

The Jargon of Authenticity

David Ferraro

Mindfulness and positive psychology as ideology

Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative: 'try not to think'

It would be tempting, perhaps, to describe 'positive psychology' as the latest fad in a discipline not short of buzzwords and passing fashions. Tempting, but not true, since this particular trend has thoroughly infiltrated almost every form of psychotherapeutic mental-health treatment, and many other areas besides, and is implemented in the corporate world, the public sector and educational settings. The function of this doctrine of optimism in times of crisis calls for explanation, remembering that here, as elsewhere, the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.

One can get a sense of what the doctrine is all about in 'Positive Psychology', a pamphlet published by Australian mental-health research and advocacy centre the Black Dog Institute. The aim of such a psychology, according to the pamphlet, is 'wellbeing'. (One should carefully note that the construction of the subject of positive psychology is ontological—based on well-being—and not ethical and oriented around well doing or well saying.) This need for wellbeing seems implicitly, at least, to derive from meaninglessness, since 'meaning' is everywhere posited as a key goal of positive psychology. The 'meaning' in question is in turn reducible to a set of practices or 'strategies', including those aimed at 'enhancing pleasure'; such as committing to regular acts of self-congratulation, seeking novelty and being 'absorbed' in all this to the extent that you 'try not to think, just sense'. Beyond this are further recommendations for wellbeing, such as practising forgiveness, thanking mentors and engaging in 'mindfulness', to which we shall return shortly. Perhaps the most famous exponent of the positive psychology approach is Martin Seligman, whose strategies are promoted in his book *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*. Pitted against contem-

porary meaninglessness is a terminology involving 'authenticity', the immediacy of 'presence', a pathologisation of the 'negative', and acceptance and commitment (though generally much more of the former than the latter).

Such rhetoric recalls that which was pilloried in Theodor Adorno's brief and incisive work *The Jargon of Authenticity*. Adorno's tome was a critique of German existentialism, particularly that of Jaspers and Heidegger. By examining both the language of the philosophers and the conceptual machinery of their project, Adorno argued for German existentialism to be grasped in terms of ideology. In dismantling the jargon—of 'authenticity', 'wholeness', 'immediacy' and the like—he was able to reveal its underpinnings as a series of religious gestures, but devoid of religious content. This was an ideological mystification of human domination, with affinities to at least two other discourses of note from the twentieth century: mass advertising, and the philosophical apologetics for German fascism.

One need not be particularly radical to observe that an approach that eschews context and history greatly favours oppressors over the oppressed.

The conceptual heir of the German ideologues is, arguably, today's positive psychology movement, a predominantly Anglophone appropriation of the Continental European tradition of existential-humanistic psychology, with some pop Buddhism and patronising glibness added for good measure. ('Critical positivity ratios; anyone?') What I wish to show here is that Adorno's critique applies to this movement as it did to the German existentialists, and that both jargons operate ideologically in a similar manner: as a method of pacification and obedience, for the promotion of personal narcissism and consumerism, and in service of crypto-fascist and militaristic functions.

Mindfulness and the marketing of immediacy

At the heart of positive psychology is mindfulness. It derives from certain Buddhist tenets aimed at a pacification of the mind. (For summaries, see Virginia Heffernan's 'The Muddled Meaning of Mindfulness' in *The New York Times Magazine* and Brad Warner's 'Why I Avoid Using the Word "Mindfulness"' in *Hardcore Zen*).

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David Ferraro

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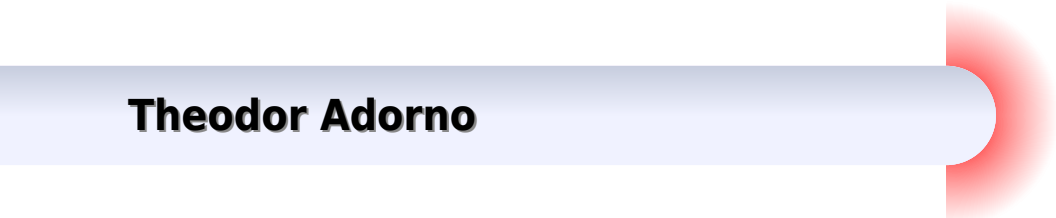


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The Jargon Of Authenticity

Theodor Adorno



The Jargon Of Authenticity:

