

Marx and Wittgenstein

Knowledge, morality and politics

Edited by

Gavin Kitching and Nigel Pleasants

Routledge Studies in Social and Political Thought



**Also available as a printed book
see title verso for ISBN details**

Marx and Wittgenstein

Karl Marx and Ludwig Wittgenstein are often thought to be as deeply opposed to each other as it is possible for two major thinkers to be.

Despite this standard conception, however, a small number of scholars have long suggested that there are deeper philosophical commonalities between Marx and Wittgenstein. They have argued that, once grasped, these commonalities can radically change and enrich understanding both of Marxism and of Wittgensteinian philosophy. This book develops and extends this unorthodox view, emphasising the mutual enrichment that comes from bringing Marx's and Wittgenstein's ideas into dialogue with one another.

The contributors to this book are leading scholars drawn from sociology, politics, economics and philosophy. They focus on areas such as:

- the influence of the Marxist economist Piero Sraffa on Wittgenstein's philosophical development
- the limitations of the conventional arguments on Wittgenstein's significance for social science found in the writings of Peter Winch and Ernest Gellner
- the 'philosophical anthropology' of Marx and Wittgenstein
- the ethical and political status of Marxist knowledge-claims when seen in the light of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

Essential reading for all scholars and philosophers interested in the Marxist thought and the philosophy of Wittgenstein, this book will also be of vital interest to those studying and researching in the fields of social philosophy, political philosophy, philosophy of social science and political economy.

Gavin Kitching is a Professor of Politics at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. In addition to *Karl Marx and the Philosophy of Praxis* (Routledge, 1988) and *Marxism and Science: Analysis of an Obsession* (Penn State, 1994), he has written books on Africa, Third World development and globalisation. A collection of personal essays, *Wittgenstein and Society*, will be published in 2003.

Nigel Pleasants is Lecturer in Sociology and Philosophy at the University of Exeter, UK. He is the author of *Wittgenstein and the Idea of a Critical Social Theory: A Critique of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar* (Routledge, 1999).

Routledge Studies in Social and Political Thought

- 1 **Hayek and After**
Hayekian liberalism as a research programme
Jeremy Shearmur
- 2 **Conflicts in Social Science**
Edited by Anton van Harskamp
- 3 **Political Thought of André Gorz**
Adrian Little
- 4 **Corruption, Capitalism and Democracy**
John Girling
- 5 **Freedom and Culture in Western Society**
Hans Blokland
- 6 **Freedom in Economics**
New perspectives in normative analysis
Edited by Jean-François Lasher, Marc Fleurbaey, Nicolas Gravel and Alain Trannoy
- 7 **Against Politics**
On government, anarchy and order
Anthony de Jasay
- 8 **Max Weber and Michel Foucault**
Parallel life works
Arpad Szakolczai
- 9 **The Political Economy of Civil Society and Human Rights**
G.B. Madison
- 10 **On Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life***
Edited by W.S.F. Pickering, W. Watts Miller and N.J. Allen
- 11 **Classical Individualism**
The supreme importance of each human being
Tibor R. Machan
- 12 **The Age of Reasons**
Quixotism, sentimentalism and political economy in eighteenth-century Britain
Wendy Motooka

- 13 Individualism in Modern Thought**
From Adam Smith to Hayek
Lorenzo Infantino
- 14 Property and Power in Social Theory**
A study in intellectual rivalry
Dick Pels
- 15 Wittgenstein and the Idea of a Critical Social Theory**
A critique of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar
Nigel Pleasants
- 16 Marxism and Human Nature**
Sean Sayers
- 17 Goffman and Social Organization**
Studies in a sociological legacy
Edited by Greg Smith
- 18 Situating Hayek**
Phenomenology and the neo-liberal project
Mark J. Smith
- 19 The Reading of Theoretical Texts**
Peter Ekegren
- 20 The Nature of Capital**
Marx after Foucault
Richard Marsden
- 21 The Age of Chance**
Gambling in Western culture
Gerda Reith
- 22 Reflexive Historical Sociology**
Arpad Szakolczai
- 23 Durkheim and Representations**
Edited by W.S.F. Pickering
- 24 The Social and Political Thought of Noam Chomsky**
Alison Edgley

- 25 Hayek's Liberalism and Its Origins**
His idea of spontaneous order and the Scottish Enlightenment
Christina Petsoulas
- 26 Metaphor and the Dynamics of Knowledge**
Sabine Maasen and Peter Weingart
- 27 Living with Markets**
Jeremy Shearmur
- 28 Durkheim's Suicide**
A century of research and debate
Edited by W.S.F.Pickering and Geoffrey Walford
- 29 Post-Marxism**
An intellectual history
Stuart Sim
- 30 The Intellectual as Stranger**
Studies in spokespersonship
Dick Pels
- 31 Hermeneutic Dialogue and Social Science**
A critique of Gadamer and Habermas
Austin Harrington
- 32 Methodological Individualism**
Background, history and meaning
Lars Udehn
- 33 John Stuart Mill and Freedom of Expression**
The genesis of a theory
K.C.O'Rourke
- 34 The Politics of Atrocity and Reconciliation**
From terror to trauma
Michael Humphrey
- 35 Marx and Wittgenstein**
Knowledge, morality and politics
Edited by Gavin Kitching and Nigel Pleasants
- 36 The Genesis of Modernity**
Arpad Szokolczai

Marx and Wittgenstein

Knowledge, morality and politics

**Edited by Gavin Kitching
and Nigel Pleasants**

First published 2002 by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003.

© 2002 Selection and editorial material, Gavin Kitching and
Nigel Pleasants; individual chapters, the authors

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced
or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means,
now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording,
or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in
writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

Marx and Wittgenstein: knowledge, morality, and politics / edited by
Gavin Kitching and Nigel Pleasants.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 1889–1951. 2. Marx, Karl, 1818–1883.

I. Kitching, G.N. II. Pleasants, Nigel, 1962–

B3376 .W564 M295 2002

192–dc21

2002069894

ISBN 0-203-45340-9 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-76164-2 (Adobe eReader Format)

ISBN 0-415-24775-6 (Print Edition)

For Joachim Israel

Contents

<i>Notes on contributors</i>	xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xv
Introduction GAVIN KITCHING	1
PART I Conventional wisdoms	21
1 Ernest Gellner's criticisms of Wittgenstein and ordinary language philosophy T.P.USCHANOV	23
PART II Commonalities	47
2 Marx and Wittgenstein as natural historians TED SCHATZKI	49
3 Marx and Wittgenstein: culture and practical reason DAVID RUBINSTEIN	63
4 Commodity fetishism as a form of life: language and value in Wittgenstein and Marx DAVID ANDREWS	78

5 Marx, Wittgenstein and postmodernism	95
TERRELL CARVER	
PART III	
Wittgenstein and Sraffa	111
6 Sraffa's influence on Wittgenstein: a conjecture	113
KEIRAN SHARPE	
7 A Marxist influence on Wittgenstein via Sraffa	131
JOHN B.DAVIS	
PART IV	
Disjunctions	145
8 Wittgenstein, Winch and Marx	147
TED BENTON	
9 Towards a critical use of Marx and Wittgenstein	160
NIGEL PLEASANTS	
PART V	
Forerunners	183
10 Towards a Marxian use of Wittgenstein	185
FERRUCCIO ROSSI-LANDI	
11 Remarks on Marxism and the philosophy of language	213
JOACHIM ISRAEL	
PART VI	
Knowledge, morality and politics	229
12 Marxism and reflexivity	231
GAVIN KITCHING	

13 Marx and Wittgenstein on vampires and parasites: a critique of capital and metaphysics	254
RUPERT READ	
14 Beyond Marx and Wittgenstein (a confession of a Wittgensteinian Marxist turned Taoist)	282
K.T.FANN	
<i>Index</i>	295

Contributors

David Andrews is Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Social Science at Cazenovia College, New York, USA. His research focuses on the intersections of economics and philosophy. Most recently he has written articles on philosophy and the economics of Piero Sraffa and J.M.Keynes.

Ted Benton is Professor of Sociology at the University of Essex, UK. He is author of numerous publications on Marxist philosophy and social theory, history of the life-sciences and political ecology, including *Natural Relations* (Verso, 1993), *The Greening of Marxism* (editor; Guilford Press, 1996) and *Philosophy of Social Science* (with I.Craib; Palgrave, 2001).

Terrell Carver is Professor of Political Theory at the University of Bristol, UK. He has degrees from Columbia and Oxford, at which he developed an interest in Wittgenstein. He has published extensively on Marx and Engels, as well as on gender. His most recent book is *The Postmodern Marx* (Manchester University Press, 1998).

John B.Davis is Professor of Economics and International Business at Marquette University. He is the author of *Keynes's Philosophical Development* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), editor of *New Economics and Its History* (Duke University Press, 1998), and co-editor of *The Handbook of Economic Methodology* (Edward Elgar, 1998). He is currently working on a book to be published by Routledge on theories of the individual in economics.

K.T.Fann, now retired, was formerly Professor and Head of Philosophy Department at York University, Canada. He is the author of *Wittgenstein's Conception of Philosophy* (Blackwell, 1969) *Peirce's Theory of Abduction* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), and editor of *Ludwig Wittgenstein the Man and His Philosophy* ([1967] Harvester Press, 1978) and *Symposium on J.L.Austin* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).

Joachim Israel was, until his death in 2001, Professor Emeritus, University of Lund, Sweden. His publications include: *Alienation from Marx to Modern Sociology* ([1968] Harvester Press, 1979), *The Dialectics of Language and the Language of Dialectics* (Harvester Press, 1979), *Sprache und Erkenntnis* (Campus, 1990), *Martin Buber: Dialogphilosophie in Theorie und Praxis*

(Duncker and Humblot, 1995); *The New Class Society* (1997) and *Action and Interaction: A Critical Analysis* (1999) (both in Swedish).

Gavin Kitching is a Professor of Politics at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. In addition to his *Karl Marx and the Philosophy of Praxis* (Routledge, 1988) and *Marxism and Science: Analysis of an Obsession* (Penn State, 1994) he has also written books on Africa, Third World development and globalisation. A collection of personal essays, *Wittgenstein and Society*, will be published in 2003.

Nigel Pleasants is Lecturer in Sociology and Philosophy at the University of Exeter, UK. He is the author of *Wittgenstein and the Idea of a Critical Social Theory: A Critique of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar* (Routledge, 1999).

Rupert Read is Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK. His publications include *Thomas Kuhn, the Philosopher of Scientific Revolution* (with W.Sharrock; Polity, in press), *The New Wittgenstein* (edited with Alice Crary; Routledge, 2000), *The New Hume Debate* (edited with Ken Richman; Routledge, 2000).

Ferruccio Rossi-Landi was born in 1921 and died in 1985. He held Chairs of Philosophy at the Universities of Padua, Lecce and Trieste as well as studying and teaching in the UK and the USA. He played a leading role in introducing Wittgenstein's ideas to an Italian audience. His major publications in English include *Contact: Human Communication and Its History* (Thames and Hudson, 1981), *Language as Labour and Trade* (Bergin and Garvey, 1983), *Marxism and Ideology* (Clarendon Press, 1990) and *Between Signs and Non-Signs* (Benjamin, 1992).

David Rubinstein is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Illinois, Chicago, USA. He is the author of *Marx and Wittgenstein: Social Science and Social Praxis* (Routledge, 1981) and *Structure, Culture, and Agency: Towards a Truly Multidimensional Sociology* (Sage, 2001).

Ted Schatzki is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Kentucky, USA. He is the author of *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social* (Cambridge University Press, 1996) and *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change* (Penn State, 2002).

Keiran Sharpe is Lecturer in Economics at the Queen's College, Oxford. He is interested in the classical tradition of economics that proceeds from the work of Piero Sraffa, and has published a number of articles on that subject. He is currently undertaking a constructively critical analysis of the concept of agency in economics along Sraffian and Wittgensteinian lines.

T.P.Uschanov is at the University of Helsinki, Finland, where he is planning a doctoral dissertation on the history of the reception of Wittgenstein's thought from the 1920s to the present. His other major research interest is the philosophical critique of modernity as developed by such figures as Benjamin and Ortega y Gasset.

Preface

This book originated from an international symposium on ‘Marx and Wittgenstein’ held at Trinity College, Cambridge, UK, between 29 March and 1 April 1999. All but three of the sixteen who attended the symposium have written chapters for the book. However, even chapters derived from symposium papers have been considerably developed for publication here, and in four cases symposium participants have written a chapter especially for the book in place of their original paper. In addition to contributions by symposium participants the editors have also included two further chapters by other scholars (T.P. Uschanov and Ferruccio Rossi-Landi) in order to further deepen and complete the text.

The original symposium brought together people from six countries and four continents, and this book contains contributions from people from a further two nations. The symposium was, and this book is, therefore, a genuinely *international* initiative, in which a variety of cultural, as well as intellectual, perspectives are brought to bear on this fascinating topic. The symposium was also an unusually interdisciplinary event, bringing together not just philosophers but also economists, sociologists and political theorists interested in some aspect of the life and thought of Marx and/or Wittgenstein.

In a period in academic history in which academics are increasingly battered by demands that their activities be ‘practical’, ‘policy relevant’ and above all ‘income generating’, the symposium on ‘Marx and Wittgenstein’ was determinedly none of these things, which is perhaps why all its participants recall it with affection as one of the most intellectually stimulating events of recent years and one which has given rise to some lasting friendships.

The editors of this book, and the organisers of the symposium—Gavin Kitching and Nigel Pleasants—wish to thank Trinity College for its hospitality in hosting the event and subsidising part of the costs, and also James Whiting of Routledge for commissioning the publication of the resulting book. The hopes we have for the influence which this book might exert are laid out in more detail in the Introduction which follows. But suffice it to say here that if this book were to result in a generalised dialogue both among and between Marxists and Wittgensteinians even approximating the openness, intensity and honesty displayed in Cambridge then its editors will be more than satisfied.

Gavin Kitching
Nigel Pleasants
June 2002

Introduction

Gavin Kitching

I never heard him talk politics, though who can doubt that he was deeply disturbed by the events of those years, and may have been shaken in the conservatism he brought from home. Yet, whenever a political issue came up he would bristle. Once when he said something derogatory about Marxism I turned on him furiously, saying it was nothing like so discredited as were his own antiquated political opinions. To my astonishment he looked taken aback. He was silenced!

(Fania Pascal, 'A personal memoir' in Rush Rhees (ed.) *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)

Wittgenstein probably struck Pascal as an 'old time conservative' because of his hostility to Marxism. But many of Wittgenstein's other friends received a very different impression. George Thomson, for example...speaks of Wittgenstein's 'growing political awareness during those years' (the 1930s) and says that, although he did not discuss politics very often with Wittgenstein, he did so 'enough to show that he kept himself informed about current events. He was alive to the evils of unemployment and fascism and the growing danger of war.' Thomson adds, in relation to Wittgenstein's attitude to Marxism: 'He was opposed to it in theory, but supported it in practice.' This chimes with a remark Wittgenstein once made to Rowland Hutt... 'I am a communist at heart.' It should be remembered, too, that many of Wittgenstein's friends of this period... were Marxists. In addition to George Thomson there were Piero Sraffa, whose opinion Wittgenstein valued above all on questions of politics, Nicholas Bachtin and Maurice Dobb. There is no doubt that during the political upheavals of the mid-1930s Wittgenstein's sympathies were with the working class and the unemployed, and that his allegiance, broadly speaking, was with the left.

(Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1990)

Conventional wisdoms

Despite some occasional contrary voices, to whom I will refer shortly, it is fair to say that the dominant view in the worlds of philosophy and social science was, and probably still is, that no two thinkers have *less* in common than Karl Marx and Ludwig Wittgenstein. And certainly it is not difficult to place the two men at the extreme opposite ends of several spectra. Karl Marx, the thinker who

2 *Gavin Kitching*

averred that ‘philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the thing however is to change it’ (Marx, 1970a: 30), confronts the Austrian philosopher one of whose best-known aphorisms is that ‘philosophy...leaves everything as it is’ (Wittgenstein, 1972: §124). Karl Marx, whose explicit engagement with philosophical issues ended early in his intellectual life and who turned firmly away from philosophical concerns to political activism and to ‘the critique of political economy’, is not difficult to contrast sharply with a thinker who, after a brief flirtation with aeronautical engineering, gave his entire life to academic philosophy and showed virtually no interest in conventional political activity¹ throughout that life. Above all, perhaps, a thinker who is conventionally credited with founding the ‘science’ of ‘historical materialism’ and most of whose followers have considered themselves to be possessed of ‘scientific’ insights into society, economy and even into patterns of historical development, would seem to have little in common with a philosopher who once asked ‘who knows the laws by which society evolves? I am sure they are a closed book to the cleverest of men’ (Wittgenstein, 1980:60e) and who was profoundly sceptical (at least) of attempts to extend ‘scientific’ ways of knowing into the study of human beings and their activities.

So if there was—and still is—a conventional wisdom that Marx and Wittgenstein have little in common and even less to say to one another, it is not a conventional wisdom entirely without grounds to support it. And in fact it is not the aim of this volume to suggest that this conventional wisdom is *entirely* groundless or *entirely* wrong. Still less is it our aim here to argue some ridiculous thesis to the effect that Wittgenstein was a ‘closet Marxist’ (or Marx an unknowing Wittgensteinian). Our aim is rather threefold:

- 1 To draw attention to some ‘deep’ (i.e. not obvious or apparent) commonalities in the thought of Marx and Wittgenstein, and commonalities which set both of them against certain powerful—even dominant—trends in western philosophy and social theory.
- 2 To show that, despite these commonalities, there are still important differences between Marxian and Wittgensteinian views of the world and (therefore) differences over precisely *how* and *to what degree* these world views can be, or even should be, aligned. These differences were apparent among contributors to the original symposium upon which this book is based and they reappear in its pages. In particular, there is a marked difference of emphasis between those contributors—like Ted Benton and David Rubinstein—who think that the ‘idea of a social science’ still has some important validity (and in Benton’s case at least, that such a science can be founded on a Marxian framework) and others—such as Gavin Kitching, Nigel Pleasants and Rupert Read—who are more sceptical about this possibility, although on somewhat varied grounds.

In addition, however, it is the aim of this book to suggest that:

- 3 the perspectives of Marx and Wittgenstein on the world can be, as it were, *mutually enriching*—that a ‘Wittgensteinian Marxism’ (or a ‘Marxist Wittgensteinianism’) can offer a way both of understanding and of being in the social world which is in certain ways much richer and more rewarding than that offered by either conventional Marxism or conventional Wittgensteinianism.

Commonalities

No one who has taught any form of social science or studied historical and contemporary debates in social theory can fail to be struck by the still powerful methodological hold of a certain kind of dualism over the entire field. That dualism takes several interlinked forms (see Rubinstein, 1981:181–207) but the most fundamental of them (in the sense that it affects all the others) is a subject–object dualism which is simultaneously a dualism of observer and observed. That is, the student who is being introduced to the fundamentals of any social science discipline will be asked to place themselves in the imagined role of an ‘outside observer’, and an observer, moreover, of some large-scale social scientific ‘object’—‘society’, ‘the economy’, ‘politics’, ‘history’, etc.—placed imaginatively over and against them. In this adopted role of objective observer the student will then be set certain tasks *vis-à-vis* the object, or constituent parts of the object: viz. to ‘describe’ it (or them) to ‘explain’ it (or them), and to theorise about the causes which affect the functioning of this object or any of its constituent ‘parts’.

And with this subject–object, observer–observed dualism there comes (rarely explicitly stated but all the more powerful for that lack of explicitness) a particular conception of the relationship between the language of the observer and the reality of what is observed. This conception is in turn twofold:

- 1 On the one hand the observer is conceived as the *exclusive* user of language in this couple. That is, the social science observer applies language to an ‘object’ (society, the economy, politics, etc.) which is seen as essentially non-linguistic.
- 2 And on the other hand, both the appropriateness of the language used by the observer and the truth of what s/he asserts with that language are conceived as determined by the non-linguistic object. That is to say, the language is appropriate if it ‘fits with’ or ‘pictures’ (accurately) the social object which it describes. And what is stated in that language is ‘true’ of the object if what is asserted or proposed in that language matches or pictures certain social (or economic or political) ‘states of affairs’ in the objective world.

To put it simply, it is a prime thrust and aim of several of the chapters in this collection to show that both Marx and Wittgenstein take issue with this subject–object/observer–observed dualism, and that they do so, moreover, in

4 *Gavin Kitching*

very similar ways. That is to say, both Marx and Wittgenstein hold that the social observer cannot stand 'outside' what s/he is observing (even imaginatively) in order to see it as some kind of objective 'whole' over and against them. In addition, Wittgenstein and (even if this surprises) Marx deny that social objects *are* non-linguistic entities which are restricted, as it were, to validating observer language use from some place 'outside' language. Third, and most important of all, both Marx and Wittgenstein deny that the practices of describing or explaining social or economic or political phenomena are to be analogised to any kind of 'picturing' or 'reflecting' of non-linguistic 'facts' or non-linguistic 'states of affairs' in some pure language of observation.

In short, both Marx and Wittgenstein hold that what we (all of us—any human being, whether a professional social scientist or no) *do* when we do the things we call 'explaining social inequality' or 'analysing economic stagnation' or 'outlining our state's foreign policy' cannot be analogised to any sort of 'picturing' or 'reflecting' of pre-existing states of affairs. Both concur, in fact, that such activities or practices are essentially purposive rather than reflective, and since they are purposive they are given form and shape at least as much by the intentions, values and priorities of the observer as by what s/he observes. But even that is not all. For these very intentions, values, etc., of the observer, drawing as they do upon shared social resources for their very formation, require us to pay attention to the social observer as *participant in*, as *citizen of*, a society or societies rather than as some detached 'observer' of it or them.

Of course, when it is stated explicitly (as above) that societies are not 'non-linguistic' entities it is hard to imagine that anyone would wish to deny this. Human societies are made up of people, and people engage in the activities we call talking (and writing and reading) among many others. But arguably no traditionally 'objectivist' and 'positivist' theorists of social science (including many Marxist theorists) has had it in view to deny this. Rather, in placing emphasis on the linguistic tasks of the observer (explaining, describing) but ignoring the role of language in the observed, such thinkers have wanted to stress that it is the job of the social scientist to describe and explain 'more important' or 'more basic' phenomena than 'mere language' or 'mere talk'. And in the Marxist case particularly this has meant such 'material' things as production, exchange, exploitation, etc. In such a conception, drawing attention to the role of language in society at large is to risk putting the 'epiphenomenal' 'ideological' cart before the 'more basic' 'material' horse.

But this is just another pernicious form of dualism, and, again, one rejected—and rejected in much the same way—by both Marx and Wittgenstein. For juxtaposing (say) 'basic' 'material' 'realities' to 'mere talk' or 'mere ideology' necessarily entails a failure to see that use of language is often intimately implicated in precisely those human *activities* (or their results) which the traditional Marxist wants to include in the term 'material reality'. Thus talking, writing and reading are intimately implicated in such activities as reclaiming or cultivating land, building dams, railways or airports, investing money, or crushing (or organising) strikes. In fact there is virtually *nothing*

human beings do which is not accompanied by, justified by, criticised with, described by, the use of language. And it is this observation on which both Marx (in sketchiest outline) and Wittgenstein (in much greater exemplary detail) base their philosophies. Human beings are active or acting creatures, and using language is not only one of the things they do but also facilitates (in a variety of ways) everything else they do.

It follows, therefore, that for both Marx and Wittgenstein enormous intellectual confusions and problems will follow from any attempt *either* to analyse language use in abstraction from the other human activities which so often give it its point or purpose (its ‘meaning’ in that sense), *or* to conceive human activities, or the results of those activities, in abstraction from the use of language which facilitates those activities and describes their results.

An example may give the above general assertions greater force. Marx famously observes in his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.

(Marx, 1970b: 96)

A Wittgensteinian Marxist reading of these propositions would emphasise three points simultaneously:

- 1 The word ‘circumstances’ here cannot be understood in abstraction from the understandings that ‘men’ (people) have of what those circumstances are, but
- 2 *whatever* such understandings may consist in (and of course they will almost certainly be varied as between human subjects for all kinds of reasons—class, culture, gender and many others), nonetheless some kinds of *actions* by historical subjects will prove either impossible or ineffective if they are entered into in too blatant disregard of the circumstances ‘directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past’.

However, such a reading will also emphasise a third point, found passingly in Marx,² but not much emphasised. This is that

- 3 a principal *way* in which ‘the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living’ is that antecedent historical circumstances often make it *impossible* for living human subjects to *think and feel* (or—therefore—act) in certain ways. Thus, one simply *could not* worry about the earth’s ecological viability in medieval Europe, any more than one could desire to start a Gay Rights movement in medieval (or even early modern) China. That is to say, the way in which historically created

6 *Gavin Kitching*

material circumstances restrict (and enable) the making of history by present generations is *not* (or certainly not typically) that such generations try to do things and then find that (for 'material' reasons) they cannot do them—cannot make history 'just as they please'. Rather, and much more typically, such circumstances deeply form what it is that present generations can *desire* to do, can conceive *of* at all (as well as what actions they can conceive as being 'possible'/'impossible', 'feasible'/'unfeasible', 'natural'/'unnatural' etc.).

So to take a well-known and much discussed case: it was not that, in the early decades of the twentieth century, an attempt was made to create a democratic socialism in Russia which failed because of Russia's 'material backwardness'. Rather it was that, given the cultural traditions of Russia (traditions inextricably linked to its material backwardness) which 'weighed like a nightmare on the brain' of all Russians living in those decades, the conceptions of socialism *and* of democracy which *all* Russians (i.e. non-communist as well as communist) at that time *could* embrace can be seen (in retrospect) to have been severely limited and defective. There were certain ways (particularly in regard to democracy) in which Russians at that time just *could not* think and (therefore) *could not* act. However, given that seventy years of communism did much to end, or at least strongly modify, those forms of Russian material and cultural backwardness, many Russians can now think in much more sophisticated ways both about socialism and about democracy.

