint earlier in this essay when I mentioned Dave Concepcion. Seeing an instrumental procedure "work," over and over again, does not make a law out of it.