The Jargon of Authenticity Theodor W. Adorno, 1973 A philosophical critique of Heidegger and modern German thought that focuses on the validity of existentialist jargon and the relationship between language and truth Bibliogs **The Jargon of Authenticity** Theodor Adorno, 2013-09-13 Theodor Adorno was no stranger to controversy In The Jargon of Authenticity he gives full expression to his hostility to the language employed by certain existentialist thinkers such as Martin Heidegger With his customary alertness to the uses and abuses of language he calls into question the jargon or aura as his colleague Walter Benjamin described it which clouded existentialists thought He argued that its use undermined the very message for meaning and liberation that it sought to make authentic Moreover such language claiming to address the issue of freedom signally failed to reveal the lack of freedom inherent in the capitalist context in which it was written Instead along with the jargon of the advertising jingle it attributed value to the satisfaction of immediate desire Alerting his readers to the connection between ideology and language Adorno's frank and open challenge to directness and the avoidance of language that gives itself over either to the market to balderdash or to the predominating vulgarity is as timely today as it ever has been *The Jargon of Authenticity* Theodor Adorno, 2013-09-13 Theodor Adorno was no stranger to controversy In The Jargon of Authenticity he gives full expression to his hostility to the language employed by certain existentialist thinkers such as Martin Heidegger With his customary alertness to the uses and abuses of language he calls into question the jargon or aura as his colleague Walter Benjamin described it which clouded existentialists thought He argued that its use undermined the very message for meaning and liberation that it sought to make authentic Moreover such language claiming to address the issue of freedom signally failed to reveal the lack of freedom inherent in the capitalist context in which it was written Instead along with the jargon of the advertising jingle it attributed value to the satisfaction of immediate desire Alerting his readers to the connection between ideology and language Adorno's frank and open challenge to directness and the avoidance of language that gives itself over either to the market to balderdash or to the predominating vulgarity is as timely today as it ever has been The Jargon of Authenticity Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, 1986 *The jargon of authenticity* Theodor W. Adorno, 1973 **Meaning and Authenticity** Brian J. Braman, 2008-01-01 Presents a dialogue between Bernard Lonergan and Charles Taylor thinkers who placed a high value on the search for human authenticity both of whom maintain that there is a normative conception of authentic human life that overcomes moral relativism narcissism privatism and the collapse of the public self **Heidegger, History and the Holocaust** Mahon O'Brien, 2015-09-24 Heidegger History and the Holocaust is an important contribution to the longstanding debate concerning Martin Heidegger's association with National Socialism Although a difficult topic this ambitious new work moves the entire debate on the Heidegger controversy forward Following Being and Time Heidegger expands on his notion of authenticity and related notions such as historicity and discusses the possibility of an authentic Dasein of a people along structurally consistent lines to his account of authenticity in

Being and Time O'Brien argues that the same difficulties which appear to hamstring the early account of authenticity further affect the notion of an authentic Dasein of a people Heidegger's political myopia in the thirties can thus be attributed to an underlying failure to come to terms with some of the difficulties discussed in this study O'Brien concedes that Heidegger's philosophy is influenced by its historical period and context but argues that however inflammatory Heidegger's rhetoric cannot be simply reduced to crude Nazi jingoism This book is a genuinely philosophical approach to the Heidegger controversy and a much needed re-examination of his ideas and influences **Essays from the Edge** Martin Jay, 2011-06-10

Over his distinguished career as a European intellectual historian and cultural critic Martin Jay has explored a variety of major themes the Frankfurt School the exile of German intellectuals in America during the Nazi era Western Marxism the denigration of vision in twentieth century French thought the discourse of experience in modern Europe and America and lying in politics *Essays from the Edge* assembles Jay's writings from the intersections of this intellectual journey Several essays focus on methodological debates in the humanities and social sciences the limits of interdisciplinarity the issue of national or universal philosophy cultural relativism and visuality and the implications of periodization in historical narrative Others examine the concept of scopophilic regime and the metaphors of revolution and the gardening impulse Among the theorists treated at length are Theodor Adorno Hannah Arendt Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault The essays also include several of Jay's *Salmagundi* columns dealing with subjects as varied as the new Museum of Modern Art in New York the impact of Colin Wilson's *The Outsider* and the demise of the *Partisan Review* All of these efforts can be considered what Arthur Schopenhauer called to borrow the title of one of his most celebrated collections *parerga and paralipomena* As essays from the edges of major projects they illuminate Jay's major arguments elaborate points made only in passing in the larger texts and explore ideas farther than would have been possible given the focus of the larger works themselves The result is a lively diverse offering from an extraordinary intellect **The House That Race Built** Wahneema Lubiano, 2010-06-09

In these essays brought together by the scholar Wahneema Lubiano some of today's most respected intellectuals share their ideas on race power gender and society The authors including Cornel West Angela Y Davis and Toni Morrison argue that we have reached a crisis of democracy represented by an ominous shift toward a renewed white nationalism in which racism is operating in coded quasi-respectable new forms **Volume 11, Tome I: Kierkegaard's Influence on Philosophy** Jon

Stewart, 2016-12-05 Kierkegaard's relation to the field of philosophy is a particularly complex and disputed one He rejected the model of philosophical inquiry that was mainstream in his day and was careful to have his pseudonymous authors repeatedly disassociate themselves from philosophy But although it seems clear that Kierkegaard never regarded himself as a philosopher there can be no doubt that his writings contain philosophical ideas and insights and have been profoundly influential in a number of different philosophical traditions The present volume documents these different traditions of the philosophical reception of Kierkegaard's thought and the articles featured demonstrate the vast reach of Kierkegaard's

writings in philosophical contexts that were often quite different from his own Tome I is dedicated to exploring the reception of Kierkegaard in Germanophone and Scandinavian philosophy Kierkegaard has been a major influence for such different philosophical projects as phenomenology hermeneutics dialogical thinking critical theory Marxism logical positivism and ordinary language philosophy Similarly in Denmark and Norway Kierkegaard's writings have been more or less constantly discussed by important philosophers despite the later dominance of analytic philosophy in these countries The present tome features articles on the leading Germanophone and Scandinavian philosophers influenced by Kierkegaard's thought

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