In short, then, we must keep firmly in mind that it is human *action* in and on the world that, as it were, inextricably links thought (and thus language) to 'material reality'. And we must further understand that 'historical circumstances' (which are themselves, as Marx stresses, simply the outcomes, intended and unintended, of the actions of previous generations of human beings) place constraints on what 'present' human beings can think and feel (and *thus* on how they can act). By keeping both these points clearly in view we may avoid falling into the deep confusions which have always attended the material/ideal distinction in Marxism, a distinction which, philosophically at least, has absolutely nothing to commend it.³

And the most direct and readily comprehensible way to see through that distinction is by grasping firmly that all human *action* or *practice*—the category which is central to the philosophies of both Marx and Wittgenstein—is at once mental *and* physical, material *and* ideal. That is why *all* the authors in this anthology insist that it is as much a mistake to conceive Wittgenstein as a purely 'linguistic' or 'idealist' philosopher as it is to conceive Marx as an entirely 'non-linguistic' or 'materialist' thinker. And yet both kinds of mistake have been made, and often enough. That is to say, there have been (some) self-styled Wittgensteinians who have made the former mistake and (many) self-styled Marxists who have made both the former and the latter mistakes.

Wittgenstein and Sraffa

Wittgenstein's 1945 Preface to the part of the manuscript which became the *Philosophical Investigations* outlines the debt that he felt he owed to his friend Frank Ramsey for helping him to realise 'grave mistakes' in his first book of philosophy—the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Wittgenstein goes on to say, however, that:

Even more than to this—always certain and forcible—criticism I am indebted to that which a teacher of this university, Mr P.Sraffa, for many years unceasingly practised on my thought. I am indebted to *this* stimulus for the most consequential ideas of this book.

(Wittgenstein, 1972:viii, emphasis in original)

One of the most remarkable lacunae in Wittgensteinian scholarship over many years was the lack of curiosity shown in this remark. Yet Wittgenstein was not known either for the volume or the generosity of his intellectual acknowledgements, of which this is by far the most fulsome. And in addition 'Mr P Sraffa', or Piero Sraffa, was, and is, extraordinarily well known in another intellectual universe—that of economics—where he is widely recognised as one of the most original writers and theorists of the twentieth century. Indeed a whole school of economic theory—often referred to as 'neo-Ricardianism'—has sprung up in the wake of his work—in particular his editorship of the standard edition of the *Collected Works* of David Ricardo (featuring an extremely influential introductory essay) and Sraffa's own major contribution to economic theory, *The Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities* (Sraffa, 1960). Most saliently of all, Sraffa was a friend of Antonio Gramsci, leader of the Italian Communist Party in the 1920s and himself a major Marxist theorist and thinker, and Sraffa himself is often referred to as a 'Marxist' economist. Certainly he was extremely influenced by the broadly Hegelian strand of Marxism which was dominant in left-wing intellectual circles in Italy immediately before and after the First World War, as well as being a devotee of the tradition of classical political economy which most influenced Marx's economic thinking. Indeed, a great deal of Sraffa's own work can be seen as an attempt to vindicate the classical tradition (and especially the work of David Ricardo) against its neo-classical successor—the successor which dominates contemporary economic theory.

Sraffa and Wittgenstein first met shortly after the latter's return to Cambridge in 1929 and they appear to have carried on a series of weekly term-time meetings and a rather extensive correspondence over almost twenty years until Sraffa himself broke off their exchanges in 1946.⁴ Despite all this, however, the tendency of traditional Wittgensteinian scholars to ignore 'the Sraffa connection' has been made easier (if not justified) both by the paucity of the record which remains of these meetings and by Sraffa's consistently demure response in later years both to the *Investigations* acknowledgement itself and to all subsequent requests to describe or analyse the influence which he might have had upon Wittgenstein. (See Rossi-Landi, this volume, Chapter 10, and Fann 1969:48; also Fann's contribution to this volume, Chapter 14.)

The two Sraffian economic theorists contributing to this volume—John Davis and Keiran Sharpe—both begin by acknowledging that the precise influence which Sraffa had on the development of Wittgenstein's thought must be a matter of speculation, since neither the Sraffa nor the Wittgenstein papers contain anything to fill out the anecdotal evidence already well known to all researchers on Wittgenstein.⁵ Thereafter, however, their approaches diverge somewhat, Sharpe suggesting some particular criticisms which Sraffa may have made of the *Tractatus* epistemology, and Davis concentrating more broadly on Sraffa's own philosophical formation and the way this influenced the direction of his own economic theorising in the 1930s (and especially his critique of Marshall).

The upshot of both their analyses is broadly similar, however. They stress that Sraffa's own Marxist intellectual formation had rendered him extremely sensitive to the implicit (and often completely unconscious) historical and social assumptions built into highly abstract (and supposedly timeless and universal) intellectual schemas. His own prime interest, of course, was in neo-classical economics as such a schema. But the assumption of both Sharpe and Davis is that Sraffa would have had little difficulty in recognising the *Tractatus* discourse of 'logical form', 'truth functions', 'elementary propositions' and 'atomic facts' (complete with symbolic logic notation) as another such schema. And they further suggest that Sraffa would have encouraged Wittgenstein to adopt a rather similar scepticism towards these philosophical high abstractions as he had already adopted towards their economic equivalents. That is to say, he would have encouraged a scepticism based on recognising the intellectual suppression of specifically *social* phenomena entailed in treating human actions either as 'facts' or as 'states of affairs' and the intellectual suppression of specifically *historical* phenomena involved in treating human relationships as somehow analogous to spatial relationships (i.e. treating the proposition 'John is a friend of Peter' as having the same 'logical form' as 'the cat is on the mat').

But even if Davis's and Sharpe's speculations are true (and they are, at the least, very plausible) they do not of course imply that Wittgenstein could not have made such intellectual moves on his own without Sraffa's influence. Still less do either Davis or Sharpe deny that, having made them, Wittgenstein went on to develop a ramified and detailed critique of his own earlier philosophical enthusiasms, going far beyond anything that Sraffa himself envisaged. (Indeed, recognition that this was so may well be what made Sraffa so modest in later years when asked about his influence on Wittgenstein.)

What the speculations of Davis and Sharpe do suggest, however, are two points of great importance. First, they suggest that, irrespective of what Wittgenstein *might* have achieved on his own, Sraffa's influence on Wittgenstein's intellectual development was, *as a matter of historical fact*, vital. It was vital because it came at a crucial time in that development (when Wittgenstein's unease with his earlier philosophy was marked, but the precise form and shape of an alternative was still unclear to him). Moreover, Sraffa's intervention had great intellectual force (for Wittgenstein) precisely because it came from a thinker who manifested considerable critical self-confidence

when confronted with highly abstract logically driven discourse. For even in the 1930s this discourse was still enchanting Wittgenstein's intelligence, even as his awareness of its acute limitations was growing.

But second, the Sraffa connection, and its important influence on Wittgenstein, is crucial in lending weight to the idea that the strong 'coincidence' of epistemological approaches and themes in the work of Wittgenstein and Marx is something *more* than mere coincidence. That, in John Davis's words, it was through Sraffa, above all, that the best and most illuminating methodological protocols of the Hegelian Marxist intellectual tradition were introduced to Wittgenstein, protocols which, as an intellectual of genius, he then proceeded both to deepen (by his own methodological innovations) and to develop in directions previously unexplored. And this could be so, of course, irrespective of whether Wittgenstein *recognised* these influences to be specifically Marxist or not (or would have cared if he had).

These biographical facts are important just because it is possible to take almost *any* two thinkers of genuine insight and sophistication and to find some parallels and commonalities in their thought. Indeed, doing so is one of the favourite intellectual pastimes of all academics. So if that were all that we were dealing with in this case it might be regarded as a mildly interesting and mildly surprising exercise in intellectual history, but not much else. The Sraffa connection suggests, however, that the sociological/anthropological turn in Wittgenstein's thought which would culminate in the *Investigations* did have a specifically *Marxist* historical genesis. It might not have done so, and it did not logically have to have done so (neither sociology nor anthropology are Marxist monopolies) but as a matter of historical fact, it did. Small wonder then that those Marxist scholars who have engaged with the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein in a serious way have found something there both familiar and congenial and something rather other than what the conventional wisdom had led them to expect they would find.

Disjunctions

The views expressed above would meet with assent, I believe, from all the scholars who attended our 1999 Cambridge symposium on Marx and Wittgenstein and from all those who have contributed to this volume. However, it is in the tracing out of the implications of the fundamental protocols outlined above that disagreements arise, both among the scholars represented in these pages and more widely.

For example, given that all professional social observers are *also* social participants and citizens (indeed, are always the latter before they are the former) and that their activities or practices in these latter roles must—and should to some degree—affect their 'professional' activities, questions arise both about precisely *how* and *to what extent* these latter roles influence the former, both in fact and normatively (i.e. about how far the latter *do* influence the former and how far they *should* do so). Peter Winch is the Wittgensteinian philosopher who

most notoriously argued that in fact social scientists and theorists should *only* use forms of description and explanation of social phenomena which are widespread or commonplace in the societies being explained, and that any notion that there could be ‘scientific’ practices of social explanation using concepts and categories totally distinct from those commonly employed in a society rested on some fundamental ‘category mistake’ (Winch, 1958). Winch’s ideas figure prominently in both Nigel Pleasants’ and Benton’s contributions to this volume, but there is no agreement between them either upon what precisely Winch took the relationship between ‘ordinary’ and ‘social scientific’ uses of language to be, or upon what either the ‘autonomy’ of the latter or their ‘fundamental dependence’ on the former might imply.

Also, given that both Marx and Wittgenstein centralised notions of human activity or practice in their philosophies, questions necessarily arise about how such activities should be classified or categorised. In particular, an old question arises about whether there are human activities or practices which are ‘natural’ in the strong—and contentious—sense of being encountered in any and all human societies (rather than in the weak—and agreed—sense of requiring the use of both inanimate and animate natural resources—including the body). Here commentators on both Marx and Wittgenstein are divided. On the one hand are those who tend to see both Wittgenstein *and* Marx as committed to a view of a generically human ‘form of life’ (Wittgenstein) or ‘species being’ (Marx) which generates some important common activities and practices across all periods of human history and all human societies past and present. This view is strongly represented in our collection and is found expressed by Rubinstein, Ted Schatzki and Benton. On the other side—and not found among our contributors, although discussed in T.P. Uschanov’s opening chapter—are those who tend to see Wittgenstein (in particular) as more strongly culturally relativist in orientation than this ‘naturalistic’ account would suggest. The balance of textual evidence from Wittgenstein does tend to suggest, however, that he was in general a lot *less* sceptical about the possibilities of cross-cultural explanation and understanding than is often supposed. In particular, several of our contributors emphasise that Wittgenstein’s (1979) *Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough* is, when closely examined, much less of a culturally relativist text than sometimes supposed.

Forerunners

It is the view of some people that nothing worthy of being called a discovery has ever been made in the entire field of social science. Those who believe this tend to see it as another ground for wondering whether social science is a species of science at all. But whether or not empirical social scientists have ever made any discoveries, it is certain that social *theorists* never have. Therefore, although the small group of scholars who came together in Cambridge in 1999 to discuss the topic of ‘Marx and Wittgenstein’ were aware of doing something unusual, we were equally aware that what we were doing was not at all unique. Indeed, one

of the symposium participants (Rubinstein, 1981) had published a book entitled *Marx and Wittgenstein: Social Praxis and Social Explanation* which was already eighteen years old at the time of the symposium, and another two (K.T.Fann and Benton) had participated in a small but lively debate about the Marx-Wittgenstein relationship in the journal *Radical Philosophy* as early as the mid 1970s (Fann, 1974; Benton, 1976; see also the contribution by Burke, 1974). But even that was not the first time such a bell had been rung. In 1966 an Italian Marxist scholar, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, had published in the journal *Nuovi Argumenti* an article entitled 'Per un uso Marxiana della Wittgenstein'.⁶

And in fact the historical trail could be followed still further back—right back, indeed, to that significant proportion of Wittgenstein's students in 1930s Cambridge who were either active communists or fellow-travellers and who seem to have seen no contradiction either then or (in at least two cases)⁷ years later, between their Wittgensteinian philosophy and their Marxist—indeed communist—politics.⁸

A lot of this story, particularly in regard to 1930s Cambridge, remains untold and indeed uninvestigated in any systematic way. The matter is touched on in Ray Monk's biography of Wittgenstein (1990:348) and in some fascinating, but all too brief, remarks of Eric Hobsbawm's about student life in 1930s Cambridge (1997:207). But in any case it is important to understand how varied as well as small scale this 'Marx and Wittgenstein' story (or at any rate the published part of it) is. For in bringing Marx and Wittgenstein together, some have done so in order to stress certain basic philosophical commonalities in their thought—the commonalities on which (overall) this book concentrates. This would be especially true of Rubinstein (1981), but also of Fann (1969), of Manser (1973)⁹ and of Easton (1983). Others have done so, however, in order to find Wittgenstein wanting by Marxist criteria, or in order to convict Wittgenstein of not being nearly Marxist enough in some respect or other. This would be true of Rossi-Landi's pioneering piece in 1966, of Benton's contribution to the 1970s *Radical Philosophy* debate, and of David Lamb's (1980) *Philosophical Forum* article on 'The philosophy of *praxis* in Marx and Wittgenstein'. Finally, one scholar represented in this volume (Kitching) has tried to use Wittgenstein's philosophical perspective to restructure and restate Marxist ideas in ways which (at least in the author's eyes) would enrich them, make them more intellectually defensible and—above all—make them more relevant to contemporary social and political realities (Kitching, 1988 and 1994; and the review essay by Pleasants, 1996).

But overall what impresses one most about the 'Marx and Wittgenstein' literature, apart from its sheer sparsity, is how little impact it has had on dominant understandings of Marx or Wittgenstein, either among Marxists or among Wittgensteinians. That is to say, *all* the occasional dissenting or tangential pieces mentioned above have come and gone without seriously denting the conventional wisdom, shared on both sides of the divide, that Wittgensteinians have little to learn from reading Marx or Marxists and vice versa. And that has remained the case even when there have been—admittedly

rather partial and cautious—endorsements of some aspects of this literature from mainstream Wittgensteinian or Marxist scholars.¹⁰

It is interesting to speculate why this might be, but personally I doubt whether there is any single answer. The still powerful hold of pro-science or scientific ideas within the Marxist tradition, and the hostility to such ideas among many Wittgensteinians, is certainly one factor. The utterly unintended but powerfully combined effect of Ernest Gellner's (1959) critique of the deep 'conservatism' of Wittgensteinian 'linguistic philosophy' and Winch's (1958) Wittgensteinian assault on the very 'idea of a social science' in alienating many 1960s radical students from Wittgensteinian philosophy is certainly another factor. The deeply damaging legacy of Gellner's polemic in particular for more popular understandings and misunderstandings of Wittgenstein is the subject of analysis and critique in Uschanov's opening contribution to this book. The distinctly partial view of Wittgenstein's 'apoliticality' and even political conservatism, which was popularised by his acolytes after his death (and especially during the cold war years) may have been another influence in maintaining the divide.

But the single most important factor preventing the cross-fertilisation of the Marxist and Wittgensteinian intellectual traditions may not be any of these things, but something at once more simple, more apparently innocent, but more profound in its consequences than any other. This is simply that what has passed for 'Wittgensteinian philosophy' since Wittgenstein's death has consisted, in almost equal parts, of exegesis of his ideas on the one hand and, on the other, of attempts to demonstrate that Wittgenstein had better answers to certain traditional philosophical problems than other philosophers. That is, despite some of Wittgenstein's expressed hopes and the occasional reiteration of those hopes by his acolytes,¹¹ there have been relatively few attempts to apply Wittgenstein's ideas to issues and concerns outside philosophy, or outside the range of concerns and issues (mathematics, psychology, epistemology and some questions in ethics and aesthetics) which are directly legitimated by his own writings. And in particular, a *political* philosophy animated by any genuine Wittgensteinian sensibility or insight has been notable almost entirely by its absence.¹²

Mutual enrichment: knowledge, morality and politics

An implicit theme of most of the papers in this collection, and an explicit theme of two of them (Kitching and Fann), is the moral or ethical nature of knowledge claims. That is to say, no serious student of Wittgenstein can fail to note his insistence (both in the *Investigations* and in other important texts such as *On Certainty*) that the human act of claiming to 'know' or 'be certain' of anything carries certain moral responsibilities with it. At the very least, and most obviously, it carries the responsibility for having done all that may be regarded as reasonable (in a given context) to ensure that any factual information you purvey in your claim ('yes, there is another train to Edinburgh at 8 o'clock') is accurate.

But that is the least important (because least morally onerous) aspect of the matter. Purveyors of knowledge claims also take on moral responsibilities both to

other people and (odd though it may seem to say this) to themselves. That is to say, if others *act* on the basis of some knowledge claim I make ('the last train to Edinburgh is at 8 o'clock', 'the situation of the poor peasants will improve if the kulaks are liquidated', 'retribution, in this case, will only lead to further violence') then, quite clearly, I can be held responsible (in whole or part) if their action 'misfires'. That is especially the case, of course, if the misfire is directly and unambiguously related to the inaccuracy of the information I provided. ('The last train left at 7.30 p.m., you idiot! We rushed on to the platform, having taken two expensive taxis to get there, and the whole place was deserted!') But I can still be held to have some degree of responsibility for a 'misfired' outcome or state of affairs, even if that outcome is a result both of the inaccuracy of the original knowledge claim *and* the infelicity of the subsequent action. (It proved difficult or impossible in practice to distinguish the kulaks from the poor peasants *and* the party militants acted in thuggish ways which antagonised virtually all the peasants.)

So much for the responsibility of knowers to others who act on their knowledge. But what of their responsibilities to themselves? These are of two sorts. In the first place, and more obviously, people who obtain a reputation for supplying information which turns out, more than very occasionally, to be inaccurate or flawed are likely to get a reputation for sloppiness or carelessness at best, and for indifference to the welfare of others at worst. Either way, they will (all things being equal) encounter the growing distrust of others over time. But, in addition, proffering (however sincerely) or even endorsing (however sincerely) knowledge claims which turn out to be flawed, and flawed in ways which—when acted upon *either by oneself or others*—damage the welfare of other people, can be a source of pain and of guilt for the profferer or endorser, perhaps even a source of strong self-distrust. To ease the pain and guilt, to ask for forgiveness of those damaged, and (perhaps) to try and repair a shattered self-confidence, the failed knower may feel the need to make a *confession*. Wittgenstein felt such a need very strongly at least once in his life (Monk, 1990:367–72; Rhees, 1984:172–86), and the contribution by Fann to this collection also takes the deeply moral form of a confession.

Why do I say all this? For two reasons. First, as I have said, no serious reader of Wittgenstein¹³ can fail to see the deep importance he gave to this moral dimension of human knowing as a practice, both in his formal philosophy and (as I have just noted) in his life. In fact this intimate link in his thought between epistemology and ethics is what makes Wittgenstein a far more deeply ethical philosopher than many self-styled ethicists (as Read notes in his contribution to this collection). But second, I emphasise these points because, with but very few exceptions, the Marxist tradition, since Marx himself, *has been almost totally purblind to these moral aspects of knowing*. In fact the overwhelming majority of Marxist intellectuals, and certainly almost the entire body of Marxist political activists and power-holders in the world, have held to a conception of ethics in which ethical questions enter life (when they enter it at all) only as a question about 'what is to be done?' (prescriptively)¹⁴ and virtually never as a question about what one claims to know, descriptively or explanatorily.

Hence, it is indeed an ethical (as well as a political) question for Marxists whether the party militants act in such a way towards the kulaks that they antagonise the entire peasantry. But it is not an *ethical* question whether the kulaks *exist* or not (that is, whether the Marxian descriptions and explanations which identify the kulaks as a 'peasant class' and separate them from the other peasants are accurate or justified or not). That question is, for Marxists, a *theoretical* question certainly, an *epistemological* question possibly (for those of a philosophical bent), and a *political* question certainly. But it is never (= it is never seen or treated as, or categorised as) an *ethical* or *moral* question at all. Indeed, this is one respect in which the Marxist tradition has been entirely at one with positivism. For as my contribution to this book tries to demonstrate, thinkers in both traditions have insisted, in both their intellectual and political practices, on placing epistemological/methodological questions in one box and ethical questions in an entirely separate box. As a concomitant of this they have both also insisted that ethical questions arise only *after* truths have been scientifically established (and usually, as I have said, as questions about 'what is to be done' politically 'on the basis'—as it is said—of these truths).

So why then are so many (I do not say all) acts of knowing *also* moral acts? Partly for Foucauldian reasons (Foucault, 1972). If I, for some contingent reason, am in the position (if only temporarily) of being the only one of us *able* to check the train times, then you (single or plural), as would-be passengers on the last train to Edinburgh, are *dependent* on my getting the information right. To that very limited but not inconsequential extent I have *power* over you. And, at the other extreme, if I, Joseph Stalin, Secretary-General of the Communist Party of the USSR, am certain that (a) kulaks exist and that (b) they are exploiting other peasants, then *given my institutional power*, that certainty has implications for other human beings which will make missing the last train to Edinburgh seem totally inconsequential. Foucault is importantly right here. Knowledge in the hands of the powerful is always more than knowledge. But, in addition, many even mundane knowledge claims, made by ordinary people, themselves *confer* power (even if only temporarily or conjuncturally) if others *act* upon them.

But, as suggested above, there is something even more to the morality of knowing than this Foucauldian issue. And that something is that in making a claim to know, and in broadcasting that claim to others, a human being *may be held responsible by others*, and *may hold him or herself responsible* for the consequences of that claim misfiring in some way. And this is especially so, of course, if the claim misfires in ways that severely hurt or damage others. And in the real world, many even ordinary or mundane knowledge claims *are* consequential in that way (even if the damage done is limited both in extent and in degree) and a few are *enormously* consequential in that way, both in extent and degree. ('She thought he looked suspicious. But I reassured her he was all right and should be allowed through. And now look what's happened!!')

So, then, Wittgenstein can enrich Marxism, if under the influence of Wittgensteinian philosophy (or any other influence for that matter) Marxists can be induced to abandon their positivistic refusal to link epistemology to ethics—which means to see the practice of knowing as a human practice which

is at once epistemological *and* ethical. But how might Marxism enrich the Wittgensteinian tradition?

Oddly enough, that question may be answered by further reflection on some of the observations above. For an obvious question to ask (and a question significantly not asked above) is *why* have Marxists traditionally been insensitive to, even purblind about, the morality of knowledge? The answer is, I think, that Marxists have usually been advancing knowledge claims in historical and social contexts of deep and often violent conflict.

That is to say, a principal reason why Marxists have, as it were, thundered their knowledge claims through the blasting megaphone of scientific certainty and rectitude is that they have often been confronted not by opponents, but by *enemies*, blasting counter-certainties in an equally strident fashion. In many cases these have been religiously guaranteed certainties. In rather fewer cases they have been certainties supposedly guaranteed by 'traditional' or 'immutable' orders of society or authority. But in any and all cases, the situation has been one in which any self-reflexive tentativeness expressed by Marxists, far from being treated by their opponents with honour or respect, would simply have been seized upon as a sign of weakness. In such situations, where intellectual and political debate is not (or is certainly not only) debate but a matter of life or death, of power or execution, of triumph or banishment, only discourses of certitude (or at least of public or apparent certitude) can or will survive.

Now the above is not, of course, a description of political and intellectual debate¹⁵ as it is conducted in liberal democratic capitalist societies—in 'bourgeois' societies—as Marxists are wont to call them. But that is just the point, of course. For Marxism began, as a political movement, at a time in the history of western capitalist societies when liberal democracy was either entirely absent or just developing. Moreover, and as is even more well known, in the twentieth century Marxist (or more accurately Marxist–Leninist) political movements were powerful only in societies which had no, or very little, history of liberal democracy at all. And the predominant outcome of this oddly combined history¹⁶ is, I would say, that Marxism has generally failed to develop a type or style of political *or intellectual* discourse fully appropriate to contemporary liberal-democratic conditions.

And that observation returns us, oddly enough, to Wittgenstein. For there is no doubt that one of the characteristics which attracts so many people to Wittgenstein's philosophy is the honesty and authenticity of voice in which it is expressed.¹⁷ To read Wittgenstein is to read a thinker who has found a way—a mode of expression—which can simultaneously do justice to, or capture, a striving to tell truth, and genuine doubt that such striving has succeeded; a desire and a need to judge, and a sense that all judgements must be tentative lest they return to haunt the judger; a willingness to take sides and to risk the costs of that siding and a desire to fully confront and acknowledge the humanity of others who choose another side or sides.

In short, it seems to me that, for whatever reason and whether consciously or not, Wittgenstein found a voice—a form of speaking and writing—that *is* appropriate, and deeply appropriate, not just for doing philosophy in a

postmodern, highly individualised, bourgeois democratic society, but also a voice which is equally appropriate for doing political and ethical and religious and aesthetic debate (both with others and with oneself) in such societies. To put it more pungently: if the Marxist or socialist cause is going to make progress in our contemporary western societies *now*, it must do so by adopting a form of praxis which fully recognises and grasps both the profound individual and cultural diversity of those societies and the (how shall I put it?) determined tentativeness and other-respectfulness which is essential to mobilising people in and through (and beyond) that diversity. In short, not ‘science tells us that...’ or ‘from historical materialism we learn...’ (these kind of formulations simply will not cut the political mustard in western democratic societies any more) but ‘what about this for an idea?’ And if Marxists want or need to learn *how* to do that, they could do far worse than reading Wittgenstein in order to find out.

So I end with a puzzle. How could Wittgenstein (who arguably was personally neither a liberal nor a democrat) have created a discourse perfectly appropriate for living and thinking in liberal democratic conditions? How could he, indeed, have created a discourse which, if anything, is *more* appropriate to the way materially prosperous western liberal societies are *now* (at the beginning of the twenty-first century) than it was to the way they were when he was alive? I have some suspicions about what the answer to such a question might be. But they do not belong in this introduction. What does belong here, however, is the observation that *that* (the question I have just asked, but not answered) is a Marxist question, not a Wittgensteinian one. For it is a question about the *historical and social preconditions* necessary for anybody to think (or write or feel) anything. And that is a question (about the historical preconditions of his own activity) to which Wittgenstein himself—and despite Sraffa’s best efforts—was completely purblind. And that blindness is one respect (perhaps the only respect) in which Wittgenstein was a completely conventional ‘abstracting’ and ‘abstracted’ philosopher in the liberal tradition. Mutual enrichment indeed!

Notes

- 1 Which is not to say that Wittgenstein had no interest in politics *per se*. Whatever impressions may have been given about this in earlier accounts of his life, we now know from Ray Monk’s (1990:343) biography that in his later life at any rate, Wittgenstein kept himself well informed about politics and current affairs and had quite strong views of a broadly left-wing sort.
- 2 Most notably in his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*—‘therefore mankind always sets itself such problems as it can solve; since on reflection it will be seen that the problem itself only arises when the material conditions for its solution already exists or are at least in the process of formation’ (Marx, 1970c:182). See also Marx (1973:104).
- 3 It can have, and has had, some important political/polemical uses for Marx and Marxists, particularly for attacking the ideas of opponents regarded as unrealistic in various ways (‘utopian’ socialists, etc.). But the problem arises when what started out as a polemical device for some specific conjunctural use is erected into a timeless philosophical and methodological principle.

- 4 See Monk (1990:467).
- 5 Both writers make reference to this evidence in their contributions to this volume. It can also be found in a number of other places, including Monk (1990:260–1), Malcolm (1958:69), Fann (1969:48 and note 2) and Rossi-Landi's Chapter in this volume, pp. 196–7.
- 6 'Toward a Marxian use of Wittgenstein'. An English version, under this title, translated by the author, first appeared in 1981 in a collection of Austrian studies and texts in philosophy, edited by J.C.Nyiri (1981:113–49).
- 7 D.A.T.Gasking and A.C.Jackson (1978).
- 8 That the trail can be followed that far back means, of course, that some self-conscious Marxists were present—at least as student listeners—at the actual *formation* of the philosophical ideas which we now identify with the later Wittgenstein. Whether they, or any other of the communist students and teachers in 1930s Cambridge, other than Sraffa, had any significant *intellectual* influence on that formation is at present unknown, but seems unlikely. And this is true despite the fact that Wittgenstein's personal contacts with communist intellectuals both inside and outside of Cambridge in the 1930s seem to have been closer than previously supposed. On this see Monk (1990:347–8).
- 9 The debate in *Radical Philosophy* seems to have been sparked partly by Fann's 1969 text and by the publication, in 1973, of Anthony Manser's inaugural lecture at the University of Southampton.
- 10 On the Wittgensteinian side of things the most mainstream endorsement of a Marx-Wittgenstein link has come from Alan Janik (1989:41–79), both in his insistent attempts to dispel the idea that Wittgenstein was either philosophically or politically conservative and in the sympathetic interest he has taken in Rubinstein's work. On the Marxian side, the late Raymond Williams had a strong interest in the 'praxis' approach to Marxism and, toward the end of his life became especially interested in the work of Volosinov and Bakhtin (for the latter see Joachim Israel's chapter, this volume). Williams' (1981) *New Left Review* article is especially important here. Williams has been followed in his interest in Volosinov and Bakhtin by Terry Eagleton (1982) who, unlike Williams, also has a specific interest in Wittgenstein and indeed wrote the script for the Derek Jarman film of Wittgenstein's life (Eagleton, 1993). In addition the Budapest school of Marxian philosophers, followers of Gyorgy Lukacs, developed a sympathetic interest in Wittgenstein (see especially Markus, 1986). As one would expect, in fact, it is Marxists in the European 'critical theory' tradition who have tended to be much less dismissive of the 'philosophy of language' in general (and therefore of Wittgenstein in particular). That tradition is represented in this volume by Israel.
- 11 I have especially in mind here G.H.von Wright's (1982:31–2) remark that

The teaching of great men often has a simplicity and naturalness which makes the difficult appear easy to grasp. Their disciples usually become, therefore, insignificant epigones. The historical significance of such men does not manifest itself in their disciples but through influences of a more indirect, subtle, and often unexpected kind.

For Wittgenstein himself, see for example his famous outburst at Norman Malcolm (Malcolm, 1958:39) indicating his at least occasional conviction that his work would have been wasted if all that was learned from it was an ability 'to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc.'

- 12 The works by Pitkin (1973), Danford (1978) and Connolly (1983) stand as partial exceptions to this generalisation.
- 13 And of other Wittgensteinian philosophers, most especially Stanley Cavell (1979:242–326).

- 14 For a classical example of this strongly ‘consequentialist’ approach to ethics in Marxism see Trotsky ([1938] 1969). For an excellent general discussion see Lukes (1987).
- 15 In fact, I believe that public political and intellectual *debate* only goes on in a liberal-democratic context. In other contexts, past and present, what went on, and goes on, is political and intellectual *struggle*—a word with which Marxian political rhetoric is—not coincidentally—replete. What is the difference between debate and struggle? That in the former context outcomes do not matter, do not affect people, *in certain very vital and profound ways* (which is not to say that they do not matter *at all* or affect people *at all*). And this, I now think, is a very good thing. It is a privilege to live in societies in which political outcomes are not (normally) a matter of life or death. But such societies are still an exceptional minority in the world and it is the broadly shared material prosperity of such societies which is the necessary precondition of their experiencing politics as debate and not as struggle. Note however: broadly shared material prosperity is a necessary precondition for the hegemony of liberal-democratic political debate. It is not (historically speaking) a sufficient condition for the emergence of such debate.
- 16 There have been varieties of Marxism which have sought to prosper in, and identify with, liberal democratic freedoms. One thinks of the German Social Democratic Party in the years immediately after the First World War and of the closely related ‘Austro-Marxism’ of the Austrian Socialist Party. But these varieties of Marxism perished—both politically and intellectually—with fascism and hence had no impact on the profoundly anti-liberal and anti-democratic reputation of Marxism in the twentieth century.
- 17 Nor is this an accident. As Janik and Toulmin (1973:67–119, 202–8, 255–62) make clear, one of the abiding obsessions of Wittgenstein’s entire life was the desire to be authentic and honest—true to himself and avoiding all forms of affectation or cant—in everything he said and did. In this respect above all he remained a life-long ‘Krausian’—a follower of Karl Kraus, the polemical cultural critic of the hypocrisies of Habsburg society, who seems to have influenced Wittgenstein profoundly in his youth.

References

- Benton, T. (1976) ‘Winch, Wittgenstein and Marxism’, *Radical Philosophy* 13, 1–6.
- Burke, E. (1974) ‘Wittgenstein’s conservatism’, *Radical Philosophy* 10, 27.
- Cavell, S. (1979) *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Scepticism, Morality and Tragedy*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Connolly, W. (1983) *The Terms of Political Discourse*, Oxford: Martin Robertson.
- Danford, J. (1978) *Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Eagleton, T. (1982) ‘Wittgenstein’s friends’, *New Left Review* 135, 64–90.
- (1993) *Wittgenstein: The Terry Eagleton Script, the Derek Jarman Film*, London: BFI Publications.
- Easton, S. (1983) *Humanist Marxism and Wittgensteinian Social Philosophy*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Fann, K.T. (1969) *Wittgenstein’s Conception of Philosophy*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- (1974) ‘Wittgenstein and bourgeois philosophy’, *Radical Philosophy* 8, 24–7.
- Foucault, M. (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, New York: Pantheon Books.
- Gasking, D. and Jackson, A. (1978) ‘Wittgenstein as a teacher’, in K.T.Fann (ed.) *Ludwig Wittgenstein the Man and His Philosophy*, Brighton: Harvester, 49–55.

- Gellner, E. (1959) *Words and Things*, London: Victor Gollancz.
- Hobsbawm, E. (1997) *On History*, London: Abacus.
- Janik, A. (1989) *Style, Politics and the Future*, Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Janik, A. and Toulmin, S. (1973) *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Kitching, G. (1988) *Karl Marx and the Philosophy of Praxis*, London: Routledge.
- (1994) *Marxism and Science: Analysis of an Obsession*, Philadelphia: Penn State Press.
- Lamb, D. (1980) 'The philosophy of praxis in Marx and Wittgenstein', *The Philosophical Forum* 11(3), 273–98.
- Lukes, S. (1987) *Marxism and Morality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Malcolm, N. (1958) *Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Manser, A. (1973) *Marx and Wittgenstein: The End of Philosophy*, Southampton: University of Southampton Press.
- Markus, G. (1986) *Language and Production: A Critique of the Paradigms*, Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Marx, K. (1970a) *Theses on Feuerbach*, in K.Marx and F.Engels, *Selected Works in One Volume*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 28–30.
- (1970b) *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in K.Marx and F.Engels, *Selected Works in One Volume*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 94–179.
- (1970c) Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* in K.Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works in One Volume*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 180–4.
- (1973) *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Monk, R. (1990) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, London: Jonathan Cape.
- Nyiri, J. (ed.) (1981) *Austrian Philosophy: Studies and Texts*, Munich: Philosophia Verlag.
- Pitkin, H. (1973) *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Pleasants, N. (1996) 'A Wittgenstein social theory? Introducing reflexivity to Marxism', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 26(3), 397–416.
- Rhees, R. (ed.) (1984) *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rossi-Landi, F. (1981) 'Toward a Marxian use of Wittgenstein', in J.Nyiri (ed.) *Austrian Philosophy: Studies and Texts*, Munich: Philosophia Verlag, 113–49.
- Rubinstein, D. (1981) *Marx and Wittgenstein; Social Praxis and Social Explanation*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Sraffa, P. (1960) *The Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Trotsky, L. (1969) 'Their morals and ours', reprinted in L.Trotsky, J.Dewey and G. Novack, *Their Morals and Ours: Marxist Versus Liberal Views on Morality*, New York: Pathfinder Press.
- Williams, R. (1981) 'Marxism, structuralism and literary analysis', *New Left Review* 129, 51–66.
- Winch, P. (1958) *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1972) *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1979) *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, Swansea: Brynmill Press.
- (1980) *Culture and Value*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wright, G.H.von (1982) *Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Part I

Conventional wisdoms

1 Ernest Gellner's criticisms of Wittgenstein and ordinary language philosophy

T.P. Uschanov

Introduction

Which book criticising post-war analytic philosophy won favours from both Karl Popper and the Soviet Union, moved I.A. Richards to write a poem, inspired situation comedy, caused a month-long correspondence in *The Times*, was the subject of concerned editorials in both that newspaper and *The Economist*, and still strikes sparks today? *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions? Naming and Necessity? Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature?* No: it was *Words and Things* by the Czech anthropologist Ernest Gellner (1925–95) which caused world-wide controversy on its publication in 1959 but is practically forgotten nowadays. *Words and Things* is a vehement attack on the style of philosophising known as ‘linguistic philosophy’, ‘Oxford analysis’ or, most often, ‘ordinary language philosophy’ (OLP)—the style of philosophising associated with Wittgenstein along with Oxford philosophers of the last mid-century, such as Gilbert Ryle and J.L. Austin. The way in which OLP has been written out of history in recent decades is largely the result of Gellner’s influence, and I want to reassess the background, nature and scope of his impact.

I think that *Words and Things* is a very bad book and that its influence has been almost totally deleterious. I agree with Antony Flew’s assessment that it is not only a ‘juvenile work’ displaying ‘fundamental frivolousness and irresponsibility’ (1984:77), but also ‘the immediate or ultimate source of innumerable slick and ignorant put-downs in the subsequent literature’ (1986:95). Gellner’s criticisms of OLP are for the most part unjustified, and even when this isn’t so the point would have been better made without the sensationalism. Stephen Mulhall has suggested that ‘the need to reject or transcend [OLP] far outweighed the capacity to provide good grounds for so doing, and so resulted in a form of collective projection coupled with collective amnesia’ (1994:445). Even if the chances of reviving OLP are slim, by curing part of that amnesia I hope to take some steps to clean the name of a period in which ‘the gains and advances in philosophical understanding...were probably as great as any that have been made in a comparably short time in the history of the subject’ (Strawson, 1998:12).

Today, familiarity with the influence of *Words and Things* is especially important if one wants to understand the history of the reception of Wittgenstein, the one

philosopher attacked by Gellner who is still generally considered one of the all-time greats. Even if, *per impossible*, all the writings of all other practitioners of OLP turned out to be worthless (which is hardly believable), it would still be interesting to demonstrate how the reception of Wittgenstein reflects Gellner's influence. An instantly recognisable style of Wittgensteinian misreading, exploited by thinkers as diverse as Marcuse, Popper, Habermas and Deleuze, can be seen to trace back to Gellner. It is also a key source of a rhetorical style of arguing against Wittgenstein that almost every Wittgensteinian thinker regularly finds himself confronted with.

The reception of Gellner's arguments

The widespread influence of *Words and Things* is primarily a function of the way in which a large non-academic public was made aware of it shortly after it was published. The book became a *succès de scandale* when Ryle wrote to its publishers, Victor Gollancz, in his capacity as editor of *Mind*:

You recently sent me a review copy of *Words and Things* by Ernest Gellner. I am returning it to you (separately) since I shall not have a review of the book in *Mind*. Abusiveness may make a book saleable, but it disqualifies it from being treated as a contribution to an academic subject.

(quoted in Russell, 1997:607)

Bertrand Russell, who had written a laudatory introduction to the book, protested against this in a letter to *The Times*. Ryle replied, and the exchange started a controversy finally involving nineteen different correspondents, both the merits of the book and the lightness of Ryle's decision being contested with equal vigour.¹ The controversy culminated a few weeks later in a solicitous *Times* leading article (Anonymous 1959c) critical of both sides, although slightly favourable to Gellner. About a month later, *The Economist* devoted a similarly worried and seemingly impartial editorial to 'The hatreds of philosophers' the affair had brought to light (Anonymous 1960). For a while, Gellner's assault seemingly became 'the most discussed work of English philosophy since A.J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*' (Cohen, 1960:178); even in Oxford itself, it 'was *chic*...to claim that one had enormously enjoyed this piece of intellectual slapstick' (Anonymous, 1973b: 8).

Although *Mind* did not review *Words and Things*, many other periodicals did. Most reviewers were of the opinion *Mind's* would undoubtedly have been. The most negative estimate was probably Michael Dummett's view that the book didn't even have 'the smell of honest or seriously intentioned work' ([1960] 1978:436). Many other leading philosophers of the day expressed similar sentiments in their reviews, although a few degrees milder in form (Anonymous 1959b; MacIntyre 1959; Warnock 1959; Cohen 1960; Falck 1960; Mayo 1960; White 1960; Isenberg 1961; Körner 1961; Nuchelmans 1961; Quinton 1961; Doney 1962). Even philosophers who personally disliked OLP were less than commendatory (Ayer 1959; Copleston 1960; Watkins 1960; Findlay 1961). The few completely laudatory reviews were by non-philosophers (e.g. Crick 1960; Meyerhoff and Main 1960).

I.A. Richards wrote to Gellner expressing his 'very substantial agreement', enclosing 'The Strayed Poet', a poem about Wittgenstein which, he said in another letter, was prompted by his reading *Words and Things* (Richards, 1990:159–62). What was the minority view among reviewers, however, became the norm quite quickly: *Words and Things* was a success, and established Gellner's name internationally. He even achieved theatrical fame when Jonathan Miller and Alan Bennett wrote the sketch 'Words...and Things' for the 1961 comedy revue *Beyond the Fringe*. In it, an Oxford philosopher claims that he can 'quite easily' establish the relevance of OLP to everyday life, but is quickly rendered a laughing stock (Bennett *et al.* [1963] 1987:51–2). In 1961 and 1962, translations of *Words and Things* came out in Italy, Spain and the Soviet Union; in 1968 it appeared as a Penguin paperback; and 1979 saw the publication of a second edition with a new introduction.

By then Gellner's views were established almost as facts of nature. Many philosophical schools that oppose each other implacably—Popperians, positivists, Marxists, poststructuralists and so on—agree on one thing: OLP was wrong and its disappearance was a good thing indeed. As the years passed, Gellner's estimate of OLP and Wittgenstein's work got lower and lower. In the 1980s the falsity of Wittgenstein's ideas was, to him, 'probably the single most important fact about the intellectual life of mankind' (1984:263); by the 1990s it had grown to 'the single most important fact about the human condition' (1996:670), and Wittgenstein now 'condemns and ignores everything that is important in the history of human intellectual life' (1998:162), recommending 'a collective infantile regression for all mankind' (1992:123).

It is only in his recently published posthumous book, *Language and Solitude*, that Gellner's dislike of Wittgenstein and OLP goes beyond mere sensationalism and takes on the contours of a complete *Weltanschauung*. It includes a seventy-page section on Wittgenstein intended as a definitive statement on the matter of his influence. In the 1960s, Gellner claimed that Durkheim had already thought of everything worth preserving in Wittgenstein (1964:63–6); a decade later, the thinker with whom Gellner proposed to replace OLP was Collingwood (Anonymous, 1973a:338). In *Language and Solitude*, it is Malinowski who serves as the good guy in a scheme in which the bad guy is invariably Wittgenstein. Shortly before his death, Gellner wrote: 'A man does not necessarily have the last word on the interpretation of his own thought: his views may imply or presuppose ideas he repudiates, and he may be blind to it. Others must judge whether this has happened to me' (1996:672). I believe that it has happened to him, and in the following discussion I try to demonstrate this.

The content of Gellner's book

According to Gellner, the 'four pillars' on which OLP stands are:

- 1 *The paradigm case argument*: language proves, for example, that tables must exist, since we use the word 'table' often and with apparent success. In its

- paradigm actual usage a concept must be correctly applied, for what else could it mean? (1959:30–7).
- 2 *The generalised version of the naturalistic fallacy*: linguistic norms and recommendations can legitimately be inferred from currently accepted usage (1959:37–40).
 - 3 *The contrast theory of meaning*: any meaningful term must have both a possible example and a possible counterexample. There must be something a term does not cover. Contrastless concepts are meaningless, because nothing could conceivably count as their refutation (1959:40–4).
 - 4 *Polymorphism*: a logically homogeneous ‘ideal language’ is impossible, since every language includes concepts subject to family resemblance and other aspects of the irreducible diversity of language. What were thought to be homonyms are actually different meanings of the same concept. Any general models of languages are impossible (1959:44–50).

Gellner’s most famous objection to OLP, which he claims must follow from the pillars, is that OLP is deeply conservative. It defers to the linguistic habits of the boorish common man; it preserves the social status quo by belittling the significance of social problems; and it can only exist in a closed world like that of Oxford University, ‘being of its essence an ivory tower pursuit’ (Gellner, 1959:235). OLP is diagnosed as ‘conservative in the values which it in fact insinuates ...not specifically conservative...but conservative in a general, unspecific way. It...concentrates on showing that the reasons underlying criticisms of accepted habits are in general mistaken’ (Gellner, 1959:224–5). Furthermore, Gellner argues that ‘in terms of its own account of its nature and purposes’ OLP is ‘unintelligible to anyone of a practical orientation’ (1959:246). Its practitioners are accordingly portrayed by him as ‘smug, unintelligent, upper class, superciliously apolitical, unhistorical and anti-scientific’ (Cohen, 1960:180; cf. Anonymous, 1973b:8).²

The paradigm case argument

Gellner claims that the paradigm case argument is ‘absolutely essential to Linguistic Philosophy: it pervades it and it is presupposed without qualification’ (1959:30–1). He selects a tendentious example: Antony Flew’s claim that if someone denies the reality of free will, the paradigm case argument supposedly refutes the claim by invoking the fact that ‘of one’s free will’ is meaningful in ordinary language (Gellner, 1959:31; 1998:161). Gellner gives the impression that all paradigm case arguments are of this kind. Now Flew undeniably uses the paradigm case argument and thinks that it solves the problem of determinism. But this hardly proves that it is ‘absolutely essential’ to OLP. For example, we have lengthy records of both Wittgenstein’s and Ryle’s lectures on the freedom of the will, and neither of them invokes the paradigm case argument (Wittgenstein [1989] 1993; Ryle, 1993:111–45). I, in turn, disagree with all of what Flew says and with most of what Ryle and Wittgenstein say.³ Gellner’s claim about the pervasiveness of the paradigm

case argument is thus refuted; that he 'devotes only seven unbuttoned pages in an extremely repetitious book to the argument he thinks so crucial' (Cohen, 1960:179) does not help his case either.

Another objection he does present against paradigm cases, which has become a stock response, is the case of witches: a certain type of unattractive old woman would once have been a paradigm case of a witch, but nobody believes in witchcraft any more. The problem with this kind of objection is that the paradigm case argument is paradigmatically (*sic*) used in conjunction with invoking conversational implicature. To deny that witches exist is to commit oneself to a *debate* on whether witches exist; and to claim that witches exist is to make the same commitment; it is 'to make one liable to questions...that call for at least some sort of answer' (Leiber, 1999:208; cf. Hanfling, 2000:85–9). And if a philosopher denies something extremely obvious, like the existence of middle-sized dry goods, the argument can be used indirectly by pointing out that the philosopher uses many concepts *other than* 'middle-sized dry goods' in a way that *tacitly presupposes* the dry goods' existence (Hertzberg [1976] 1994:42–6; Grice, 1989:172; Kitching, 1994:241–4; Hanfling, 2000:77–8). This isn't analogous to the witch example, since nobody uses language presupposing the existence of witches.

If the paradigm case argument is used 'to derive existential truths from the fact that a given expression is, or must be, ostensibly defined and learnt' (Hacker, 1996:239), it is indefensible. But this is not its only use. Its main purpose is to remind us of the fact that if we want to, say, deny the reality of free will, *the audience we address is liable to raise the issue of ordinary usage*, and that we should prepare for this, since it is just a fact that words are taken to have both standard and non-standard uses (Weitz, 1953:231–2). The argument is best used to point out 'classic' logical fallacies like the no-true-Scotsman fallacy: for example, if the members of a group entitle it to act in the name of its members, a member cannot disclaim the group's undesirable actions, because it is considered paradigmatic *of him* to be a member. Or if someone wants to give a clear definition of what would perhaps better be considered a family resemblance concept, he can be reminded of the fact that proposed clear definitions of family resemblance concepts often exclude paradigmatic instances or include paradigmatic anti-instances.⁴

'Mere words' and the alleged naturalistic fallacy

Gellner's injunction against inferring linguistic norms from usage is based on the suggestion that if ordinary language is to be the subject matter of philosophy, philosophers should have a training in sociolinguistics and not pretend that their enquiries into language are purely conceptual; otherwise there will only be a hollow pseudo-sociology (cf. Clammer, 1976:786–8). Outside of *Words and Things*, the *locus classicus* of this approach is the rejoinder by Benson Mates (1958) to Stanley Cavell's defence of the conceptual nature of OLP. In the 1960s the approach was developed and used by Chomskyan and other linguists, in whose interests it would have been to refute OLP's claim not to treat empirical matters

(Herdan, 1960; Fodor and Katz, 1963; New, 1966). But the point of Cavell's position, as has been noted many times, is that everyone who speaks a language already has the linguistic instinct to suggest counterexamples to claims about that language (Henson, 1965; Richman, 1966; Friedman, 1969; Bates and Cohen, 1972; Lyas, 1996:189; Kindi, 1998; Hanfling, 2000:56–60). The leading ordinary language philosophers

dialectically exposed their thoughts to an intensely critical and not always friendly philosophical audience...quite capable of reminding them of things they might have overlooked. Those who participated in that dialectical process were perfectly able to engage in confirmation and disconfirmation of claims about the use of words.

(Lyas, 1996:189)

And so it should be clear that it is the speakers' *own* conflicting linguistic instincts that the exchange of counterexamples primarily tries to chart and reconcile (Grice, 1989:173–6).

And ironically, *it is a by-product of the myth that OLP always defers to a majority view that its critics want it to find out the majority view empirically*. For example, Austin's correction of Ryle's claim that 'Voluntary' is used only of actions that are morally suspect has been exhumed again and again to claim that proponents of OLP are not familiar with the standard usage of their language even among themselves.⁵ 'In providing his counterexample', however,

Austin is not surveying or justifying anything...he is assuming that Ryle will take his point. In speaking for himself, Austin takes himself to be speaking for Ryle at the same time, because his counterexample and the appeal he makes to it take for granted a *common discourse* that he and Ryle share.

(Phillips, 1999:89)

When confronted with Austin's claim, Ryle surely didn't reply 'Well, that's how *I* use that word', but 'Yes, you're right' (Hacker, 1996:235). Counterexamples like Austin's, far from being fatal to OLP, are in fact central in it. Their use is a particularly good example of the benefits of OLP's piecemeal approach, which Austin once called '*field work* in philosophy' ([1956] 1961:131).

At its most successful OLP proceeds on a casuistic basis. Contrariwise, its opponents are often builders of grand theoretical systems afraid of their whole edifice collapsing if any possibility of a limit to its validity is taken into consideration. One can of course refuse to call a spade a spade, but then one can reasonably expect to have to call it something else, and expect to be required to justify the change (Richman, 1966:24–5; Slater, 1986:211; Grice, 1989:172; Hanfling, 2000:2). Every time it is claimed that 'ordinary language is not good enough for philosophy', it should be asked: about *which* expression of ordinary language is it claimed that it is inferior to *what* expression of

technical language, and *why?* (Khatchadourian, 1981:238). But this question has usually not been forthcoming.

On Wittgenstein's conception of meaning as use, Gellner claims:

A *selective* use of the ploy may still be possible. But then, of course, the burden of the discussion would have to shift to the principle of selection. Within this movement, no such discussions occurred, and there is no logical room for them.

(1979:26)⁶

This is false. Wittgenstein never said 'meaning is use'. He said: 'For a *large* class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language' ([1953] 1967:§43). And one of the most popular interpretative problems in Wittgenstein research has for a long time been the question of the scope of the 'large class of cases' (cf. Garver, 1994:197–204). But perhaps if this had been pointed out to Gellner, the multiplicity of interpretative strategies would merely have given him another excuse for complaining about Wittgenstein's 'wilfully and pretentiously chaotic' style of writing (Gellner, 1974:709).

One of the most repeated claims in *Words and Things* is that OLP discusses 'mere words' instead of the world behind them. Wittgenstein's (1953:§120) answer to this accusation is worth quoting extensively:

When I talk about language (words, sentences, etc.) I must speak the language of every day. Is this language somehow too coarse and material for what we want to say? *Then how is another one to be constructed?*—And how strange that we should be able to do anything at all with the one we have!

In giving explanations I already have to use language full-blown (not some sort of preparatory, provisional one); this by itself shows that I can adduce only exterior facts about language.

Yes, but then how can these explanations satisfy us?—Well, your very questions were framed in this language; they had to be expressed in this language, if there was anything to ask!

And your scruples are misunderstandings.

Your questions refer to words; so I have to talk about words.

No matter how much Russell, Gellner and other 'ideal language philosophers' protest, the only way to communicate abstract thoughts from one mind to another is to use a natural language, or else to use some artificial language parasitic on a natural language because originally formulated in it. This is a fact about the human constitution, not a fact about the conveyance capacities of prepositional signs. The fundamental interpretation of a language cannot be varied; what can be varied is instead the fundamental interpretation of *reality*. A meta-language cannot be used to get *outside* language any more than showing how one walks can be called 'meta-walking' as opposed to walking

(Friedman, 1969:414). And just as the absence of meta-walking does nothing to prevent us from criticising certain ways of walking, the absence of meta-languages does nothing to prevent us from criticising certain ways of talking. Reading Gellner, it would be impossible to guess that Wittgenstein once wrote: ‘Yes, philosophical problems emerge when we hand the reins to language instead of *life*’ (Wittgenstein, 2000: §105)—or that one of his closest students, M.O’C.Drury, published a book titled *The Danger of Words*.

There can be no empirical question of validating the examination of words, because words are *already* the most indispensable tool of a philosopher (Austin [1956] 1961:129–30). Gellner writes: ‘A part—“language”—cannot challenge or sit in judgement on the whole—world—of which it is a part’ (1959:83). But no philosopher, no matter how implacably opposed to the study of words, can communicate his ideas without them; after all, to Gellner’s discomfort, the very words ‘words and things’ are words, not things (Hinton, 1973:382). To censure a philosopher for being interested in ‘mere words’—as opposed to ‘the real world’—is comparable to scolding a taxi driver for being interested in ‘mere cars’ or a microbiologist for researching ‘mere germs’ (cf. Sullivan, 1967:62). And, somehow, nobody ever suggested to a linguist, philologist or lexicographer that their endeavours were ‘merely linguistic’ or ‘mere lexicography’ (Grice, 1989:178). It has never been explained why frequent complaints about a ‘cult of language’ in conjunction with philosophers should not be equally applicable to these other occupations dealing with language. To sum up: OLP is not merely about ordinary language, but about *whatever ordinary language is about* (Weitz, 1953:230–1; cf. Austin [1956] 1961:130).⁷ Even if its creators wanted it to be, any ‘linguistic’ philosophy can never be *merely* linguistic.

I have tried to give past philosophers the benefit of doubt, but I still cannot help believing that most philosophers throughout the history of philosophy simply have not understood the fact that

all philosophy, in so far as philosophy is a conceptual inquiry, must be concerned with correct verbal usage. This is because we have and can have no access to concepts save through the study of the usage and, hence, the use of those words through which these concepts are expressed.
(Flew, 1986:79; cf. Hanfling, 2000:129–49)

Inasmuch as the ‘linguistic turn’ in twentieth-century philosophy remedies this situation, philosophy has made genuine progress. And I don’t think that admitting this exhibits haughtiness towards tradition any more than admitting that it took 2,500 years of physics to come up with relativity theory, or that it took 2,500 years of mathematics to come up with Gödel’s theorem.

The portrayal of Wittgenstein as a conservative relativist

Throughout his career, Gellner depicted Wittgenstein as a relativist who claimed that all conceptual schemes are equally valid, and who therefore

represents 'one of the most bizarre and extreme forms of irrationalism of our time' (Gellner, 1992:121). To do this, he adhered strictly to the fideist conception of Wittgenstein's notions of 'form of life' and 'language-games', according to which these notions can be invoked in justifying any political, social or religious view. For Gellner, language-games are windowless monads that fight each other without even really knowing what they fight. He once claimed, when interviewed as an anthropologist, that the Wittgensteinian notion of a form of life 'doesn't make sense in a world in which communities are not stable and are not clearly isolated from each other' (Davis, 1991:65). Shortly before his death, he summed up his position on forms of life:

[T]he most important events of human history—the emergence of abstract doctrinal religion, the possibility of Reformations which invoke abstract truth against social practice, the possibility of an Enlightenment which does the same in secular terms, the emergence of a trans-cultural science confirmed by a uniquely powerful technology—all these facts show that thought is not limited by the form of life in which it occurs, but can transcend it.

(Gellner, 1996:671)

But Gellner never even tries to show exactly where Wittgenstein disagreed. He never stops to consider the possibility that the Wittgensteinian notion of 'form of life' might include elements opposed to each other that interact and compete in the most complex ways. In a conciliatory mood, he once wrote:

All that needs to be added to Wittgenstein's view to the effect that concepts are legitimated by their role in the living system of which they are part, is... that this world contains more than one culture, and that the various cultures found in it differ quite a lot.

(Gellner, 1968b:457)

He never shows where Wittgenstein tries to deny or even play down this fact. Neither is there any sign in *Words and Things* of a realisation that a Wittgensteinian language-game can be criticised, rejected or condemned in any other Wittgensteinian language-game, even one played within the same form of life. There is, however, a brief passage in *Language and Solitude* in which Gellner suddenly presents this feature of 'language-games' and 'forms of life' as his own exciting discovery that is supposed to create a nasty 'snag' for Wittgenstein's claim that all cultures are self-validating. Gellner goes on once more to castigate Wittgenstein (and Peter Winch) for forgetting that the world contains 'an enormous number of unstable and, above all, overlapping cultural zones' (1998:171–2).

This is the complete opposite of what Winch and Wittgenstein actually say. One of Winch's greatest achievements was to argue persuasively that it is the *non*-self-validating character of Wittgensteinian language-games that demonstrates

the sense of what Wittgenstein really said about validation: that language-games certainly need arbiters, but whatever arbitrates between them, it isn't philosophy. Gellner doesn't seem to have the slightest idea that his interpretation of Wittgenstein as a transcendentalist relativist is merely one extreme of a spectrum of views on the interpretation of 'form of life' and 'language-game', at the other end of which is an organic view of 'this complicated form of life' (Wittgenstein [1953] 1967:174) as something common to all humans. The views of Wittgenstein scholars constitute a whole gamut of readings from this strictly naturalising, 'grammatical' view (e.g. Hunter, 1968; Emmett, 1990; Garver, 1994:237–68; Svensson, 1997; Clack, 1999:87–9) via a wide and heterogeneous middle ground (e.g. Hertzberg [1978] 1994; Gier, 1980; Simpson, 1998; Wallgren, 1999) to the end that offers transcendental or other non-anthropological views (e.g. Williams, 1974; Baker, 1984; von Savigny, 1991). Gellner always considers only the latter end of the spectrum. But if we accept the at least partial correctness of the organic, 'grammatical' interpretation, it makes his critique of the *Investigations* miss the point completely, as John Skorupski (1996:491) has argued:

Gellner seriously misreads the significance of the 'rule-following' argument in the *Philosophical Investigations* in this respect. The point of the argument is precisely to highlight the ineliminability of nature as against convention. The application of a conventional rule to a particular case in one way rather than another is always a normative judgement. The judgement does not in turn reflect any further convention, and it corresponds to no fact, natural or Platonic. Its objectivity rests on the epistemology of natural spontaneity and convergence—the epistemology appropriate to normative rather than factual judgements.

According to organic interpretations of 'form of life', it is this 'natural spontaneity and convergence'—what John McDowell (1994) calls 'second nature' or *Bildung*—that Wittgenstein appeals to in seeking to ground his vision in human practices. Philosophy supplies 'remarks on the natural history of human beings' (Wittgenstein, 1953:§415); on a set of features found in every culture and every human form of life, and not 'limited by the form of life in which it occurs', as Gellner would have us believe. It is what Wittgenstein calls 'the common behaviour of mankind', the ways of behaving shared by all of the world's myriad civilisations, which according to him are 'the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language' (Wittgenstein [1953] 1967:§206). Certainly it is contingently true of many language-games that they are not universally played, but as Newton Garver states, 'none of Wittgenstein's key language-games or examples depends on or even involves any significant cultural variation, and...the thrust of his *Philosophical Investigations* has to do with what is characteristic of humans in general' (1994:249).

Amazingly, Gellner portrays Winch as a representative of the transcendental interpretation. In fact it is Wittgenstein's remark 'Language—I want to say—is a refinement, "in the beginning was the deed"' (Wittgenstein,

1980:31; cf. Wittgenstein, 1969:§402) that Winch alludes to in the title of one of his best-known papers, arguing strongly for the grammatical interpretation and noting how 'there is no application for the true-false polarity at the level of the deed' ([1981] 1987:53). Immediately after the notorious passage in *The Idea of a Social Science* in which Winch calls both science and religion 'nonlogical', he emphasises that this is misleading if taken by itself, because it ignores 'the overlapping character of different modes of social life' (1990:100–1).⁸ Winch would undoubtedly agree even with the views of the Marxist Gavin Kitching: human language is 'both a practice and a practice among, and within, other practices'; and that consequently '*meaning in language is not just a matter of language*' (1994:114). As Marshall Sahlins (1995:204–5) has noted, in a flatly hyperrealist theoretical practice like Gellner's,

in order for cultural schemata to function in practice, in order for people to successfully use their understandings of the world, the world will have to consistently and objectively correspond to the ideas by which they know it. If not, their minds turn into Lockean blank sheets of paper, and the biological capacity for realism takes over. Indeed, a Utopian Lockean world of empirical truth would be the pan-human fate, since, sooner or later, usually sooner, reality proves a disappointment to all peoples' categories... The reason this theoretical practice is unworkable is that every situation to which a people refer a given category is empirically unique, distinct from every other to which the same notion may be applied. One never steps into the same river twice—which never stopped anyone from calling it by the same name. To paraphrase John Earth, reality is a nice place to visit (philosophically), but no one ever lived there. Unless experiences were selectively perceived, classified and valued by socially communicable criteria, there would be neither society nor intelligibility, let alone sanity.

It is exactly this 'biological capacity for realism' that Wittgenstein refers to when using the notion of a 'form of life'. Wittgenstein does often speak of the organic roots of justification, but this hardly means that he peddled 'a cult of *Gemeinschaft*, in the very curious disguise of a theory of language and philosophy' (Gellner, 1988:286). Actually he always speaks of the organic as something *natural*, as something *opposed to* the ethnological, not—contra Gellner—as *equalling* the ethnological. 'Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing' (Wittgenstein [1953] 1967:§25); and, one might add, as mundane a part of it.

Gellner repeatedly claims that Wittgenstein and Winch are relativists for whom, for example, the world view of Sir James Frazer is just as good as the world view of the savages whose rituals he studied. This just isn't true. According to Wittgenstein and Winch, the world view of Frazer is *much inferior* to the world view of the savages, since Frazer continuously mistakes the savages' symbolic statements for empirical ones (Sharrock and Anderson, 1985:399); similarly, the world view of early twentieth-century Europeans in

general was for Wittgenstein *much inferior* to that of, say, early nineteenth-century Europeans. But Gellner has a quick getaway from these counterexamples—his refusal to believe that anyone ‘really has any doubts about the cognitive inferiority of the pre-scientific outlook’ (1968a:401). Damned and double-damned: interpreted as relativists, Wittgenstein and Winch are deluded; interpreted as non-relativists, they are lying.

Gellner blusters: ‘I do not apologise for travestying the richness of [Wittgenstein’s] thought, for there is no travesty’ (1974:709). But he never quotes *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (which both Wittgenstein and his executors intended as a companion to the *Investigations*); he doesn’t attempt to explain Wittgenstein’s gloomy reference in the *Investigations* to ‘the darkness of this time’, or his angry claim to Norman Malcolm that philosophy has no value ‘if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life’ (quoted by Malcolm, 1958:39), or his description of his own lectures as ‘propaganda for one style of thinking as opposed to another’ (Wittgenstein, 1966:28); and he ignores the mass of biographical data contradicting his selective use of them. Neither does Gellner attempt to address the vast amount of Wittgenstein materials that had appeared since the first edition of *Words and Things*; when he refers to Wittgenstein’s work, it is practically always the *Tractatus* or the *Investigations*.⁹

This brings us to Gellner’s most popular accusation, that of preventing linguistic change. He claims in *Words and Things*: ‘Philosophy does not spring, as Wittgenstein thought, from our being blinded by grammar, but from the need to re-order our concepts’ (1959:55). At least from the *Blue Book* onwards, and repeatedly in such works as *Zettel*, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, etc., Wittgenstein uses ‘being blinded by grammar’ and ‘needing to re-order one’s concepts’ interchangeably; today it is practically a triviality to say that Wittgenstein’s philosophy is based on the need to re-order concepts. In fact, Wittgenstein defends the possibility of innovatory revision of concepts on a number of occasions, for example in the *Blue Book* with respect to Freud’s notion of unconscious thoughts (Wittgenstein, 1958:56–8).

Gellner claims that ordinary language enshrines ‘the impossibility of justification, and the fallaciousness of criticism from general premises’ (1959:225). But actually OLP can *neither prevent nor promote* justification. It is *completely neutral*, because the vocabularies of offering a justification and contesting it are both equally important parts of language:

The language games of criticism, questioning, doubting and probing use the concepts or words of the English language to examine, criticise and argue for changing prevailing values, institutions and patterns... It is simply wrong for Gellner to argue that ordinary language analysis stresses ‘the impossibility of justification’, because the language of justification is a part of ordinary language.

(Wertheimer, 1976:411)

The same point is made by Hanna Pitkin (1972:19):

The same ordinary language that allows the expression of various commonsense beliefs also allows their negation, their questioning, their doubting. What is binding is not ordinary beliefs, but the ordinary language in which they are expressed; and it is not binding because the common man is normative for the theorist, but because the ordinary language is also the theorist's own.

To claim that giving reminders of the self-justifying nature of all practices was, for Wittgenstein, 'the only valid or possible method in philosophy' (Gellner, 1998:167) is simply bizarre. For Wittgenstein, practically nothing justifies itself. Gellner's central notion of vital linguistic change being prevented by 'a pre-established language-game' (e.g. 1959:44) has no textual basis in Wittgenstein, since his language-games are typically not pre-established; they arise from instinctive behaviour that neither invokes nor suppresses communal agreement, since such agreement comes into the picture only after the language-game has arisen. To suggest otherwise simply amounts to a mild form of the conspiracy theory of history 'Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination' (Wittgenstein, 1969:§475), so it cannot in good faith be called a self-validating form of ratiocination: nobody *decided* to take it in use (Pitkin, 1972:132).

Wittgenstein simply does not declare anything inviolable; he merely points out that there is no guarantee that criticism of language-games is found compelling by one's audience, and that the fact that it often *isn't* found compelling has certain too often ignored *implications* for philosophical criticism of cultures. The whole problematic of whether a form of life can criticise another is quixotic, for the simple reason Lars Hertzberg pointed out many years ago—that the extent to which our arguments seem compelling to *ourselves* has nothing to do with the extent to which they can compel persons who currently don't accept them. It is often alleged that Wittgenstein's notions of language-games and forms of life make it impossible to justify our criticising racists, Stalinists, Nazis and so on, because these groups can invoke their status as valid forms of life and the status of their hateful language as a valid language-game (e.g. Schlagel, 1974; Goodman, 1982:141–2; Nieli, 1987:241–2). But this is a pseudo-problem:

The question we set ourselves was: how can we choose between our own philosophy and that of the Nazis? But it ought to be seen that this is a pseudo-question—we have already chosen, or so to say—and in fact *it is the presence of our conviction and not its lack that makes us pose this question!* We begin by believing and then go on to seek foundations for our belief. But this is philosophical self-deception; we forget that no foundations could appear to us more convincing than the very thing the foundations of which they are supposed to be. (To perceive this: try to imagine an argument that

would convince *you* of the acceptability of Nazism!—We can only seek *foundations* for our belief when it is *possible* to believe the opposite.)
(Hertzberg, 1971:509)

Finally, there remains the awkward question of intellectuals who profess to understand and appreciate Wittgenstein while fighting everything Gellner claims he represents. If Wittgenstein equals rampant self-legitimizing relativism, it is extremely hard to explain why such outspoken foes of self-legitimizing relativism as Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Bouveresse, Esa Itkonen, Hilary Putnam and Barry Smith have presented themselves as admirers of Wittgenstein and constantly co-opt him as an ally in their struggle against postmodernist defeatism. It is also hard to explain why many Marxists and other political radicals like Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, K.T.Fann, David Rubinstein and Gavin Kitching have a similarly positive attitude to Wittgenstein. As far as Gellner is concerned, these anti-relativist, anti-quietist Wittgensteinians might never have written. Of course it *is* a possibility that they are deluded or mendacious on a grand scale; but an immeasurably more economical explanation is that Gellner profoundly misunderstands Wittgenstein's stance on relativism.

Yet another example of Gellner's no-true-Scotsman argument is his explaining away of social scientists who admire Wittgenstein. In *Words and Things* and in many of his essays from the 1960s Gellner condemned OLP for being a pseudo-sociology unsuitable for 'real' empirical social scientists, who were supposed to be above all that; in the early 1970s, as many trained and competent social scientists like Hanna Pitkin and Rodney Needham¹⁰ started to use OLP, Gellner rushed to condemn them for somehow ceasing to be 'real'. Already, in 1968, Gellner had attacked the use of sociological research by philosophers in an article in the *Times Literary Supplement*, and again it was followed by a heated correspondence, this time involving such familiar names as Alasdair MacIntyre, Peter Winch, W.G.Runciman and D.Z.Phillips.

The supposed social conservatism

The novelty of Gellner's book, and undoubtedly a big reason for its popularity, was the attempt in the ninth chapter to explain the conservatism of OLP not only philosophically but sociologically, with reference to the social conditions of Oxbridge in the 1950s. But even taken as biographical assertion, Gellner's claim that the prevalent social attitude among OLP's practitioners was a complacent, self-serving blimpishness is simply not true. Their social background was extremely narrow (Rée, 1993:16; cf. Ferguson, 2001), but their actual social and political opinions were extremely diverse; they were hardly the irresponsible 'playboy/pedant coalition' Gellner (1979:23) terms them. In the intellectual atmosphere of OLP there were philosophers known for being political leftists, centrists and rightists; avid anticlericalists and practising Christians; moral relativists and moral realists. 'The most obvious common characteristic of Oxford philosophers, is, indeed, their propensity for arguing with one another,' as R.M. Hare (1960:120)

put it at the height of the controversy. But for Gellner the disagreements were all a subterfuge intended to conceal the fact of the lack of them; as *The Economist* noted, in *Words and Things* the hapless Oxford philosophers are 'not allowed that right to differ which even members of Plato's Academy possessed' (Anonymous, 1959a:618). It is easy to agree with Marshall Cohen's verdict concerning Gellner's notion that conceptual conservatism necessarily implies political conservatism: 'I believe this argument to rest on nothing more elevated than a pun' (1960:180).

Wittgenstein's suspicious attitude to most of his followers in Oxford and Cambridge is well documented and deep. It is hard to argue with H.O. Mounce's assertion that 'a figure more alien to Oxford in the 1950s than Wittgenstein would be difficult even to imagine' (2000:112) or with von Wright's estimate that 'not even those who professed to follow him were really engaged in the same spiritual endeavour as he' (Flowers, 1999:4.207). Wittgenstein had been friendly with Ryle since 1929, and in the 1930s they used to go on walking holidays together (Monk, 1990:275), but Wittgenstein broke with Ryle in 1947 after Ryle had published a favourable review of Popper's *Open Society and Its Enemies*—a book never noted, of course, for its deep understanding of Wittgenstein (Hacker, 1996:313). Austin spoke of Wittgenstein as 'Witters' and made it clear that he preferred Moore (Hacker, 1996:172); he used to 'read a page or two of Wittgenstein aloud...to show how incomprehensible and obscure the Austrian philosopher was, and how easily he could be parodied and dismissed' (Mehta, 1983:62). Even the relationship of Ryle to Wittgenstein is not straightforward. There is evidence that despite his admiration for Wittgenstein's philosophy, Ryle regarded Wittgenstein as a poseur and his mannerisms as affected (Deutscher, 1982:254; cf. Ryle, 1970:11–12).

Gellner's method of referring and quoting—ironically enough—seems to be nothing other than Wittgenstein's celebrated notion of family resemblances run wild, so that it makes his accusations towards OLP completely unfalsifiable:¹¹

Most often he will cite a particular writer, show that he holds a given doctrine and then conclude that every one of that philosopher's supposed allies also holds the doctrine... If linguistic philosopher *a* and linguistic philosopher *b* share doctrine *X* which *c* does not hold, and if *b* and *c* share doctrine *Y* which is not accepted by *a*, it is grotesque to attack the whole family of linguistic philosophers for holding, say, *X*... Moreover, he seems to say that those who do not explicitly subscribe to *X* or to *Y* are 'unconsciously' evasive or dishonest. One can imagine how maddening this must be to those philosophers who are found guilty by association.
(White, 1960:205–6; cf. Nuchelmans, 1961:92)

Gellner's basic technique was to scour the writings of ordinary language philosophers for passages that could, taken out of context, be interpreted so that they denied trivialities—and then claim that since these philosophers denied trivialities, they were madmen or charlatans. As Wittgensteinian interpretation

boomed in the 1960s and 1970s, Gellner set a thief to catch a thief, taking every interpretation of every exegete seriously as long as the interpretations happened to support his own position. Even Saul Kripke's book on Wittgenstein, which famously denies that it seeks to expound Wittgenstein's own views (Kripke, 1982:5), was for Gellner exactly the same as Wittgenstein himself (Gellner, 1984).

Gellner claims that there is 'no evidence that Wittgenstein was ever consciously interested in social and political questions' (1998:74), except as belittling them from a conservative point of view; 'the horizon of his intellectual life included so little other than his own wrestling with the views of the *Tractates*' (1959:101). Somewhat strangely it has become a central part of the Wittgenstein myth that politics simply didn't interest him. But one of the most consistent aspects of the many personal memoirs of him is actually his impeccable knowledge of current events. He 'kept himself informed about current events' (Flowers, 1999:2.219–20); 'had, at all times, a shrewd idea of what was going on about him in the wider world' (Flowers, 1999:2.244); and 'seemed to know what was going on in the world' (Flowers, 1999:4.136). His recently published correspondence with his sisters and his close friend Ludwig Hänsel testifies to the interest that he took in Austrian politics even when living in Britain for extended periods.¹² According to G.H.von Wright, he regularly read the *New Statesman*, which already in his lifetime was among the leading political weeklies in Britain. In 1945, he even took the venturesome step of telling his students which way they should vote in the British general election: the supposedly 'arch-conservative' Wittgenstein professed his dislike of Churchill and said that he'd vote Labour (Monk, 1990:480).

Part of a 1931 remark selected by Wittgenstein for *Zettel* reads: 'The philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas. That is what makes him into a philosopher' ([1967] 1981:§455). This is the core of Wittgenstein's attitude towards the mixing of philosophy and politics. It is also illustrated by an anecdote Rush Rhees records about the time he told Wittgenstein of his intention to join the Revolutionary Communist Party; Wittgenstein said that in his view philosophers cannot treat the ideas of any one ideology differently from others, and that a philosopher should rather be content to support his favoured party's objectives from without (Flowers, 1999:3.280–1). Wittgenstein was neither the extreme leftist many of his political statements imply, nor the extreme conservative his outlook on life implies. Rather, he represented an archetype of modernist intellectual that is quite common but regrettably lacks a generally agreed name.¹³ I mean someone who is socially quite radical and whose political convictions on the everyday level are typically some way to the left of a 'western liberal intellectual' in a Rortyan sense, but whose *Menschenbild* is nevertheless that of a Romantic conservative, often with an anarchist streak. Varying instances of this outlook can be found in such diverse thinkers as José Ortega y Gasset, Rush Rhees, Leszek Kolakowski, G.H.von Wright, Heinrich Böll, John Lennon—and, I should perhaps add, myself.

There have been frequent accusations that OLP not only is conservative and impotent, but that it openly celebrates this fact. The reference is usually to Wittgenstein's remark: 'Philosophy...leaves everything as it is' ([1953] 1967: §

124). It is undeniable that Wittgenstein makes this remark. But the history of its interpretation isn't encouraging. It has usually been read as either (1) 'Philosophers leave everything as it is', or (2) 'Philosophy *must* leave everything as it is'. Both readings are equally misguided. The first has Wittgenstein claiming, bizarrely, that philosophers are exceptionally unable to engage in attempts to change their society, while the second has him thinking that they aren't, but it would be better if they were (Conant, 1995:299–300). But as Stanley Cavell (1962:79) pointed out forty years ago, Wittgenstein's point is merely that when philosophers *do* change things, there's nothing about their being *philosophers* that specially enables them to do this. Nothing prevents philosophers from voicing their political opinions openly, standing for elective office, or fighting social evils. *But there isn't anything about their being philosophers that specifically enables them to do this either.*¹⁴ Political philosophy does not make a political statement a philosophical one any more than philosophy of chemistry makes a chemical statement a philosophical one. D.Z. Phillips (1999:160), one of the ablest defenders of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy has put this point forcefully:

I must know, for example, that political philosophers have criticised forms of government in the light of political ideals they espouse. I must know that moral philosophers have criticised certain kinds of moral motivation in the light of moral ideals they espouse. I must know that some philosophers of religion condemn belief in God, advocate certain attitudes they think should be taken toward other religions, and so on. All this goes on; how can I deny it? The answer is that I do not. What I deny is the claim by the philosophers concerned that the value judgements they make (for that is what they are) are themselves underwritten by philosophy. The subject cannot get them to where they think they are going.

Phillips also makes an important related point: *nobody can become an authority on anything merely by deciding to become one* (1986:93–7). If philosophy 'leaves everything as it is', it also leaves every individual and movement seeking to improve society as it is (Wertheimer, 1976:410–11). If philosophy cannot do something, it is useless to pretend that it can; it is 'no more sensible to complain that philosophy is no longer capable of solving practical problems than it is to complain that the study of the stars no longer enables one to predict the course of world events' (Grice, 1989:180; cf. Slater, 1986:207). The *Economist* editorial on the Gellner affair diagnosed Gellner's accusations on the abdication of wisdom, and his claim that OLP regards the pursuit of world views as the cardinal sin of philosophers (Gellner, 1959:99), as a simple *ignoratio elenchi*:

So why are modern philosophers hated—if they are? For the lay outsider, the clue might be found in this: that hardly any of them, despite their other diversity, would claim that, as philosophers, they can tell us what to do. When other direction posts are falling down, philosophers are assumed to

be the people who ought to be giving us directions about life. But if they cannot, they cannot: and there are philosophical arguments for the belief that they cannot. If these arguments are valid, then the suggestion that they ought to give directions all the same is an invitation to disingenuousness.

(Anonymous, 1960:16)

Conclusion

The history of ideas and the sociology of knowledge have hitherto concentrated almost exclusively on the success and propagation of ideas, not their failure and erasure. Victors write the histories in intellectual history as well as political history, and therefore source criticism is often conspicuously lacking when historians of ideas treat schools of thought that failed to maintain their legitimation. With a few exceptions, the historiography of philosophy has not paid any significant attention to the role of hostile caricatures in discrediting philosophers and their ideas.

Four decades after its publication, Gellner's attack on Wittgenstein, Ryle, Austin and other ordinary language philosophers is almost entirely forgotten. But his collection of rhetoric, insinuation and personal abuse is still taken to be the plain truth about their philosophy in many quarters. One contribution to a specific British discussion of the 1950s has somehow become entrenched as a definitive and timeless statement about a whole school of philosophy. Unlike the Oxonian practitioners of OLP, Wittgenstein still has considerable influence on our culture, but it too is increasingly manifested outside of OLP-type thought, in fields like literature, visual art, aesthetics, semiotics, theology, and continental philosophy. Even when Wittgenstein's and OLP's dwindling influence has been discussed by philosophers, the discussion has usually concentrated on developments *within* analytic philosophy, such as the revival of interest in mathematical logic, the rise of the naturalist paradigm in the philosophy of mind, and other forms of growing technicalisation. Sociological and cultural explanations have been lacking, and Gellner's influence on the reception of OLP has accordingly been neglected, to the detriment of both philosophical historiography and contemporary philosophy.

Gellner's damaging legacy has been especially prominent in the relationship of many anthropologists, sociologists and social scientists to the OLP tradition more generally and to Wittgenstein's philosophy specifically. As I hope I have shown in this paper, the attention to ordinary language paid by OLP doesn't necessarily lead to conservatism, relativism or any other politically or morally undesirable consequences—although it can facilitate them if one doesn't watch out. Wittgenstein and OLP may have been largely *apolitical*, but this doesn't mean that they were *conservative*. As Anthony Quinton put it against *Words and Things*, one does not become Canute by failing to assist the incoming tide (1961:341). The availability of effective rebuttals to Gellner's criticisms forces the revision of an old saw: those who are not with us are not necessarily against us. In this way, increased

understanding of OLP's disinterested, but not cavalier, stance could hopefully also have repercussions beyond the immediate philosophical context.¹⁵

Notes

- 1 For details of the *Times* controversy and its aftermath, see Mehta (1983:1–14), Rée (1993:15–16) and Russell (1997:605–9). The correspondents—apart from Russell, Ryle and Gellner himself—were eight in favour of Russell (including the political scientist Arnold S.Kaufman and the economist Joan Robinson); seven in favour of Ryle (including John Wisdom, Brian McGuinness and Alan Donagan); and one critical of both.
- 2 In this, Gellner's book can be seen alongside other polemics such as C.P.Snow's *The Two Cultures* (which was also published in 1959) as a contribution to a much larger debate on the role of the traditional humanities in the changing British society of the 1950s and 1960s. I hope to discuss the sociological context of the *Words and Things* controversy at greater length in another paper.
- 3 For what it is worth, my own position on human freedom is basically Spinozistic.
- 4 A recent example is provided by Michael Dummett's and P.M.S.Hacker's proposed definitions of 'analytic philosophy', which end up excluding Russell and Quine respectively.
- 5 Which is an odd comment in view of the frequent accusations by Gellner, Russell and others that practitioners of OLP are merely too lazy to examine the empirical world instead of just language. The Ryle-Austin exchange convincingly shows the charting of ordinary language to be so hard that even Ryle, an acknowledged leader in the field, can go wrong in it (Hanfling 2000:4).
- 6 In his brief discussion of Strawson's paper, Gellner (1959:178–9) comes perhaps closest to executing a critique of a single easily identifiable argument in a single easily identifiable text. But, as Dummett ([1960] 1978:434) shows, Gellner completely misunderstands both the nature and the point of Strawson's objection to Russell's theory.
- 7 And if a philosopher's being professionally interested in ordinary language automatically made him a member of a 'cult of common sense' (cf. Gellner, 1959:32) that 'deified actual language' (Gellner, 1959:55), shouldn't we brand philosophers like Russell and Gellner, who so strongly and emotively emphasise that the object of philosophy is rather 'the nature of reality' or 'the universe', high priests of a *pantheist* cult? (Should *Mind* perhaps have been retitled *Reality*?)
- 8 In the first edition of *The Idea of a Social Science*, Winch used other formulations that have led to his philosophy being read as relativist, but he retracted most of these formulations explicitly in the preface to the second edition (Winch, 1990:ix–xviii).
- 9 And, in fact, only a dozen out-of-context quotations from the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* respectively.
- 10 Pitkin (1972); Needham (1972); Needham (1975). In my opinion, Pitkin's book is one of the very best examples of OLP's genuine applicability to problems or sets of problems arising completely outside analytic philosophy—in this case problems in political philosophy. (For more examples of the use of OLP to support radical or reformist politics, see Gallie 1956; Symanski 1976; Wertheimer 1976:414–20; and Connolly 1993. And for a recent attempt to use OLP as a key weapon in a post-Marxist or neo-Foucaultian cultural critique of a depth and breadth usually encountered only in the continental tradition, see Robinson 1998.)
- 11 The Popperian John Watkins complained in his review of *Words and Things* that Gellner 'puts himself in the position of a complacent psycho-analyst who regards his patient's protestations against his interpretations as further confirmation of them' (1960:107). This is also odd in the view of Gellner's later interest in

- criticising psychoanalysis (e.g. Gellner, 1985)—as is Gellner’s insistence on calling Wittgenstein a relativist in the face of his well-known suspicion of Freudian explanatory schemes.
- 12 Gellner claims that Wittgenstein endorsed the politically escapist movement into reviving local folklore that was popular in the interbellum decades in the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian empire. He constantly evokes ‘the Carpathian village green’, with its ignorant folk dancers, as an accurate metaphor for Wittgenstein’s cultural ideals. Nothing could be further from the truth. In a diary entry from 1932, Wittgenstein explicitly deplores ‘the adoption of ancient names for denominations’ and ‘the revival of folk dances and costumes’ as ‘a kind of stupidification’ that betrays the degeneration of Austrian culture (Wittgenstein, 1997:68).
 - 13 In his classic study of Ernst Jünger, Hans-Peter Schwarz (1962) suggests the term ‘conservative anarchist’. Highly misleading when considered in isolation, this nevertheless has something of the right flavour.
 - 14 A philosopher can, of course, lend whatever prestige he has as an intellectual to causes he considers worthy of support. But this prestige is the same with many other kinds of intellectual; and nobody would suggest that painters, musicians, physicists or mathematicians can lend their support to progressive social causes any more effectively because of their vocational training.
 - 15 For their comments on earlier versions of this paper and discussions on its subject matter, I am grateful to Antti Arnkil, Bo-Ram Lee, Lars Hertzberg (and the participants of his research seminar at Abo Akademi), Sami Järvinen, Gavin Kitching, Olli Kulmala, Martin Kusch, Justin Leiber, Elia Lennes, Neil McLaughlin, Nigel Pleasants, Jonathan Rée, Duncan Richter, J.L.Speranza, Günter Trendler, Kirby Urner and Thomas Wallgren. I would also like to thank Chess Krawczyk and Deborah McVea for technical help.

References

- Anonymous (1959a) Attack on philosophy’, *The Economist*, 14 November, 618.
- [= Thompson, J.] (1959b) ‘Polemical intentions’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 November, 682.
- (1959c) ‘Words about words’, *The Times*, 24 November, 13.
- (1960) ‘The hatreds of philosophers’, *The Economist*, 2 January, 15–16.
- [= Gellner, E.] (1973a) ‘Collingwood and the failure of realism’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 March, 337–9.
- (1973b) ‘The clever men of Oxford’, *New Statesman*, 6 July, 8–11.
- Austin, J. ([1956] 1961) A plea for excuses’, in *Philosophical Papers*, Oxford: Clarendon Press: 123–52.
- Ayer, A.J. (1959) ‘Linguistic philosophy’, *Spectator*, 20 November, 714–16.
- Baker, L. (1984) ‘On the very idea of a form of life’, *Inquiry* 27, 277–89.
- Bates, S. and Cohen, T. (1972) ‘More on what we say’, *Metaphilosophy* 3, 1–24.
- Bennett, A., Cook, P., Miller, J. and Moore, D. ([1963] 1987) *The Complete Beyond the Fringe*, London: Methuen.
- Cavell, S. (1962) ‘The availability of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy’, *Philosophical Review* 71, 67–93.
- Clack, B. (1999) *An Introduction to Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Religion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Clammer, J. (1976) ‘Wittgensteinianism and the Social Sciences’, *Sociological Review* 24: 775–91.
- Cohen, M. (1960) ‘The angry young philosopher’, *Commentary* 30, 178–80.

- Conant, J. (1995) 'Putting two and two together', in T. Tessin and M. von der Ruhr (eds) *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 248–331.
- Connolly, W. (1993) *The Terms of Political Discourse*, 3rd edition, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Copleston, F. (1960) 'Review of Gellner 1959', *Heythrop Journal* 1, 155–7.
- Crick, B. (1960) 'Review of Gellner 1959', *Political Quarterly* 31, 102–4.
- Davis, J. (1991) 'An interview with Ernest Gellner', *Current Anthropology* 32, 63–72.
- Deutscher, M. (1982) 'Some recollections of Ryle and remarks on his notion of negative action', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 60, 254–64.
- Doney, W. (1962) 'Review of Gellner 1959', *Philosophical Review* 71, 252–7.
- Dummett, M. ([1960] 1978) 'Oxford philosophy', in *Truth and Other Enigmas*, London: Duckworth, 431–6.
- Emmett, K. (1990) 'Forms of life', *Philosophical Investigations* 13, 213–31.
- Falck, C. (1960) 'Philosophy again?' *New Left Review* 1, 63–5.
- Findlay, J. (1961) 'Critical notice of Gellner 1959', *Indian Journal of Philosophy* 3, 130–8.
- Flew, A. (1984) 'Critical notice of Popper's *The Open Universe*', *Philosophical Investigations* 7, 75–87.
- (1986) 'Apologia pro philosophia mea', in S.G. Shanker (ed.) *Philosophy in Britain Today*, London: Croom Helm, 72–97.
- Flowers, F. (ed.) (1999) *Portraits of Wittgenstein* (4 vols), Bristol: Thoemmes Press.
- Fodor, J. and Katz, J. (1963) 'The availability of what we say', *Philosophical Review* 72, 57–71.
- Forguson, L. (2001) 'Oxford and the "epidemic" of ordinary language philosophy', *Monist* 84, 325–45.
- Friedman, P. (1969) 'The availability of ordinary-language philosophy', *Man and World* 2, 410–22.
- Gallie, W. (1956) 'Essentially contested concepts', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56, 167–98.
- Garver, N. (1994) *This Complicated Form of Life*, LaSalle: Open Court.
- Gellner, E. (1959) *Words and Things: A Critical Account of Linguistic Philosophy and a Study in Ideology*, London: Gollancz.
- (1964) 'The crisis in the humanities and the mainstream of philosophy', in J. Plumb (ed.) *Crisis in the Humanities*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 45–81.
- (1968a) 'The new idealism', in I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (eds) *Problems in the Philosophy of Science*, Amsterdam: North-Holland, 377–406.
- (1968b) 'The entry of the philosophers', *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 May 1968, 457.
- (1974) 'The phoney revolution', *Spectator*, 8 June 1974, 708–9.
- (1979) *Words and Things: An Examination of, and an Attack on, Linguistic Philosophy*, revised edition, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- (1984) 'The Gospel according to Saint Ludwig', *American Scholar* 53, 243–63.
- (1985) *The Psychoanalytic Movement, or, The Cunning of Unreason*, London: Paladin.
- (1988) 'The stakes in anthropology', *American Scholar* 57, 17–30.
- (1992) *Reason and Culture*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1996) 'Reply to critics', in J. Hall and I. Jarvie (eds) *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 623–86.
- (1998) *Language and Solitude*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gier, N. (1980) 'Wittgenstein and forms of life', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 10, 241–58.
- Goodman, R. (1982) 'Wittgenstein and ethics', *Metaphilosophy* 13, 138–48.
- Grice, P. (1989) *Studies in the Way of Words*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hacker, P. (1996) *Wittgenstein's Place in Twentieth-Century Analytic Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell.

- Hanfling, O. (2000) *Philosophy and Ordinary Language*, London: Routledge.
- Hare, R. (1960) 'A school for philosophers', *Ratio* 2, 107–20.
- Henson, R. (1965) 'What we say', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 2, 52–62.
- Herdan, G. (1960) 'Linguistic philosophy in the light of modern linguistics', *Language and Speech* 3, 78–83.
- Hertzberg, L. (1971) 'Wittgenstein, filosofi' ('Wittgenstein, philosopher'), translated by T. Alanko, *Parnasso* (Helsinki) 21, 501–9.
- ([1976] 1994) 'On the factual dependence of the language game', in *The Limits of Experience*, Helsinki: Philosophical Society of Finland, 33–62.
- ([1978] 1994) 'Language, philosophy and natural history', in *The Limits of Experience*, Helsinki: Philosophical Society of Finland, 63–95.
- Hinton, J. (1973) 'Linguistic philosophy, empiricism and the Left', *Philosophy* 48, 381–5.
- Hunter, J. (1968) 'Forms of life in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 5, 233–43.
- Isenberg, A. (1961) 'Review of Gellner 1959', *Journal of Philosophy* 58, 110–12.
- Khatchadourian, H. (1981) 'Contemporary philosophy, alienation and the abdication of wisdom', *Metaphilosophy* 12, 224–46.
- Kindi, V. (1998) 'Is Wittgenstein's resort to ordinary language an appeal to empirical facts?' *Metaphilosophy* 29, 298–305.
- Kitching, G. (1994) *Marxism and Science*, University Park: Penn State Press.
- Körner, S. (1961) 'Review of Gellner 1959', *Philosophical Quarterly* 11, 376–9.
- Kripke, S. (1982) *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Leiber, J. (1999) 'Language without linguistics, or, badly reinventing Oxford ordinary language philosophy', *Synthese* 120, 193–211.
- Lyas, C. (1996) 'On not interfering with the words with which we talk of personal identity (or of anything else)', in K.S. Johannessen and T. Nordenstam (eds) *Wittgenstein and the Philosophy of Culture*, Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 183–200.
- McDowell, J. (1994) *Mind and World*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- MacIntyre, A. (1959) 'The hunt is up!' *New Statesman*, 31 October 1959, 597–8.
- Malcolm, N. (1958) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mates, B. (1958) 'On the verification of statements about ordinary language', *Inquiry* 2, 161–71.
- Mayo, B. (1960) 'Review of Gellner 1959', *Philosophical Books* 1, 3–6.
- Mehta, V. (1983) *Fly and the Fly-Bottle*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Meyerhoff, H. and Main, A. (1960) 'A conservative therapy', *The Nation*, 24 September 1960, 182–4.
- Monk, R. (1990) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, London: Jonathan Cape.
- Mounce, H. (2000) 'Review of Gellner 1998', *International Philosophical Quarterly* 40, 112–14.
- Mulhall, S. (1994) 'Review of Ryle 1993', *Philosophical Investigations* 17, 444–56.
- Needham, R. (1972) *Belief, Language and Experience*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1975) 'Polythetic classification', *Man* 10, 349–69.
- New, C. (1966) 'A plea for linguistics', *Mind* 75, 368–84.
- Nieli, R. (1987) *Wittgenstein: From Mysticism to Ordinary Language*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Nuchelmans, G. (1961) 'Mr Gellner's attack on linguistic philosophy', *Synthese* 13, 88–97.
- Phillips, D. (1986) *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- (1999) *Philosophy's Cool Place*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Pitkin, H. (1972) *Wittgenstein and Justice*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Quinton, A. (1961) 'Review of Gellner 1959', *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 11, 337–44.
- Rée, J. (1993) 'English philosophy in the fifties', *Radical Philosophy* 65, 3–21.
- Richards, I. (1990) *Selected Letters of I.A.Richards*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Richman, R. (1966) 'On the philosophical significance of what we say', *Philosophical Studies* 17, 21–6.
- Robinson, G. (1998) *Philosophy and Mystification*, London: Routledge.
- Russell, B. (1997) *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, vol. 11, London: Routledge.
- Ryle, G. (1970) 'Autobiographical', in O.P.Wood and G.Pitcher (eds) *Ryle*, Garden City: Doubleday, 1–15.
- (1993) *Aspects of Mind*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sahlins, M. (1995) *How 'Natives' Think*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Savigny, E.von (1991) 'Common behaviour of many a kind: *Philosophical Investigations* Section 206', in R.Arrington and H.J.Glock (eds) *Wittgenstein's 'Philosophical Investigations'*, London: Routledge, 105–19.
- Schlagel, R. (1974) 'Contra Wittgenstein', *Philosophy and Phenomena logical Research* 34, 539–50.
- Schwarz, H.-P. (1962) *Der konservative Anarchist*, Freiburg: Rombach.
- Sharrock, W. and Anderson, R. (1985) 'Criticising forms of life', *Philosophy* 60, 394–400.
- Simpson, D. (1998) "'A form of life", and a type of naturalism', electronic publication, World Wide Web (<http://www.herts.ac.uk/humanities/philosophy/simpson.html>). Accessed 29 January 2002.
- Skorupski, J. (1996) 'The post-modern Hume', in J.Hall and I.Jarvie (eds) *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 467–96.
- Slater, B. (1986) 'A defence of linguistic philosophy', *Philosophical Investigations* 9, 205–15.
- Strawson, P. (1998) 'Intellectual autobiography', in L.Hahn (ed.) *The Philosophy of P.F. Strawson*, Chicago: Open Court, 3–21.
- Sullivan, J. (1967) 'In defence of Wittgenstein', *Texas Quarterly* 10, 2, 60–70.
- Svenson, G. (1997) 'The Wittgensteinian notion of forms of life', *Uppsala Philosophical Studies* 46, 245–54.
- Symanski, R. (1976) 'The manipulation of ordinary language', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66, 605–14.
- Wallgren, T. (1999) "'Grammatical" and "weak transcendental" readings of the later Wittgenstein', in U.Meixner and P.Simons (eds) *Metaphysics in the Post-Metaphysical Age*, vol. 2, Kirchberg am Wechsel: Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society, 331–5.
- Warnock, G. (1959) 'Review of Gellner 1959', *Cambridge Review*, 7 November, 129–31.
- Watkins, J. (1960) 'Review of Gellner 1959', *Ratio* 3, 106–10.
- Weitz, M. (1953) 'Oxford philosophy', *Philosophical Review* 62, 187–233.
- Wertheimer, A. (1976) 'Is ordinary language analysis conservative?' *Political Theory* 4, 405–22.
- White, M. (1960) 'A logical positivist's case against the school of linguistic philosophy', *Scientific American* 202, 3, 205–11.
- Williams, B. (1974) 'Wittgenstein and idealism', in G.Vesey (ed.) *Understanding Wittgenstein*, London: Macmillan, 76–95.
- Winch, P. ([1981] 1987) '*Im Anfang war die Tat*', in *Trying to Make Sense*, Oxford: Blackwell, 33–53.
- (1990) *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, 2nd edition, London: Routledge.
- Wittgenstein, L. ([1953] 1967) *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edition, Oxford: Blackwell.

- (1958) *The Blue and Brown Books*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1966) *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- ([1967] 1981) *Zettel*, 2nd edition, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1969) *On Certainty*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1980) *Culture and Value*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- ([1989] 1993) 'Lectures on the freedom of the will', in *Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 427–44.
- (1997) *Denkbewegungen*, Innsbruck: Haymon.
- (2000) 'The big typescript (TS 213)', in *Wittgenstein's Nachlass: The Bergen Electronic Edition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Part II

Commonalities

2 Marx and Wittgenstein as natural historians

Ted Schatzki

Juxtaposing prominent thinkers can be treacherous business. Nonetheless, this essay tries out the idea that construing the work of early Marx and later Wittgenstein as exercises in natural history unearths, as well as illuminates, parallels—and even convergences—in their ideas. Some licence for this attempt is furnished by their common evocation of natural history. Further warrant will have to be established through the insight and merit of the resulting interpretation. My ultimate hope is that the following reflections deepen appreciation of the entanglements between nature and history.

Natural history

Wittgenstein mentions natural history in only three places in *Philosophical Investigations*. This infrequency has not deterred the claim that the idea of such a history is central to his work. Indeed, the suggestiveness of the term ‘natural history’ owes much, I believe, to the fact that nature and history make at best minor appearances in Wittgenstein’s texts.

In paragraph 415, and on page 230, Wittgenstein (1958) writes that what ‘we’ are and are not, respectively, doing is furnishing remarks on the natural history of human beings. Seizing upon the implication of these statements that Wittgenstein’s remarks are natural historic in character, and building upon historical connotations of the term *Naturgeschichte*, Newton Garver has claimed that Wittgenstein conceives natural history to be a particular form of investigation, one that lies alongside other types of inquiry such as natural science. As the distinguishing features of this form of investigation in contrast to scientific inquiry, Garver lists key aspects of Wittgenstein’s investigations and their objects. For instance, he claims that natural history is a descriptive enterprise that brooks neither explanations nor theories. What’s more, it states plain facts that are open to view, that are beyond doubt and justification, and that science cannot overrule (Garver, 1994:16, 155, 279–80).

This interpretation explicates what is going on when Wittgenstein characterises his enterprise as natural history. In paragraph 415, however, as well as elsewhere, Wittgenstein avers that he is contributing remarks *on* natural history. Like history in general, natural history is both narrative and phenomenon narrated.

Consequently, the term *Naturgeschichte* does not indicate merely epistemic features of Wittgenstein's investigation and the phenomena it describes, but also points towards something content-ful about the domain of phenomena involved. Paragraph 415 and page 230 are utterly unhelpful here. The third appearance of the term, in paragraph 25, is more illuminating. It reads:

It is sometimes said that animals do not talk because they lack the mental capacity. And this means: 'they do not think, and that is why they do not talk'. But—they simply do not talk. Or to put it better: they do not use language—if we except the most primitive forms of language—Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing.

These lines suggest that natural history *qua* domain embraces phenomena that pertain to, or are even characteristic of, humans as opposed to other species; phenomena that pertain to or are characteristic of human life as opposed, say, to canine or chimpanzee life (Wittgenstein, 1980b:14–9); phenomena, some would say, as Garver does, that pertain to or are characteristic of the human *form of life* as opposed to the canine or chimpanzee forms of life. Why, however, do these phenomena belong to natural history? That is, what is the point of calling them *natural* and *historical*? Before addressing this issue, it is instructive to turn to Marx.

Marx's early work, above all the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, offers a straightforward, substantial conception of natural history. In these texts, natural history is the development of humankind through its entanglement with nature.¹ In highlighting the relation of humans to nature, this conception shares with the soon to emerge Darwinian paradigm a focus on the relatedness of organisms to their environments. At the same time, it opposes those myriad nineteenth-century schemes of thought that, in elevating humans above nature, separate history from nature and distinguish the passage of history from the course of natural events. Marx agrees with these dichotomising schemes that the emergence of humanity was a seminal event that initiated a novel development called 'history'. He does not, however, conceptualise this development as a process that spirals away from and only contingently connects with happenings in nature. Instead, in history the character of what predates it, nature, and the character of that whose appearance sets it off, humankind, become mutually dependent and subsequently change in tandem. Humankind, in other words, evolves through its transformation of nature, just as nature changes through its encounter with humans. History, consequently, is the evolution of, in Marx's words, 'naturalised man' and 'humanised nature':

for socialist man the *whole of what is called world history* is nothing more than the creation of man through human labour, and the development of nature for man...the essentiality [*Wesenhaftigkeit*] of man and of nature,

man as the existence of nature for man and nature as the existence of man for man, has become practically and sensuously perceptible.

(Marx, 1975:357)

This entanglement of humans and nature is precisely what earlier conceptions of history had overlooked:

In the whole conception of history up to the present day this real basis of history has either been totally neglected or else considered a minor matter quite irrelevant to the course of history. History must, therefore, always be written according to an extraneous standard; the real production of life seems to be primeval history, while the truly historical appears to be separated from ordinary life, something extra-terrestrial. With this the relation of man to nature is excluded from history and hence the antithesis of nature and history is created.

(Marx and Engels, 1970:59; see also Marx and Engels, 1956:201)

The celebrated 'unity of man with nature' is the centrepiece of Marx's conception of history. The first presupposition of people 'making history' is that they live (Marx and Engels, 1970:48). As a result, the inaugural act of history is the production of the means through which humans procure such necessities as food, shelter and clothing. This first act of history depends, however, on nature: 'The worker can create nothing without *nature*... It is the material in which his labour realises itself, in which it is active and from which and by means of which it produces' (Marx, 1975:325). In this sense, nature is humanity's 'inorganic body'. What, however, is this nature? It is, first, the environment humans found around them when they began to create their own lives. In this vein, Marx, in one passage (1975:325), equates nature with external, sensuous objects (i.e. objects accessible to the senses). Nature, accordingly, comprises living and nonliving entities different from humans. Humans, however, are also part of nature. Marx (1975:347) writes:

The immediate, natural, necessary relation of human being to human being is the *relationship of man to woman*. In this *natural* species-relationship the relation of man to nature is immediately his relation to man, just as his relation to man is immediately his relation to nature, his own *natural* condition. Therefore this relationship *reveals*...the extent to which the human essence has become nature for man or nature has become the human essence for man.

As this quotation indicates, the class of natural relations, i.e. relations that belong to nature, embraces not just relations between humans and non-humans, but also certain relations between humans, in particular the relationship between man and woman. Humans, too, consequently, are nature. And human history is a natural history not only because it (necessarily) comprises changes both in the

transformation of nature and in relations between humans and non-humans; it is natural history also because humans are part of nature.

One might say, consequently, that for Marx, as in some sense for Wittgenstein, natural history encompasses prominent features of the development of human life. What justifies the appellation 'natural history', moreover, is the inherent presence of nature in this development. The nature in natural history is above all the nature that humans transform and leave behind in altered form in fulfilling their material needs. The history involved is not simply the evolution of this transformational human-nature relation, but in addition the development of all aspects of society that are contingent upon the metamorphosing forms of transformation. The phenomena that constitute natural history are thus changing features of a human-nature complex.

Wittgenstein's employment of the term *Naturgeschichte* to denote a type of investigation is rooted in a pre-Darwinian procedure of descriptive morphological cataloguing, of which Goethe and Spengler are but two famous practitioners. By contrast, when Wittgenstein writes that something either belongs to 'our' natural history or is a fact or phenomenon of natural history, his use of the term is best viewed as continuous with its employment in German and English to designate the development of nature, or something's natural development. Malcolm (1994:59) seems to go astray, however, when he writes:

The concept of 'natural history'...is a central concept in [Wittgenstein's] thinking. In natural history different species of animals are described in terms of posture, locomotion, habitat, breeding, social organisation, feeding—the characteristic sounds they make, the way they play, and so on. Some animals live on the earth, some in the earth, some in trees, some in water. Wittgenstein says that his philosophical observations 'are really remarks on the natural history of human beings' (*PI*, 415). That human beings use language is an outstanding feature of their natural history.

The problem with these lines is that Wittgenstein does not chronicle most phenomena that compose the natural history of human beings as Malcolm specifies this realm. In other words, when Wittgenstein writes that he is contributing remarks on human natural history he is not indicating that he describes human beings in the way naturalists describe animals. At the same time, Malcolm is right to suggest that Wittgenstein's objectual use of 'natural history' signals sensitivity to the animalistic dimensions of human life, to such facts as that people are animals, that continuities exist between humans and other species, and that certain aspects of human life might be rooted in the animality of humanity. Indeed, despite Wittgenstein's scepticism about the ability of Darwin's monological scheme to explain the diversity of species,² his use of the term *Naturgeschichte* to characterise the objects of his investigation is only intelligible against the background of the bio-evolutionary viewpoint on human existence that arose in the mid-nineteenth century. To write human natural history is, at a minimum, to view and depict humans as one species

among many—and maybe also to treat the development of this species as a terrestrial process linked to geoclimatic-ecological conditions.

In any event, it turns out that certain animalistic aspects of human life are relevant to philosophy as Wittgenstein conceived of and practised it. Perhaps the philosophically most decisive such aspect that enters Wittgenstein's investigations is what he calls *brute facts*: facts of the form, that in such and such a situation human beings simply react or go on in this particular way and not others. Such facts underlie all language-games, from those carried on when eating to those bound up with mathematics. And although many, if not most, of these reactions are learned and not innate in human infants, their entrenched bruteness, the fact that there are no reasons or grounds for them, indicates their rootedness in animality; or better, it suggests that such reactions constitute an animalistic dimension of human existence. It is in this spirit that Wittgenstein (1977:§359) writes about everyday certainty with familiar things, 'But that means that I want to conceive it as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal.' Particular ways in which humans happen to go on also underlie reason and language:

I want to regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination [*Raisonnement*]... Any logic good enough for a primitive means of communication needs no apology from us. Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination.

(Wittgenstein, 1977:§475)

In this context, recall in addition the prominent role that the notion of instinctive behaviour plays in Wittgenstein's (1993) account of ritual in his essay on Frazer.³

The fact that most brute reactions are learned points towards a second key animalistic dimension of human existence: the role of training (*Abrichten*) in it. Wittgenstein repeatedly writes that humans come to be able to carry on language-games through training. It appears that he thinks this fact is something animalistic about human beings. For the word *Abrichten* is routinely employed in German to describe the human instruction of animals. Wittgenstein's use of it thus points towards resemblances he saw between humans and animals.

Wittgenstein's sensitivity to the animalistic dimension of human existence suggests the following simple hypothesis: The domain of natural history is life, that is, the development of life. Paragraph 25 of *Investigations*, quoted above offers evidence for this hypothesis. Humans talk, animals do not. Speech acts belong to our natural history, but not, so the implication, to that of animals. Hence, the domain of natural history comprises human, animal and, in addition (Wittgenstein, 1980a:950), plant life. The centrality of the concept of life in later Wittgenstein furnishes additional justification for this interpretation of natural history. As evidence of this centrality, which cannot be adequately documented here, I adduce several unusual German words in Wittgenstein's repertoire that build upon the root *Leben* (life): *Lebensform* (form

of life), *Lebensäußerung* (life expression), *Lebensmuster* (life pattern) and *Lebensteppich* (weave of life). In sum, in characterising the phenomena he describes as phenomena of natural history, Wittgenstein indicates threefold: that the domain of his remarks is human life, that human life is one species of life among many, and that animalistic aspects of human life are relevant to understanding human existence, including dimensions of human existence such as meaning, mind, language, and reason that are of great interest in philosophy.⁴

Wittgenstein writes more or less nothing that illuminates what the history in natural history is. Indeed, Wittgenstein has occasionally been accused of ignoring the historical dimensions of the phenomena he describes. For want of evidence, I assume that his use of the term is standard: something's history is its career over time, the continuities, developments and changes that characterise it from its origin to either its demise or the present time. Natural history, consequently, embraces continuities, developments and changes in life, more particularly, in human life viewed as one type alongside others.

As discussed earlier, Garver interprets natural history *qua* type of investigation through epistemic features of Wittgenstein's procedure and the objects Wittgenstein investigates. He further maintains, modally, that these objects are contingent in character. Consequently, *qua* domain embracing the objects of Wittgenstein's investigations, natural history comprises prominent phenomena of human life as it happens to have developed as one life form among many. (And human natural history is *in toto*, for Wittgenstein, the non-explanatory and non-theoretical morphological description of prominent, evident and undeniable phenomena of human life as it happened to have developed as one life form among many.) Wittgenstein's conception of natural history *qua* realm thus varies from Marx's. For early Marx, the expression 'natural history' connotes the entanglement of human evolution with nature and its development. It thereby stands for a domain of evolving facts that concern and arise from the human 'metabolism with nature'. Still, two overall similarities emerge. First, many facts that natural history encompasses are facts about human life generally, what Marx labelled 'species-being'. And second, natural history concerns the relation of humans to nature: that is, its facts either pertain to or are rooted in the presence of nature in human existence. However, what is crucial at present is not whatever similarities exist between these conceptions, but the parallel positions that some notion of natural history occupies in these thinkers' ideational schemes.

Understanding materialism

I want now to suggest that conceiving early Marx and later Wittgenstein as natural historians (though not, of course, only this) throws light on their shared materialism. I do not claim that this materialism derives from their natural histories, simply that its character is immediately intelligible when approached from that direction.⁵

Throughout philosophical history, materialism has been the doctrine that reality is composed of matter. Matter, moreover, has usually been thought to be composed of physical entities and properties, typically discrete particles in motion. This holds as much for the Greek thinkers Democritus and Epicurus as for such contemporary materialist stances on the mind/body problem as identity theory, central state materialism, physicalism and eliminative materialism.

Marx's materialism famously departs from the traditional version. Indeed, the differences between them are immortalised in the first and fifth theses on Feuerbach (in Marx and Engels, 1970:122): Whereas traditional materialism conceives of reality as matter, Marx conceives of human, or rather, natural historical reality as activity. What warrants, in part, labelling this doctrine 'materialism' is its opposition to prominent so-called 'idealisms' of Marx's day that (allegedly) made thoughts, ideas and conceptuality the essence of human and even all reality. Something similar, it turns out, holds of Wittgenstein's views.

To begin with, activity, in Wittgenstein's texts, is the pre-eminent phenomenon of human life. Language and reason, he claims, rest on ways of acting. Acts of speaking, moreover, are components of wider activities, and the meaning of linguistic expressions is—or is revealed by—their use. Mind, finally, is fundamentally something expressed in human action (though this does not exhaust its being). Thus, four of the phenomena that western thought has deemed most characteristic of human life—language, reason, meaning and mind—are phenomena of action.

As in Marx, moreover, Wittgenstein's stress on activity joins with contemporaneous forms of traditional materialism in opposing idealist claims. Materialism has always clashed with theories that promote realms of reality other than that of matter. Over the course of the past two millennia, the three realms that have posed the greatest challenge to the reductive or exclusionary claims of western materialism are spirit, mind and life. One of Wittgenstein's major targets in his later writings is the so-called 'Cartesian' conception of mind as a distinct substance or space, stage or realm.

A further target is the accompanying semantic thesis that meanings, ideas and understanding are mental phenomena, or more precisely, phenomena of consciousness. Without much distortion these 'Cartesian' doctrines can be called 'idealist' in character. As a result, Wittgenstein joins the contemporary materialisms mentioned three paragraphs above in opposing both the idealist thesis that mind is a distinct substance and the idealist claim that meaning and understanding are aspects of such a substance. In addition, his doctrine that meaning is use contravenes the most prominent theory of ideas in his day, namely Frege's (and Husserl's) thesis that meaning (*Sinn*) lies in a (nonmentalistic) ideal realm of thoughts. This opposition parallels Marx's hostility to the most prominent theory of ideas in his day, viz. Hegel's claim that ideas permeate and constitute reality. In this context, it is worth recalling Marx's remark that:

Just as philosophers have given thought an independent existence, so they had to make language into an independent realm. This is the secret of

philosophical language, in which thoughts in the form of words have their own content. The problem of descending from the world of thoughts to the actual world is turned into the problem of descending from language to life.
(Marx and Engels, 1970:118)

Unfortunately, this is not the place to examine the parallels that exist between, on the one hand, this remark and, on the other, Wittgenstein's abandonment of an independent mental-semantic realm and his placement of language/meaning in everyday life activity and situations.

Of course, the activity in which Wittgenstein anchors mind and meaning is not bodies in movement, let alone matter or atoms in motion. It possesses, however, an important property traditionally attributed to (some) physical entities, namely being an object of perception. Wittgenstein does not subscribe to the central thesis of the theories of perception dominant in his day, namely that physical entities alone are objects of perception. Instead, he grants equal perceptual status to whatever people behaviourally disclose or spontaneously indicate that they see, hear, touch and so on—and activity regularly numbers among the phenomena revealed thus. Intriguingly, Marx appears to make a parallel move. *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels, 1970:63) applauds Feuerbach, in contrast to 'pure' materialists, for a willingness to count humans among the objects of the senses. There and also in the first thesis on Feuerbach, however, Marx accuses Feuerbach of perpetuating 'prior' materialism in treating reality, equated with perceptibility (*Sinnlichkeit*), as objects (of intuition [*Anschauung*]) and not as activity (more precisely, activity towards/with objects [*gegenständliche Tätigkeit*]). These comments reveal Marx's contentions that materialism privileges sensory experience and that previous materialisms had neglected to include humans and their activity in this realm. As suggested, Wittgenstein concurs with something like this second thesis.

If these strands are added together, it emerges that Wittgenstein joins Marx in (1) considering activity the central feature of human life, (2) thereby opposing prominent contemporaneous forms of idealism, and (3) construing activity as an object of perception, a domain which has often been understood in modern times as pertaining exclusively to material objects. If, consequently, Marx's stress on activity counts as a form of materialism, then so too does Wittgenstein's. Other reasons for calling Wittgenstein's emphasis on activity materialist are, first, that he views activity as that of a socially trained and at bottom animalistic human body; and second, that he is the first thinker (at least in the analytic tradition) to emphasise the concrete setting of action as determinant of meaning.

Treating Marx and Wittgenstein as natural historians illuminates their materialism. For Marx, activity *cum* transformation-creation is the linchpin of the human-nature relation and the fundamental dynamic element in natural history. 'Industry', he writes (1975:355), 'is the real historical relation of nature, and hence of natural history, to man.' Objective activity, moreover, is humankind's 'species life' (or 'species being'); that is, the activity that makes humans human is that through which their metabolism with nature transpires. Indeed, life in general, and not just human life in particular, is activity (Marx,

1975:327). Such a thought would likely not be foreign to Wittgenstein. Hence, Marx's natural history, in particular its accentuation of activity, makes his activity materialism intelligible.

Wittgenstein believes, similarly, that activity is the most prominent categorical phenomenon of human life (as it happens to be). About the quasi-technical term 'language-game' he (1958:§23) writes, for instance, that it 'is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity'. In the very few places, moreover, where he uses the expression 'form of life', activity, sometimes in the guise of speaking, is central to what is discussed. As noted, finally, Wittgenstein grounds mind, meaning and reason in activity. It is too much to claim that these aspects of Wittgenstein's thought *result* from his considering his remarks to be contributions to human natural history. Yet, when his writing is acknowledged as such, it becomes immediately clear why activity—and not matter—is the phenomenon highlighted in his critiques of both dualist theories of mind and mentalist accounts of meaning and language. (Indeed, activity is arguably the central phenomenon of natural history however conceived.) Of course, it must not be forgotten that Wittgenstein writes in an era when behaviourist approaches to mind, language and meaning were pervasive. It is equally important to realise, however, that these approaches were continuous and even a piece with the natural histories also written at that time.

Richard Bernstein (1971: epilogue) claims that Marx teaches that all aspects of human life must be approached via action. Little acrobatics are required to extract a similar idea from Wittgenstein's texts. In both cases, I maintain, this conviction becomes much more understandable when these thinkers are viewed as writing (about) natural history.

Society and/in natural history

Action is the centrepiece of the natural history of human life. It is that through which humans create themselves materially and by reference to which other erst-while essential features of humanity (e.g. mind, language and reason) are to be understood. As David Rubinstein (1981: chapter 8 and part II *passim*) has emphasised, moreover, both Marx and Wittgenstein believe human activity is inherently social. This idea introduces a twist into these thinkers' conception of natural history.

Creative and transformative activity, Marx (1973:84) claims, is essentially social. 'Production by an isolated individual outside society', he writes, 'is as much of an absurdity as the development of speech without individuals who live *together* and talk to each other.' To say that production is social is to say that it is a collective venture: that is, that each person's productive activity is part of a wider enterprise in which different people's actions co-ordinate and complement one another. The collectiveness of this creation and transformation is evidenced, among other things, in the division of labour, the division between men and women, and the distribution of consumables. The history of the human/nature relationship also transpires within society.⁶ Society, in fact, is both the starting and end point of

this development. Writing about ‘true communism’, where a person’s production, as an expression of her individuality, is her existence for others and their existence for her, Marx (1975:349–50) claims that:

The *human* essence of nature exists only for *social* man; for only here does nature exist for him as a *bond* with other *men*, as his existence for others and their existence for him, as the vital element of human reality... *Society* is therefore the perfected unity in essence of man with nature, the true resurrection of nature, the realised naturalism of man and the realised humanism of nature.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the sixth thesis of the *Theses on Feuerbach* denies that the human essence (*das menschliche Wesen*) is an abstraction inhabiting each individual and claims, instead, that this essence, ‘in its reality’, is the ensemble of social relations. For the creative and transformative activity that renders humans human occurs only within some social ensemble. Therefore, all that exists are the particular creative and transformative activities that people carry out. Consequently, the human essence is the particular ensembles of real relations in which individual productive activities transpire, not an inner generality (*Allgemeinheit*) that individuals *qua* individuals instantiate.

For Marx, human activity is social because it occurs as part of a wider nexus of activity (and, in addition, because the humans carrying it out are raised in collectivities). The activity concerned, moreover, is production—though not just the production of items satisfying human needs, but the production of anything to do with human life, including culture, language and society itself. Wittgenstein’s remarks suggest going a step further and construing any activity whatsoever as social.⁷ Two basic arguments are germane at present.

The first argument is less found in than inspired by Wittgenstein’s texts. It begins from the premise that the performance of an action consists in the performance of a so-called ‘basic action’, the carrying out of which amounts, in the circumstances involved, to the carrying out of the action concerned. (A parallel analysis applies to omissions.) A basic action is an action, typically a bodily one, that a person performs directly and not by way of performing some other action. A non-basic action is any action that is not a basic one. The non-basic action of signalling a turn, for instance, might be performed by gesturing out of the car window, whereas the non-basic action of paying for dinner might consist in signing one’s name on a slip of paper, which itself consists in the basic action of moving one’s (pen-holding) hand. What discloses the sociality of action is the answer Wittgenstein’s texts suggest to the question: what is responsible for the performance of basic action A amounting to the performance of non-basic action B?

Four phenomena are potentially co-responsible. Two of these are properties of the actor involved: his or her mental conditions and past as well as future actions. The other two, however, are social. One, the situation of action, is typically social, while the second, the practices (complexes of activity) that populate the actor’s

world, is inherently so. Whether, for example, the driver's hand gesture is a signal, greeting or something else can depend on the situation of action (see e.g. Wittgenstein, 1958:§581). If the automobile is approaching a busy intersection, for instance, the gesture is likely to be a signal, whereas if the driver is responding to the wave of a friend standing on the sidewalk, it is likely to be a greeting. To the extent, consequently, that people's situations are social—meaning, at a minimum, that others are part of their situation—action, too, is social in a sense that parallels Max Weber's definition of social action. Practices, finally, render actions intrinsically social. For it is by virtue of the norms and conceptual understandings of action carried in such complexes that performing this or that basic action(s) amounts to the performance of such and such non-basic one. That is to say, the *intelligibility* of particular basic actions constituting specific non-basic ones rests on the understandings of action that are carried in the activities in which the actor participates. The hand gesture, for instance, can only amount to a signal or greeting given practices in which certain basic actions are understood to constitute signalling or greeting. Every non-basic action is social because bodily actions amount to such actions only given a wider matrix of understanding-carrying practices.

The second argument for the sociality of action is an interpretation of specific passages in Wittgenstein's texts. It stakes two claims: (1) that any action is a moment of an extended practice of performing it, and (2) that these practices are carried out by multiple individuals. Since defending these claims would lead this essay too far afield, for present purposes I will simply recall paragraph 199 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. This paragraph opens by asking whether obeying a rule could be something that one man did only once in his life. In response, Wittgenstein does not merely contend that it is not possible that there was only one occasion on which a rule was obeyed. He also avers that it is not possible that there was only one occasion on which a report was made, an order given or understood, 'and so on'. The scope of the 'and so on', I maintain, is action *überhaupt*. Any action presupposes an extended practice of carrying out that action. To characterise this state of affairs, moreover, Wittgenstein adds that actions are practices, usages, institutions. The German words that these expressions translate—*Gepflogenheiten*, *Gebräuche*, and *Institutionen*—indicate that these wider complexes of activity are *in fact*, though not necessarily in principle, carried out by multiple people as opposed to individuals. Action, consequently, is inherently social.

Marx suggests that productive action is social because it transpires as part of a collective matrix of activity that gives shape to what producing agents do. Wittgenstein suggests that all action is social because it occurs as part of, and its intelligibility rests on understandings carried in, a collective complex of activity. They thus concur that activity, the phenomenon definitive of humanity, is social in character. As discussed, however, the idea that activity is a categorical feature of humanity is a facet of these thinkers' natural histories. It follows that the sociality of humanity is likewise an aspect of natural history: for Marx, an essential feature of humanity's relation to nature and, for Wittgenstein, a dimension of the most prominent feature of human life as it happens to have developed. It follows

that neither thinker brooks an opposition between nature and society. Society is part of human nature, its development is part of the natural development of human life, and it is the site, at least according to Marx, where both the dependency of humans on and their relation to non-human nature transpires. Conversely, nature is part of human society; and in Marx's eyes its fate is also tied to the development of human society.

Concluding illustration: language

Gavin Kitching (1988:176) has claimed that Marx's theory of society needs an account of language and that Wittgenstein's account of language can be profitably joined with it. Although I am not sure Wittgenstein's is the only serviceable account in this regard, it does seem to me that Wittgenstein's materialism helps qualify his account for the honour. In conclusion, I want to suggest that adopting natural history as a framework through which to view and to explore parallels in the work of early Marx and later Wittgenstein enhances the plausibility of Kitching's proposal.

Marx's scattered remarks on language indicate that it is a phenomenon of natural history. To begin with, language, like consciousness, is said to arise from the necessity of interaction among humans. Language, moreover, is equated with practical consciousness, which for present purposes can be understood to be practical thought and ideas (Marx and Engels, 1970:50–1; cf. Marx, 1973:84). I take it, finally, that 'practical' in this context means pertaining to creative-transformative activity. Hence, language is the form that thinking, conceiving and consciousness initially took in the concrete, situated exigencies of collective production. Such a characterisation treats language as something that arises from the needs of humanity's social interchange with nature.

Wittgenstein, too, views language as a phenomenon of natural history: 'Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our'—and not other animals'—'natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing.' As in Marx, moreover, language reflects the needs of practical interchange. The use of language is also an activity that is both entwined with and embedded in non-linguistic activities and wider complexes of activity. It is partly because of this entwinement and embeddedness, incidentally, that it is plausible to claim three-fold: that the meaning of linguistic expressions is their use in these activities, that meaning is thereby tied to the circumstances in which language is used, and that grasping meaning is a matter of gaining overviews of linguistic use. Language, in short, is a material phenomenon that is bound up with the activities constituting the natural history of human beings. Hence, the plausibility of the thesis that Wittgenstein provides an analysis of language which Marx can appropriate reflects their common pursuit of natural history—though, of course, it would be simplistic to attribute the compatibility to this commonality.

What, finally, is to be made of the juxtaposition effected in the present essay? I am not sure of the wisdom of seeking to spin out further the convergences between Marx's and Wittgenstein's texts. Their interests and

concerns are just too disparate. I do submit, however, that the above exercise suggests that their brand of materialist natural history—one that addresses the presence and transformation of animalistic and surrounding nature, in and in relation to human activity, whose own character is tied to an evolved sociality that is transformed through its entanglements with these natures—deserves considerably more development as an approach to analysing human life.

Notes

- 1 This early conception must be distinguished from later ones, according to which to characterise human history as natural history is to suggest (1) that human history is governed by laws just as nature is or (2) that human history happens on its own without the direction of human choice and will. For discussion of the first of these conceptions, see Berlin (1996:103) and Schmidt (1971:43). For a passage suggesting both, see the preface to *Capital* in McLellan (1977:409). Marx's later writings also sometimes suggest that 'natural history' denotes simply the history of nature, analytically distinct from but not substantially independent of the history of humankind. See e.g. *Capital*, vol. I, in McLellan (1977:169); cf. Schmidt (1971:48).
- 2 Comment reportedly made to Drury, cf. Monk (1990:537).
- 3 It is pertinent to add that here and elsewhere Wittgenstein indicates that commonalities in such phenomena as emotions, reactions, needs, physical environs and biological facts of life (e.g. birth and death) are crucial to cross-cultural understanding.
- 4 Hence, I dispute McDowell's (1994: e.g. 93) apparent claim that the nature in Wittgenstein's natural history is second nature: that is, habits and capacities installed via upbringing (*Bildung*). Presumably Wittgenstein concurs that such a second nature is central to human life. This does not mean, however, that natural history is the history of this second nature. Nor, I should add, does Wittgenstein embrace the conception of nature to which McDowell opposes his notion, namely nature as the realm of law.
- 5 For a recent interpretation of Marx's materialism, one which also articulates the conception of natural history attributed to Marx above, see Foster 2000. Foster emphasises the rootedness of Marx's materialism in that of Epicurus.
- 6 Cf. 'Society is the sum-total of relations in which agents of production stand with respect to nature and to one another' (*Capital*, vol. III, in McLellan, 1977:495).
- 7 For an argument that Wittgenstein's remarks imply that understanding action requires familiarity with social matrices, see Rubinstein (1981: chapters 8 and 11). For further development of the two arguments in the text, see Schatzki (1996: chapters 2 and 4).

References

- Berlin, I. (1966) *Karl Marx*, 4th edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bernstein, R. (1971) *Praxis and Action*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Foster, J. (2000) *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*, New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Garver, N. (1994) *This Complicated Form of Life*, Chicago: Open Court.
- Kitching, G. (1988) *Karl Marx and the Philosophy of Praxis*, London: Routledge.
- McDowell, J. (1994) *Mind and World*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- McLellan, D. (ed.) (1977) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Malcolm, N. (1994) *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, edited by P.Winch, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Marx, K. (1973) *Grundrisse*, translated by M.Nicolaus, New York: Vintage.
- (1975) *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, in K.Marx, *Early Writings*, translated by R.Livingstone and G.Benton, New York: Vintage.
- Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1956) *The Holy Family*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- (1970) *The German Ideology, Part One*, New York: International Publishers.
- Monk, R. (1990) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, Penguin: London.
- Rubinstein, D. (1981) *Marx and Wittgenstein: Social Praxis and Social Explanation*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Schatzki, T. (1996) *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Schmidt, A. (1971) *The Conception of Nature in Marx*, translated by B.Fowkes, London: New Left Books.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1958) *Philosophical Investigations*, New York: Macmillan.
- (1977) *On Certainty*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1980a) *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (1980b) *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. II, Chicago: University of Chicago.
- (1993) 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*', in L.Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions*, edited by J.Klagge and A.Nordmann, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.

3 Marx and Wittgenstein

Culture and practical reason

David Rubinstein

My purpose here is to consider what Marx and Wittgenstein have to say about the role of culture in social life. There are parallels in that both emphasise its embeddedness in social practices. But while Marx seemed to subordinate culture to ‘material’ life, Wittgenstein, according to some interpretations, emphasised the autonomy of ideas from the ‘substructures’ that Marx postulated. I shall argue that these differences are not as great as some have argued and conclude with comments on the bearing of Marx’s and Wittgenstein’s thought on the social science debate over cultural analysis.

Marx and culture

The few pages in *The German Ideology* where Marx (and Engels) consider the role of ideas in action and social order are, famously, full of puzzles and contradictions. He seems to dismiss ideas as ‘ideological reflexes and echoes’ of life-process, as mere ‘phantoms formed in the human brain’ (1967a:14). This ‘reflective’ or ‘correspondence’ theory in which ideas seem inconsequential has provoked generations of critics.

A major problem in this view is that we are at a loss to explain why anyone bothers to create ideologies. Douglas North’s criticism of the aversion to cultural explanation in economics applies to Marx: ‘If ideology is not important, then economists must explain the enormous amount of resources...devoted to attempting to convince participants of the justice or injustice of contractual arrangements’ (North, 1984:120). Jon Elster makes a parallel point regarding scepticism about the power of moral ideas to bind behaviour: ‘If some people successfully exploit norms for self-interested purposes, it can only be because others are willing to let norms take precedence over self-interest’ (Elster, 1989:121). There would be no instrumental value in creating moral norms unless someone takes them seriously.

A second line of criticism focuses on Marx’s description, in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, of ‘the economic structure of society’ as ‘the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond’ (Marx, 1964:51). The

separation of ideas in society from some sort of foundation, which is the proper focus of explanation, has been a common social science goal. Durkheim complimented Marx's idea 'that social life should be explained, not by the notions of those who participate in it, but by more profound causes which are unperceived by consciousness'. He went on to say: 'I think also that these causes are to be sought mainly in the manner according to which the associated individuals are grouped' (quoted in Winch, 1958:23). The idea that the grouping of individuals, usually called 'social structure', provides causes of behaviour 'more profound' than actors' ideas remains central to much sociology. William Sewell (1992:2) avers that 'structure, in normal sociological usage, is thought of as "hard" or "material" and therefore as primary and determining, whereas culture is regarded as "soft" or "mental" and therefore as secondary or derived'.

Peter Winch's critique of the attempt to separate the social scientific idea of society from ideas *in* society applies to Marx and his social science epigones. Winch asks how we can say how 'the associated individuals are grouped' (Winch, 1958:23) apart from their ideas. The 'grouping' of individuals—as Protestants, etc.—is largely constituted by their rules of inclusion. Indeed, social constructionists argue that various categories thought to be natural, like sexual differentiation, are artefacts of culture. Because explaining social order apart from actors' ideas would be like describing chess without mentioning its rules, Karl Renner, like many others since, argued that 'legal and economic institutions, though not identical are but two aspects of the same thing, inextricably interwoven' (Renner, 1949:59). A third line of criticism of the dualism of 'substructures' and 'superstructures' emphasises the implication of culture in 'material' interests. According to Sahlins: 'it is culture which constitutes utility' (Sahlins, 1976:viii). In this view, subjective ideas define material interests.

But, as is now widely acknowledged, whatever Marx meant by the distinction between 'existence' and 'consciousness', he did not believe that the latter is irrelevant to behaviour or to the constitution of social order. For example, if all ideas are mere reflections, Marx cannot explain the origins of false consciousness or say why we should care about it. But Marx allowed that illusions can control behaviour: 'Hitherto men have constantly made up for themselves false conceptions about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be... The phantoms of their brains have gained the mastery over them' (1967a:1). It is also clear that Marx saw social order as importantly constituted by ideas in society. In the *Grundrisse* he stressed the dialectical relationship of substructures and superstructures:

every form of production creates its own legal relations, forms of government, etc. The crudity and the shortcomings of the conception [of bourgeois economists] lies in the tendency to see only an accidental reflective connection in what constitutes an organic union.

(Marx, 1971:21)

There are many examples showing that Marx aimed not to dismiss ideas—or culture—as epiphenomenal or inconsequential, but to understand the ways in

which consciousness emerges out of and is implicated with practical life. In *The German Ideology* he makes the now unexceptional claim that 'Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence' (1967a:14). Dichotomisation reappears on the same page in the claim that 'Life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life'. But rather than a claim of ontological separation and causal determinism, this can be interpreted as a clumsy way of stating what follows in the next paragraph where, more modestly and more reasonably, he rejects the conception of 'philosophy as an independent branch of activity'.

Indeed, 'reflection' theory is sharply qualified by attributions of 'autonomy' to ideas. Marx, of course, took false consciousness seriously and in other ways portrayed ideas as able to constrain behaviour. For example, if 'The tradition of all the dead generations [which] weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living' (Marx, 1967b:15) encompasses what is usually meant by tradition, i.e. established beliefs and customs, ideas cannot be merely reflective or otiose. The 'stickiness' of ideas under changing social conditions implies their partial independence from material reality, a point expanded by acknowledging their emotional grip: 'Ideas, which have conquered our intelligence and our minds, ideas that reason has forged in our conscience, are chains from which we cannot tear ourselves away without breaking our hearts' (Marx, quoted in Alexander, 1988:138). More rudely, Engels also saw a disconnectedness between ideas and material interests. Discussing aboriginal myths, he says that it 'would surely be pedantic to try and find economic causes for all this primitive nonsense' (quoted in Feuer, 1969:25).¹

The play Marx allows between consciousness and social existence is usually interpreted as describing 'cultural lag'. The 'more profound', or substructural, aspects of society change and eventually drag consciousness in their wake. But if ideas can fall behind substructural changes, the door is opened to the possibility of their *leading* such changes. Contradicting his *German Ideology* (1967a:14) claim that 'Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology...have no history, no development', Marx takes a Hegelian turn in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* by attributing to ideas the power to evolve by their own logic and even to transform society:

The bourgeoisie had a true insight into the fact that all the weapons which it had forged against feudalism turned their points against itself... It understood that all the so-called bourgeois liberties and organs of progress attacked and menaced its class rule at its social foundation and its political summit simultaneously.

(Marx, 1967b:99)

We ordinarily think of persons as having ideas. But ideas can, as it were, have us. That is, they can pull us down paths contrary to our supposed 'material' interests. Discussing the power of norms of fairness in collective bargaining,

Elster illustrates the way ideas can turn against their creators: ‘if one party opens up a certain line of argument or invokes a certain social norm, it stays on the table forever’ (Elster, 1989:240). That is, one may invoke a norm, or certain line of argument, only to find later that this very norm is used *against* one’s original proposal. The power of bourgeois liberalism to transcend bourgeois interests is routinely exploited by critics of capitalism, like Kai Nielsen: ‘It is as evident as anything can be that there is a close correlation between wealth and power...if we prize liberty and autonomy, and if we prize democracy, we will also be egalitarians’ (Nielsen, 1985:8). Ideas are two-edged swords: if they are persuasive enough to legitimate a social order, they can be used to delegitimize it.

Wittgenstein and practical reason

Wittgenstein’s understanding of ideas resembles Marx’s insofar as he too argued that they must be understood in terms of the social practices in which they are enmeshed. This approach appears in the foundational claim that ‘the meaning of a word is its use in the language’ (Wittgenstein, 1953:§43). Marx’s concept of ideology in particular, often, and like Wittgenstein, gives primary attention to the use made of ideas in a given social context.

Wittgenstein highlights the practical use of concepts by arguing that many senseless philosophical puzzles arise when ‘language goes on holiday’ (*ibid.*: §38), i.e. when linguistic usage is separated from the language-games with which they are tied. Wittgenstein claims that ‘to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life’ (*ibid.*: §19) and so understanding the former requires analysis of the latter. Hence he rejected Descartes’ doubts as contrived, even meaningless, in that they could not be tied to the activities that give doubting its sense: like having grounds for doubt, acting in ways that manifest doubtfulness, having means of resolving it, etc. A philosopher can claim to doubt that he has never been on the moon: ‘But if anyone were to doubt it, how would his doubt come out in practice? And couldn’t we peacefully leave him to doubt it, since it makes no difference at all?’ (Wittgenstein, 1969:§120). Separated from its customary practices, or language-games, we don’t know what the profession of doubt means. Wittgenstein was equally unimpressed with Moore’s response. The claim ‘I know I have two hands’ cannot be linked to activities that establish the meaning of utterances: ‘I feel as if these words were like “Good morning” said to someone in the middle of a conversation’ (*ibid.*: §464). Wittgenstein’s (1970: §173) riposte to Descartes and Moore emerges from his belief that ‘only in the stream of thought and life do words have meaning’.

But despite a shared emphasis on the ties between ideas—or language-games—and social activities—or forms of life—Wittgenstein’s approach has been pulled in directions orthogonal to Marx. The embeddedness of language in social practices is interpreted by some to be so intimate that it floats more or less free of material reality. There is, in this view, no space in Wittgenstein for

a notion like 'substructure'; a more basic reality that shapes culture and, 'in the final analysis', drives behaviour.

This interpretation is mainly associated with Peter Winch's argument that different forms of life are 'incommensurable', i.e. the language-games played within a society cannot be judged by non-participants. In this view, beliefs are so deeply implicated with local culture that they can only be understood from within and hence cannot be evaluated in light of their correspondence to external facts: 'our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality is given for us in the language that we use' (Winch, 1964:15). For example, judging the magical beliefs and practices of the Azande from a rationalist and scientific perspective would be a 'category mistake' (*ibid.*: 315). It would be like understanding baseball through the rules of chess. The proper response to such intrusions would be: 'Sorry. But we're playing our game, not yours.' Because language-games dictate 'what belongs to the realm of reality', Winch advises against using Western science 'as a paradigm against which to measure the intellectual respectability of other modes of discourse' (*ibid.*: 308).

The relativism in this claim has led Ernest Gellner to characterise Wittgenstein's view as an 'implicit cult of *Gemeinschaft*' in that we are seen to be locked 'within a cosy and self-justifying cocoon of conceptual custom, embodied in a given system of ordinary speech'. He describes this claim as 'one of the most bizarre and extreme forms of irrationalism of our time' (Gellner, 1992:121). Gellner would likely feel confirmed by Lyotard's description of the work of Wittgenstein (and Kant) as 'epilogues to modernity and prologues to an honourable postmodernity' (1988:xiii). Allan Janik, more friendly to Wittgenstein's views, argues that 'there is plenty of evidence that Wittgenstein was a committed cultural relativist' (Janik, 1985:154)

At some points, Wittgenstein suggests incommensurability, i.e. a lack of shared reference points between cultures. His (1953:§223) claim that 'If a lion could talk, we could not understand him' implies that mutual understanding requires shared forms of life. Incommensurability is amplified with examples of possible idiosyncratic cultural practices that suggest that the material world imposes few constraints on cultural practices. In *The Blue and Brown Books* he says we can 'easily imagine a language (and that means again a culture) in which there existed no common expression for light blue and dark blue': they might be called 'Cambridge' and 'Oxford' blue and considered to be opposites. He goes on (1958:§140) to argue that 'the same' is a social convention, not a mirror of nature. His examples of a society in which invisible pain is mocked (Wittgenstein, 1970:§380) and in which 'the people of a tribe were brought up from early youth to give no expression of feeling of any kind' (*ibid.*: §§383, 387-8) similarly suggest that cultural practices are autonomous from the natural world and human nature. And we seem to be locked into these practices by cultural training. At one point he describes rule-following as a kind of trained reflex: 'This is simply what I do... This is how it strikes me... I obey the rule blindly' (Wittgenstein, 1953: §219). A Winchian incommensurability is suggested in a vignette about a student of

physics encountering a people who consult an oracle: 'If we call this "wrong" aren't we using our language-game as a base from which to combat theirs?' (Wittgenstein, 1969:§60). Wittgenstein might have accepted Descartes' belief that animals did not feel pain as plausible within a certain form of life.

But Wittgenstein qualifies the portrait of persons as wrapped in cocoons of incommensurable cultural practice and challenges Winch's claim that language-games mediate 'what belongs to the realm of reality'. The following seems an innocuous remark but in light of Gellner's charges it is worth noting: 'It is a fact of experience that human beings alter their concepts, exchange them for others, when they learn new facts: when in this way what was formerly important to them becomes unimportant, and vice versa' (Wittgenstein, 1970:§352). It is noteworthy that Wittgenstein distinguishes cooking from chess by allowing that, in the former, following the wrong rules can lead to bad results (*ibid.*: §320).

In a discussion of the use of criteria and symptoms Wittgenstein seems to embrace conventionalism: 'In practice, if you were asked which phenomenon is the defining criterion and which is a symptom, you would in most cases be unable to answer this question except by making an arbitrary decision *ad hoc*.' But this does not mean that such judgements are made willy-nilly, autonomous of instrumental reason. Wittgenstein (1958:25) continues: 'It may be practical to define a word by taking one phenomenon as the defining criterion, but we shall easily be persuaded to define the word by means of what, according to our first use, was a symptom.' In considering scientific definitions he illustrates what he means by 'practical': 'it is usual to make phenomena that allow of exact measurement into defining criteria' (Wittgenstein, 1970:§438).

These comments portray actors as deploying language variably, but not arbitrarily, in that usage is tied to certain 'facts of nature' (Wittgenstein, 1953: §56) as well as their practical interests, like the scientist's need for exact measurement. Summarising the implication of language in practical activities, Wittgenstein (1970:§439) says that: 'a natural foundation for the way [a] concept is formed is the complex nature and the variety of human contingencies'. (Wittgenstein's notion of practicality should not be interpreted narrowly; it can encompass the 'human contingencies' of, for example, religious activities.) In contrast to Gellner's assertion that Wittgenstein's view of language implies that anything goes, there are many sharp strictures on language use: to doubt the belief that my friend hasn't sawdust in his head would be 'madness' (Wittgenstein, 1969:§281). And in the same text he is quite prepared to describe other views as 'demented', 'idiotic' and even 'insane' (*ibid.*: §§155, 662 and 468).

There are other aspects of Wittgenstein's thought that challenge his alleged 'cult of *Gemeinschaft*' by establishing bridges of mutual understanding between societies. In emphasising the role of cultural training in emotions Wittgenstein lends support to a constructionist view that emotions are cultural artefacts with no foundation in human nature. His (1970:§§504, 492) claims that 'Love is not a feeling' and that 'fear is not a sensation' seem to grant unlimited

latitude in the social construction of emotions. In this view, we do not simply 'have' feelings; they are culturally contrived.

More recently Robert Solomon's 'cognitive theory of emotions' seems to follow a very similar line of argument to that of Wittgenstein. Solomon contends that: 'an emotion is not a feeling (or a set of feelings) but an interpretation...a system of concepts, beliefs, attitudes, and desires, virtually all of which are context-bound, historically developed, and culture specific' (Solomon, 1984:249). Because 'Anger is not just a physiological reaction cum sensation plus an interpretation... It is essentially an interpretation' (*ibid.*: 249), it ought to be seen, according to Solomon, as a cultural construct rather than a natural fact. Anthropologists can show that there is great variety in the cultural meaning of emotions and cite examples that are purported to be entirely cultural artefacts. Indeed, Solomon claims that the Utka Eskimos not only do not express anger: 'they do not "feel" angry' (*ibid.*: 244). This conception of emotions has a distinguished pedigree in social science. Durkheim believed that

mourning is not a natural movement of private feelings wounded by a cruel loss; it is a duty imposed by the group... It is a ritual attitude which [a person] is forced out of respect for custom but which is, in large measure, independent of his affective state.

(quoted in Levy, 1984:225)²

But Wittgenstein's conventionalism is rather more qualified than Solomon's. First, he acknowledges that all sorts of things do go on 'in' us and he has no wish to deny that this is so: And now it looks as if we had denied mental processes. And naturally we don't want to deny them' (Wittgenstein, 1953:§308). While criticising the role of introspection in understanding emotions, he concedes that: 'Certainly all these things happen in you' (*ibid.*: §423) and agrees that

It makes sense to ask: 'Do I really love her, or am I only pretending to myself?' and the process of introspection is the calling up of memories; of imagined possible situations and of the feelings that one would have if...

(*ibid.*: §587)

Wittgenstein believed that cultural discourses of emotion crystallise around shared, even universal experiences: 'the primitive, unreasoned reaction on which the system of rules and reasons is grafted' (*ibid.*: §244). For example, in contrast to the possible society where invisible pain is mocked, and another where slaves are thought to lack minds and souls (Wittgenstein, 1970:§§528–9), he argues that there are 'natural, instinctive, kinds of behaviour towards other human beings' like 'a primitive reaction to tend, to treat, the part that hurts when someone else is in pain' (*ibid.*: §§545 and 540). The natural world, and more specifically, human nature, seem to be creeping back into Wittgenstein's understanding of language-games.

While granting considerable scope to cultural training, Wittgenstein rooted social practices in natural features of persons: ‘Our language-game [of pain] is an extension of primitive behaviour’ (*ibid.*: §545). Indeed, the ‘rediscovery of human nature’ claimed by evolutionary psychologists could find support in the way that Wittgenstein (1953:§206) ties cultural practices to ‘the common behaviour of mankind’. His description of his work as ‘remarks on the natural history of human beings’ (*ibid.*: §415) suggests a quest for the universals postulated by evolutionary psychology.

Culture and social science

I have argued that the relationship between ideas and social life described by Marx and Wittgenstein is not as different as it is sometimes portrayed. Marx does not subordinate culture to instrumental reason and Wittgenstein does not set language-games free from the exigencies posed by the ‘facts of the natural world’ and human nature, i.e. ‘the common behaviour of mankind’. Both tie linguistic practices and culture to something more basic: the need of persons to cope with their environment and their own natures. But both also allow that ideas and culture can transcend practical exigencies. Marx believes that ideology can transcend, even subvert, instrumental purposes, and Wittgenstein allows that diverse language-games can be developed around the same facts and suggests that some social practices—like mocking pain—can be contrary to the ‘natural, instinctive reactions’ of human nature.

This dual view can inform the debate on the role of culture in human action. Despite its apparent radicalism, Gary Becker has only amplified a view implicit in neo-classical economics and in much sociology, with the claim that culture is nearly irrelevant to human conduct: ‘Preferences are assumed not to change substantially over time, nor to be very different between wealthy and poor persons, or even between persons in different societies and cultures’ (Becker, 1979:9). In contrast, some anthropologists and sociologists consider persons to be mainly cultural beings. Clifford Geertz argues that ‘there is no such thing as human nature independent of culture’ (1973:49). The new cultural theory, in its various forms, rejects ‘essentialism’ by affirming the social construction of almost every aspect of human experience. Judith Butler, for example, argues that the language-games of gender have nothing to do with biology. In deference to Butler having recently won the Bad Writing Prize, we will quote Martha Nussbaum’s description of her view: ‘Our ideas of what women and men are reflect nothing that exists eternally in nature. Instead they derive from customs that embed social relations of power’ (Nussbaum, 1999:40). Richard Rorty’s much quoted aphorism that ‘socialisation goes all the way down’ (1989:185) similarly empowers culture and disconnects it from human nature. While Bourdieu saw habitus as rooted in ‘objective conditions’, individual actors are portrayed as entirely driven by cultural training: ‘As an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted, the habitus

engenders *all the thoughts, all the perceptions*, and all of the actions consistent with those conditions, and no others' (1977:95, emphasis added).³

The virtue of Marx's and Wittgenstein's view, in which culture is rooted—but only loosely—in the 'material exigencies' posed by the natural world and human nature, is that it shows that ideas emerge in practical life but, far from being epiphenomenal or merely adaptive, they can break free even to the point of overwhelming practical need. Marx believes that liberalism can be turned against bourgeois interests and Wittgenstein can imagine language-games that contradict our natural reactions.

The 'autonomisation' of culture can be illustrated by considering the claims of evolutionary psychology. In this perspective, the brain, like any organ, evolved by developing behavioural dispositions, like a tendency to nurture infants, that facilitate reproduction. It is argued that various cultural preferences can be explained by this logic. For example, our sense of human beauty is rooted in a universal preference for symmetry which is evident in infants (Pinker, 1997:483–7) and the tendency of animals to shun the asymmetrical as prospective mates. The logic of this is that the symmetrical are more likely to be robust and so those attracted to lop-sided lovers are at a reproductive disadvantage. A study of college students found that those with symmetrical elbows were healthier and romantically more successful.

There are hints of an evolutionary psychology in Marx and Wittgenstein. The rooting of language-games in 'natural, instinctive' reactions resembles the claim that culture is built around evolved dispositions. And, contrary to Marxist critics of evolutionary psychology, Marx himself described humans as developing in relation to the natural environment, seeing nature as 'the inorganic body of man' (Marx, 1963:126) and claiming that the senses evolve to engage the world. 'The cultivation of the five senses is the work of all previous history' (*ibid.*: 161). The description of man as 'inhaling and exhaling all the powers of nature...a natural being...endowed with natural powers and faculties, which exist in him as tendencies and abilities, as drives' (*ibid.*: 206–7) could be taken as a manifesto for the claim of evolutionary psychology that sensory mechanisms and innate drives are formed in interaction with nature.

But neither Marx nor Wittgenstein believed that our evolved nature *controls* human practices. And indeed, many practices not only transcend but also contradict our natural traits. For example, anomalies in human preferences suggest that an aesthetic sense can defy evolutionary logic. Steven Pinker claims that no society has considered bad teeth to be attractive. But 'heroin chic'—the depiction of the sallow, the emaciated, the emphatically unhealthy as fashionable—shows how far we can wander from the importunings of our genes. Denis de Rougement's *Love in the Western World* (1940) described another contradiction to the exigencies of genetic reproduction: the near cultic preference in medieval courts for unconsummated love. The low birth rates of the affluent in developed societies, clerical celibacy and various other practices similarly show that, contrary to E.O.Wilson's dictum that 'genes hold culture on a leash' (Wilson, 1978:167) culture is not constrained by genetics. While an aesthetic sense may play some

role in adaptation—perhaps aesthetically pleasing tools tend to be more efficient—the quest for beauty can subvert practicality. Noel Perrin’s *Giving Up the Gun* (1979) describes how, in the sixteenth century, the Japanese dismantled a sophisticated firearms industry mainly because the samurai thought that guns lacked the beauty of swords and that their operation required clumsy bodily positions in contrast to the balletic grace of sword-fights. Pinker’s claim that humans naturally prefer savannahs (Pinker, 1997:377) and shun terrain inhospitable to human flourishing—‘No one likes the deserts and rainforests’ (*ibid.*: 376)—is belied by the steady stream of tourists to both terrains.

These examples of non-adaptive and counter-adaptive behaviour are subject to what Elster (Elster, 1984:135) describes as a kind of professional hobby in social science—‘rationalising the irrational’, i.e. the effort to find a rational or functional reason for all social practices. And because in Western culture ‘Rationality is our rationalisation’ (Sahlins, 1976:17), social actors themselves contribute to this process. Jack Katz’s *Seductions of Crime* challenges the utilitarianism of much criminological theory by describing the various attractions of crimes, like the ‘delight in violence’ (Katz, 1988:76), that make no economic sense. But discerning such motives is complicated by the efforts of criminals to legitimate their conduct in terms acceptable to the dominant culture. Katz quotes Nietzsche: ‘he robbed when he murdered. He did not want to be ashamed of his madness’ (*ibid.*: 274).

We might challenge Malinowski, a relentless functionalist (see Sahlins, 1976:73) to rationalise this: the Yanomami Indians of the Amazon believe that bad magic is the cause of even accidental and natural deaths and that vengeance must be taken. Consequently, the tribe is riven with revenge killings: 30 per cent of the deaths of adult males are by homicide (Elster, 1989:136). It seems that the Yanomami have earned the appellation ‘cultural dopes’, i.e. they are incapable of subjecting their values to rational appraisal. The anthropologist Robert Edgerton has, in *Sick Societies*, assembled an array of self-destructive practices and beliefs that defy the most relentless rationaliser. For example, for all their technical prowess, the Inuit sustained strikingly maladaptive practices:

they avoided lakes that they admitted offered superior fishing and hunting because they were thought to be inhabited by monstrous man-eating fish, and they avoided excellent campsites in order to avoid malevolent ghosts and spirits. Good hunting and fishing areas could not be visited at night for fear of ‘wild babies’—creatures resembling human infants—that were thought to devour people like wolves or, more remarkable still, tickle them to death.

(Edgerton, 1992:60)

And yet, the autonomy of culture from instrumental reason is subject to limits: societies cannot survive, nor would we as a species have flourished, without making some concessions to our material environments and our own natures. Regarding the latter, the recalcitrance of ‘primitive reactions’ to cultural

training is strikingly illustrated in a nineteenth-century description of scalping. One observer found that Native American fighters sometimes balked before the task: 'Twice he saw a brave pause during the operation in order to vomit' (Connell, 1984:165). William Miller (1997) considers disgust to be an evolved natural reaction and this example suggests that it is deeply enough embedded to resist training. Indeed, Solomon concedes that the Utka manifest what bears a strong family resemblance to anger: 'They do feel annoyed, even hostile, and they can display raw violence, for example, in the beating of their dogs' (Solomon, 1984:244). One wants to ask whether Solomon can imagine a society in which no one felt fear. Wittgenstein's answer to this question is clear. He suggests that a book on psychology should include chapters titled: 'Man thinks, is afraid etc. etc.' (Wittgenstein, 1970:§469). Evolutionary psychologists would expand this list considerably.

So too, material reality exacts concessions from culture. One wants to ask relativists, especially those of the postmodernist persuasion, if they can *live* their philosophical professions. Such philosophical posturing calls to mind C.S. Peirce's anticipation of Wittgenstein's arguments about Cartesian doubt: '[Descartes'] skepticism will be a mere self-deception, and not a real doubt... Let us not pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our hearts' (1934:156). Sahlin's claim that 'it is culture which constitutes utility' is elsewhere qualified with a recognition of its sensitivity to practical need:

People act upon circumstances according to their own cultural presuppositions... [But] the worldly circumstances of human action are under no inevitable obligation to conform to [these] categories... In the event that they do not, the received categories are potentially revalued in practice... At the extreme, what began as reproduction ends as transformation.

(1981:72)

A conclusion about the relationship of culture to something 'more basic' which ultimately drives behaviour and which may be hidden from 'consciousness' is elusive. Winch seems to accept Evans-Pritchard's conception of the Azande as entirely creatures of cultural training—cultural dopes—locked within cocoons of custom. In this view a Zande: 'cannot think that his thought is wrong' (1964:313). But amidst great cultural variation, human nature and engagement with the facts of the natural world shapes and reshapes our beliefs. The constraining power of culture must be qualified in light of the frequency of deviance, individual and collective, personal and political, in all societies. A warrant for outside observers to subject culture to critical appraisal can be found in the ability of participants to criticise their own culture, to conclude, as they often do, that it isn't working (see Lamb 1977).

The problem of incommensurability is also exaggerated: if a lion could talk there would be much that we could understand, like: 'Hot today, isn't it?' ('We only say of a human being and what is like one that it thinks' (Wittgenstein, 1953:§360). Indeed, few social practices are utterly unintelligible to outsiders,

in part because shared natural reactions provide bridges of mutual understanding. Qualifying his main thesis, Winch (1964:323) easily dismisses MacIntyre's claim that he cannot comprehend the aboriginal practice of seeing a stick or stone as embodying the soul of a person with the example of treating a picture or lock of hair as representing a loved one. Wittgenstein might consider this part of the 'common behaviour of mankind'.

At the same time, culture routinely and sometimes radically escapes such constraints to become an autonomous factor in behaviour. Functionalists argue that culture is relentlessly pulled towards engagement with reality. But this only happens in the long run and amidst continuously emerging divergences from the exigencies of practical need posed by the imperatives of the natural world and human nature. Persons are often in thrall to primitive or not so primitive nonsense that can destroy them before functional imperatives take hold.

Perhaps it is best to acknowledge both rootedness and autonomy, i.e. to refuse to draw a general conclusion about the relationship between 'existence' and 'consciousness' because there *is* no systematic relationship. A hint of such agnosticism can be found by returning to *The German Ideology*. While elsewhere describing persons as rooted in material existence—'corporeal man, with his feet firmly planted on the solid ground' (Marx, 1963:206)—here Marx describes consciousness as '*at first* directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear *at this stage* as the direct efflux of their material behaviour' (p. 14, emphasis added). The suggestion that the connection between consciousness and practical activity is historically contingent, with the implication that 'theory itself becomes a material force' (Marx, 1963:52), is not completed. But the possibility that consciousness, while emerging in practical activity, can become a driving force in its own right suggests that while we can often explain culture as servicing a material substratum, it cannot be reduced to this function.

Wittgenstein's diversity of examples, some of which root language in natural reactions and some of which do not—like the tribe that mocks invisible pain—suggests agreement that language-games sometimes are and sometimes are not tied to a natural substratum. Marx is inclined to exaggerate the rootedness of culture in material existence and Wittgenstein its autonomy. But both ultimately back away from the reductionism of those who believe that one or another factor 'ultimately' drives behaviour.

The lesson for social science in this is twofold. Contrary to some interpretations of Wittgenstein, cultural analysis should incorporate a materialist focus on the implication of culture in practical life and our natural history. And, contrary to common interpretations of Marx, social scientists of a materialist or structuralist inclination must understand that ideas, ideologies and language-games can break free from their practical roots to become forces in their own right.

But Marx and Wittgenstein can offer more than the bromide that both material and cultural factors bear on behaviour. In various discussions of rule-following, Wittgenstein shows that rules need to be interpreted to be applied

and that interpretations can vary. He (1953:§84) argues, for example, that the use of words has no firm rules and that the order to continue a series of numbers can be variously interpreted (*ibid.*: §§143, 185). The puzzle presented by recognition that ‘every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule’ is resolved by concluding that rule-following is an exercise in custom or training: ‘This is simply what I do’ (*ibid.*: §§198, 199, 201 and 217).

But Wittgenstein’s emphasis on the role of practical exigencies in social life, like in the choice of criteria and symptoms, suggests that interpretations of rules are also shaped by practical interests, not just custom. This implies that rules are mediated by practical exigencies, that, indeed, we cannot determine their meaning ‘abstractly’—apart from their practical application. Insofar as a rule exists only in its application, there is, as it were, no cultural *ding an sich*.

Marx, coming from the opposite direction, makes a parallel point. In contrast to his occasional technological determinism, he argues that productive instruments have no determinate impact on social practices. In *The Poverty of Philosophy* he says,

Machinery is no more an economic category than the ox which draws the plough. The application of machinery in the present day is one of the relations of our present economic system, but the way in which machinery is utilised is totally distinct from the machinery itself. Powder remains the same whether it is used to wound a man or to dress his wound.

(Marx, 1964:156)

In this statement, Marx emphasises the role of cultural practices in mediating elements of substructure which, therefore, cannot directly determine action. Indeed, the argument that we cannot say what a machine or an ox *is*, except in relation to a ‘form of life’, suggests Sahlins’ contention that ‘it is culture which constitutes utility’. Wittgenstein is mainly known for emphasising the autonomy of language-games from a material substratum and Marx for subordinating culture to the material. But in some crucial ways their views converge.

Marx and Wittgenstein thus offer a way out of the debate between materialist and idealist conceptions of social science. If culture is articulated in material practices, which, in turn, are saturated with culture, neither can be ‘more basic’ in shaping human action. Marx and Wittgenstein suggest a fully dialectical organic union of the elements of action conventionally treated as discrete. In this view, the notion that either culture or practical exigencies imposed by the natural world and human nature drive behaviour ‘in the final analysis’ is superseded by recognition that neither can be articulated apart from the other and hence neither can be seen as determining action.

Notes

- 1 Alas, Marx equivocated on this issue. In *Capital* (1967c:82n) he acknowledged that the economy is not always determining:

my view...that the economic structure of society, is the real basis on which the juridical and political structure is raised, and to which definite forms of thought correspond...all this is very true for our own times, in which material interests preponderate, but not for the middle ages, in which Catholicism, nor for Athens and Rome, where politics reigned supreme.

This claim is muddled by the following:

This much, however, is clear, that the middle ages could not live on Catholicism, nor the ancient world on politics. On the contrary, it is the mode in which they gained a livelihood that explains why here politics, and there Catholicism, played the chief part.

Materialist interpretations can cite Marx's sneering at moral discourse as 'obsolete verbal rubbish' (quoted in Buchanan, 1980:266) that plays no real role in social life. But he also avers that the feudal lord seeks 'romantic glory' and hence 'does not try to extract the maximum profit from his estate' (Marx, 1964:123).

- 2 This quote illustrates how difficult it is to conceive of persons as having no pre-social traits. Here, Durkheim adduces two: a sense of duty to the group and respect for custom. Why, then, cannot mourning be 'a natural movement of private feelings'?
- 3 As on many other issues, Bourdieu equivocates on the controlling power of habitus. At one point he allows that actors can 'consciously master the relation they entertain with their dispositions. They can deliberately let them "act" or they can on the contrary inhibit them by virtue of consciousness' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:137).

References

- Alexander, J. (1988) *Action and its Environment*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Becker, G. (1979) 'Economic analysis and human behaviour', in L.Levy-Garbana (ed.) *Sociological Economics*, London: Sage.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, London: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Buchanan, A. (1980) 'Revolutionary motivation and rationality', in M.Cohen, T.Nagel, and T.Scanlon (eds) *Marx, Justice, and History*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Connell, E. (1984) *Son of the Morning Star*, New York: HarperCollins.
- de Rougement, D. (1940) *Love in the Western World*, New York: Harcourt and Brace.
- Edgerton, R. (1992) *Sick Societies*, New York: Free Press.
- Elster, J. (1984) 'Belief, bias, and ideology', in M.Hollis and S.Lukes (eds) *Rationality and Relativism*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1989) *The Cement of Society*, London: Cambridge University Press.
- Feuer, L. (1969) *Marx and the Intellectuals*, Garden City, New Jersey: Anchor Books.
- Gellner, E. (1992) *Reason and Culture*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books.
- Janik, A. (1985) *Essays on Wittgenstein and Weininger*, Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Katz, J. (1988) *The Seductions of Crime*, New York: Basic Books.
- Lamb, D. (1977) 'Preserving a primitive society: reflections on post-Wittgensteinian social philosophy', *Sociological Review* 25(4), 689–719.

- Levy, R. (1984) 'Emotions, knowing, and culture', in R.Schweder and R.Levine (eds) *Cultural Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotions*, London: Cambridge University Press.
- Lyotard, J. (1988) *The Differend*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Marx, K. (1963) *Early Writings*, edited by T.Bottomore, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- (1964) *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, edited by T.Bottomore, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- (1967a) *The German Ideology*, New York: International Publishers.
- (1967b) *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, New York: International Publishers.
- (1967c) *Capital*, vol. 1, New York: International Publishers.
- (1971) *Grundrisse*, edited by D.McLellan, New York: Harper and Row.
- Miller, W. (1967) *The Anatomy of Disgust*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Nielsen, K. (1985) *Equality and Liberty*, Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield.
- North, D. (1984) 'Three approaches to the study of institutions', in D.Collander (ed.) *Neoclassical Political Economy*, Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger.
- Nussbaum, M. (1999) 'The professor of parody', *New Republic*, 22 February, 37–45.
- Perrin, N. (1979) *Giving Up the Gun*, Boston: Godine.
- Pierce, C.S. (1934) *Collected Papers*, vol. V, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Pinker, S. (1997) *How the Mind Works*, New York: Norton.
- Renner, K. (1949) *The Institutions of Private Law and Their Social Function*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Rorty, R. (1989) *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sahlins, M. (1976) *Culture and Practical Reason*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (1981) *Historical Metaphors and Historical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Sewell, W. (1992) 'A theory of structure: duality, agency, and transformation', *American Journal of Sociology* 8(1), 1–29.
- Solomon, R. (1984) 'Getting angry: the Jamesian theory of emotions', in R.Schweder and R.Levine (eds) *Cultural Theory: Essays on Mind, Self and Emotions*, London: Cambridge University Press.
- Wilson, E.O. (1978) *On Human Nature*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Winch, P. (1958) *The Idea of a Social Science*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- (1964) 'Understanding a primitive society', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, I(4), 307–24.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1953) *Philosophical Investigations*, New York: Macmillan.
- (1958) *The Blue and Brown Books*, New York: Harper and Row.
- (1969) *On Certainty*, New York: Harper and Row.
- (1970) *Zettel*, Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Wright, R. (1994) *The Moral Animal*, New York: Pantheon.

4 Commodity fetishism as a form of life

Language and value in Wittgenstein and Marx

David Andrews

Introduction

In this chapter I use the later ideas of Wittgenstein on language to shed light on Marx's conception of value in *Capital*. This is a treacherous undertaking, as the relevant discussions of value and language arise in vastly different contexts and remain individually controversial. However, Marx himself drew an analogy between value and language: 'the characteristic which objects of utility have of being values is as much men's social product as is their language' (Marx, 1976:167). It is precisely in this sense that I believe the juxtaposition of value and language may prove fruitful: that is, in that both are 'social products'.

This essay first presents a brief interpretation of Wittgenstein's ideas on language, then it proceeds to consider Marx's discussion of value in light of these ideas. I consider Marx's discussion of value as an analysis of the language-game which involves expressions of value, i.e. the language-game around the use of the verb 'to be worth'. I argue that the relationship described by Wittgenstein between a language-game and the form of life with which it is associated is a useful way to consider the relationship between Marx's discussion of value and the form of life which is associated with value, namely commodity production or, more generally, commodity fetishism.

Before proceeding it may be useful to note two apparently large and significant differences between Marx and Wittgenstein. First, Marx does not use the language of 'games' or 'language-games'. On the contrary, Marx uses an adapted version of the metaphysical language employed by Hegel. Insofar as the language of games suggests academic playfulness or lack of seriousness with respect to the world of experience, it seems to be far removed from Marx's discussion of, for example, exploitation. I interpret Wittgenstein's choice of terms differently: in my view, the game metaphor was used in an attempt to find a mode of expression that would be intelligible to his students and readers. It does not convey any attitude towards the world of experience in general or the economic world in specific.

Second, Wittgenstein never addresses the dynamic processes through which language-games and corresponding forms of life develop and change. The development of economic forms was obviously an important

preoccupation of Marx's. Wittgenstein therefore may be seen as having developed a theory which simply accepts and indeed crystallises and reinforces the status quo. While I do see this as a limitation on Wittgenstein's analysis, I do not believe that Wittgenstein's ideas reflect any necessary connection to or support for the world as it is. On the contrary, Wittgenstein clearly looked to, at least, a revolutionising of the language of philosophy, and presumably therefore dramatic changes in the form of life within which philosophical discourse takes place.

Language-games and forms of life

The later Wittgenstein undertook, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, to proceed from the ideas of his earlier *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus*.¹ Much of the argument of the *Tractatus* is concerned with presenting a particular view according to which ordinary language is highly problematic. According to this view, ordinary language obscures and conceals the otherwise simple relationship between thought, language and the world:

Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it, because the outward form of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body, but for entirely different purposes.

(Wittgenstein, 1961:4.002)

As a result, according to this view, 'the logic of our language is misunderstood' (Wittgenstein, 1961:3). The problem lies in the inadequate character of everyday speech:

In everyday language it very frequently happens that the same word has different modes of signification—and so belongs to different symbols—or that two words that have different modes of signification are employed in propositions in what is superficially the same way... In this way the most fundamental confusions are easily produced.

(Wittgenstein, 1961:3.323–4)

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein presents a means of overcoming this problem, i.e. by creating a clear and unambiguous language in order to avoid the errors that result from the deficiency of ordinary language:

We must make use of a sign-language that excludes them by not using the same sign for different symbols and by not using in a superficially similar way signs that have different modes of signification: that is to say, a sign-language that is governed by *logical* grammar—by logical syntax.

(Wittgenstein, 1961:3.324)

Such a language would allow us to restate everyday language in unambiguous terms so that its meaning might be determined. This superior language becomes the standard in terms of which the truth and falsity of propositions can be established. The construction and explication of this superior language requires an analysis of the nature or essence of language. This solution to the problem locates the essence of the proposition, the basic element of language, in the ‘general form of the proposition’, which he identifies as: ‘This is how things stand’ (Wittgenstein, 1961:4.5). All meaningful propositions could then be reduced to this general form. This simplification helps to rectify the negative consequences of the obscuring character of ordinary language.

It is very tempting to attribute this view, according to which ordinary language is inadequate, to the early Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, and to see the *Investigations* as the later Wittgenstein criticising his earlier views. But Wittgenstein gives some reason to believe that he never really held these views even in the *Tractatus*, for example:

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognises them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

(Wittgenstein, 1961:6.54)²

In any case, in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein explicitly rejected the notion that ordinary language of everyday life is deficient or that it obscures or conceals its meaning. Mystery arises because people hope to find hidden metaphysical ‘meanings’ for words and propositions, when actually there are no such things. Propositions, on this later view, are transparent and lack the problematic nature that Wittgenstein presented in the *Tractatus*:

If it is asked: ‘How do sentences manage to represent?’—the answer might be: ‘Don’t you know? You certainly see it, when you use them.’ For nothing is concealed.

How do sentences do it?—Don’t you know? For nothing is hidden.

(Wittgenstein, 1958:§435)

Wittgenstein concludes that it is therefore a mistake to try to look beyond ordinary language for anything that has an extraordinary or universal status, i.e. any status that is ‘sublime’:

A proposition is a queer thing! Here we have the subliming of our whole account of logic. The tendency to assume a pure intermediary between the prepositional *signs* and the facts. Or even to try to purify, to sublime, the signs themselves.

(Wittgenstein, 1958:§94)

The attempt to construct a superior language from ordinary language is an attempt to purify ordinary language, to eliminate its imperfections, to elevate it to a universal status, to sublime it, to raise it to a status of theoretical perfection.

This attempt to raise the status of the language involves a mystification of language: 'our forms of expression prevent us in all sorts of ways from seeing that nothing out of the ordinary is involved, by sending us in pursuit of chimeras' (Wittgenstein, 1958:§94). Certain terms that are commonly used in ordinary language—for example, such words as 'to know', 'to be certain', 'to understand', 'to represent', and, one might add, 'to be worth'—suggest to us that something extraordinary has happened or is happening when we use such an expression. When we know something, or are certain about something, or understand something, we feel that we have some special, perhaps metaphysical, relationship to that which we know, are certain of, or understand, a relationship which is absent in the case of things that we do not know, are not certain of, or do not understand. When we say that a commodity is worth so much, we believe that we are expressing a special characteristic about the essence of the commodity. We then feel a need to explore the nature of this special relationship, the essence or meaning of knowledge, certainty, understanding or value, which appears to be complicated and obscure. But Wittgenstein suggests that there is no such special relationship, characteristic or essence. These words are as ordinary as the words 'chair' and 'table'. Ordinary forms of expression throw up obstacles, that is, preventing us from seeing their ordinary character: 'The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes)' (Wittgenstein, 1958:§129). The problem is to stop looking for mysterious essences and view the world as it is: 'God grant the philosopher insight into what lies in front of everyone's eyes' (Wittgenstein, 1980:63).

Wittgenstein argued that the language of the *Tractatus* is not a theoretically correct version of ordinary language, but is, on the contrary, simply a description of one particular use of language. The system of the *Tractatus*:

does describe a system of communication; only not everything that we call language is this system. And one has to say this in many cases where the question arises 'Is this an appropriate description or not?' The answer is: 'Yes it is appropriate, but only for the narrowly circumscribed region, not for the whole of what you were claiming to describe.'

(Wittgenstein, 1958:§3)

The 'superior' language of the *Tractatus* represents a 'particular picture of the essence of human language' (Wittgenstein, 1958:§1), not a description of language as a whole. This picture of language involved asserting facts, 'This is how things stand', but Wittgenstein points out in the *Investigations* that there are many different uses for language in addition to asserting facts: 'Think of the tools in a toolbox: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw driver, a rule, a gluepot, glue, nails and screws—The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects' (Wittgenstein, 1958:§11). Early in the *Investigations*

Wittgenstein presents a long list of various other uses of language: giving orders, describing, reporting, speculating, asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying and many others (Wittgenstein, 1958:§23).

Therefore, in order to understand the meaning of linguistic usage, all that can be done is to describe the way it is used in the relevant context. These diverse uses of language cannot be reduced to a form that is shared by all as had been done in the *Tractatus*. From this derives Wittgenstein's well-known assertion that meaning depends on use: 'For a *large* class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word “meaning” it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language' (Wittgenstein, 1958:§43). It should be noted, however, that although this is presented as a 'definition', this is not a theory of language use, but a description of how we actually use the word 'meaning'.

In order to illustrate this point, Wittgenstein uses simplified examples of language use, examples which he calls 'language-games':

These are ways of using signs simpler than those in which we use the signs of our highly complicated everyday language... When we look at such simple forms of language the mental mist which seems to enshroud our ordinary use of language disappears.

(Wittgenstein, 1960:17)

A crucial aspect of Wittgenstein's conception of language-games is that they are connected with 'forms of life': 'Here the term 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a 'form of life' (Wittgenstein, 1958:§23). A particular use of language, that is to say, reflects a manner of living: And to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life' (Wittgenstein, 1958:§19).

Garver (1994:240–52) has argued that there is only one human form of life, as opposed to the many interpreters who have seen a multiplicity of human forms of life. A detailed critique of Garver's position is outside the scope of this essay, but in my view Garver's position is mistaken and for two main reasons.³ First, he dismisses the passages in which Wittgenstein discusses diverse forms of human life because he is unable to make sense of them. More importantly, however, Garver assumes throughout his discussion that the alternatives are mutually exclusive: either there are a multiplicity of human forms of life or Wittgenstein has in mind that there is only one form of human life. But Wittgenstein explicitly says that he uses the term 'language-game' in a narrow sense in which it refers to one of many possible language-games and in a very broad sense in which it refers to 'the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven' (Wittgenstein, 1958:§7). Since Wittgenstein explicitly suggests that language-games and forms of life are correlated, it seems reasonable to assume that Wittgenstein intended that forms of life could be used either narrowly or broadly.

The form of life is more than simply the location of the language-game, it provides 'the framework on which the working of our language is based' (Wittgenstein, 1958:§240). It is only in terms of a form of life that a language can have any meaning: 'the activity...fixes the use of a word' (Wittgenstein, 1982:47). Conversely, the language characteristic of a form of life informs the activity as well. This need not be understood as any kind of crude reductionism, but it does give some primacy to activity over language; the language follows from the activity: 'What has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could say—*forms of life*' (Wittgenstein, 1958:226).⁴ This framework provided by a form of life does not determine precisely what people believe or say, but it means rather that a common form of life is necessary to be able to sufficiently share a language to express consistent or divergent opinions:

'So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?'—It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.
(Wittgenstein, 1958:§241)

If a creature with a very different form of life were able to speak to us, we would lack a framework for understanding what it said: 'If a lion could talk, we could not understand him' (Wittgenstein, 1958:223).

Wittgenstein is then able to use the language-game/form of life structure to demonstrate the different uses that language has in association with different forms of life. For example, he can show the extremely limited form of life which would be associated with the language-game constructed in the *Tractatus*. From this perspective the claims to universality of that language-game appear to be illusory: within any particular language-game and corresponding form of life, it is possible to describe the rules under which language is meaningfully used, but those rules have no necessary relevance to other language-games which are associated with other forms of life.

So in order to understand the meaning of language it is necessary to know the activity or form of life which gives meaning to the language. Moreover, once the form of life is known, there is nothing further that explains the relevant meaning. There is no underlying form or essence common to all language-games, just as there is no activity common to all forms of life.

The value language-game

One language-game that Wittgenstein could have addressed, but did not, could be called the value language-game. Here I have in mind the very common use of language to express the value of a commodity, e.g. that one commodity is worth a certain quantity of another commodity or worth a certain sum of money, even if that is different from the actual market price. Adam Smith may be the first to have explicitly characterised the nature of this language-game, in Book I, Chapter 7 of *The Wealth of Nations*, 'Of the natural and market Price of Commodities'.

There he distinguishes the market price, that price which must be paid at any time to acquire a commodity, from the natural price: ‘when the price of any commodity is neither more nor less than what is sufficient to pay the rent of the land, the wages of the labour, and the profits of the stock...according to their natural rates’ (Smith, 1976:72). The market price may be above or below the natural price. When the market price is precisely equal to the natural price, according to Smith, ‘The commodity is then sold precisely for what it is worth’ (Smith, 1976:72). This characterisation explains the circumstances and appropriate usage of the verb ‘to be worth’. In this sense, Smith indicates the conditions or rules under which this expression is appropriately employed: that is, he specifies the rules of the value language-game.

David Ricardo also made an important contribution to the development of the value language-game. Ricardo argued that the values of commodities are determined by the quantity of labour required in their production: ‘I know of no other criterion of a thing being dear or cheap but by the sacrifices of labour made to obtain it. Every thing is originally purchased by labour’ (Ricardo, 1951, IV:397).⁵ This position of Ricardo’s can also be viewed as a specification of the value language-game in that it provides a restriction on how the verb ‘to be worth’ is to be used.

Marx’s discussion of value, I would like to suggest, can also be seen as an analysis of the rules of the value language-game, i.e. an explanation of how the verb ‘to be worth’ is appropriately used. That Marx is particularly intent on analysing the use of language is evident in his discussion of the relative and equivalent forms of value. The equation of 20 yards of linen=one coat which Marx uses is, mathematically speaking, perfectly symmetric and equivalent to the equation of one coat=20 yards of linen. The asymmetry which Marx emphasises of the relative and equivalent poles comes from using the equation to represent the linguistic expression that ‘20 yards of linen are worth one coat’ (Marx, 1976:139). The value of the linen is expressed in terms of coats; the value of the coat is not expressed in terms of the linen. It is possible to reverse the equation and the linguistic expression, so that the value of the coat would be expressed in terms of the linen, but this would be a very different proposition. In this linguistic formulation the linen and the coat play different roles despite their formal mathematical equality:

Whether a commodity is in the relative form or in its opposite, the equivalent form, entirely depends on its actual position in the expression of value. That is, it depends on whether it is the commodity whose value is being expressed, or the commodity in which value is being expressed.
(Marx, 1976:140)

In this sense, then, Marx’s analysis of value seems to turn on his analysis of the linguistic expression of value, i.e. what I have called the value language-game.

Moreover, just as Wittgenstein emphasised that language-games are connected to activities, or forms of life, Marx emphasises that the language-

game of value only functions in the context of a particular form of life, viz. commodity production. Just as Wittgenstein pointed out alternative activities, or forms of life, in contrast with the forms of life which involve only the language-game of referring to objects—the famous examples of the builders at the beginning of the *Investigations*—Marx pointed out alternative forms of social production which contrast with that form of social production which involves the value language-game. Marx referred to Robinson Crusoe alone on his island, medieval European feudalism, a rural peasant family and, finally, an association of free individuals ‘working with the means of production held in common, and expending their many different forms of labour-power in full self-awareness as one single social labour force’ (Marx, 1976:171). Just as Wittgenstein argued that, although the assertion of facts does present a picture of language, it is a limited picture of language because of alternative forms of life, Marx argued that commodity production and value are limited by pointing out alternative forms of social production: ‘The categories of bourgeois economics...are forms of thought which are socially valid, and therefore objective, for the relations of production belonging to this historically determined mode of social production, i.e. commodity production’ (Marx, 1976:169).

But just as for Wittgenstein the form of life associated with a language-game is not simply the location in which the language-game occurs, commodity production is not simply the location in which the value language-games occur. Commodity production provides the framework in which the language of value can have meaning. The activity, that is to say, constitutes the use of language as much as it is simply described by it. Exchange-value, for Marx, is the reification of a social relationship, social labour, but ‘reification’ here is not a perception, or epistemological act, it is an *activity* which occurs in a system of commodity production. In order to explain this view, we need to consider more fully the meaning of commodity fetishism. I suggest that commodity fetishism should be understood as the form of life, the activity of the participants of system of commodity production, which corresponds to what I have called the value language-game.

Commodity fetishism

Marx’s discussion of commodity fetishism has been widely ignored and when it has been addressed at all, it has typically been with very little analysis or explanation that goes beyond a restatement of Marx’s words. In a well-known passage from the first chapter of the first volume of *Capital*, Marx says that in

the misty realm of religion...the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are

produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.

(Marx 1976:165)

At a general level, standard accounts of Marx agree that commodity fetishism refers to something mysterious or illusory about social relations in a commodity producing society, but the precise character of the mystery or illusion remains obscure. Elster expresses the most widely held view when he argues that commodity fetishism refers to the belief that value is an inherent property of commodities rather than the expression of human labour:

Commodity fetishism is the belief that goods possess value just as they possess weight, as an inherent property. To the unmythified mind, it is clear that a commodity has exchange-value only because it stands in certain relations to human labour and human needs.

(Elster, 1986:57)

Cohen takes the same position, arguing that '[c]ommodities possess exchange-value... But [this] power belongs to them only by grace of the material labour process. Yet [it] appear [s] to inhere in them independently of it. That appearance is fetishism' (Cohen, 1978:116). Lewin and Morris make a similar argument, adding an element of coercion, asserting that fetishism results from the fact that in a system of commodity production 'people are forced to think of material things as possessing inherent properties which by their intrinsic physical nature they cannot possibly possess' (Lewin and Morris, 1977:173).⁶

The illusion that characterises commodity fetishism, from this perspective, is an error located within the minds of people living under a system of commodity production. Some people are deceived about the true state of affairs that is known to those who are not taken in by the illusion, i.e. those with 'unmythified minds', such as, presumably, Marx and the authors cited above. This position would seem to be supported by Marx's assertion that:

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things.

(Marx, 1976:164–5)

The interpretation according to which fetishism refers to the erroneous belief that value is inherent in commodities independently of the labour process rests on taking 'socio-natural properties' (*gesellschaftliche Natureigenschaften*) to mean something like 'natural properties'.

I believe that this is incorrect. First, although it is somewhat difficult to know exactly what 'socio-natural properties' might be, they are explicitly not the same as 'natural properties'. The characterisation Marx favours for the

fetishistic character of commodities is 'objective' (*gegenstaendlich*) but the sense in which this term is used is difficult to define. It is possible to construe senses of value which are an objective characteristic of commodities without being inherent in those commodities. For example, value is objective in the sense it is 'congealed quantity of labour' (Marx, 1976:150). This is social in that the labour involved is social, but it also has physical properties in that it is 'congealed'. Hence exchange-value, as equal to the quantity of 'crystallised human labour' embodied in a commodity, is a social characteristic which is reflected as an objective and socio-natural property of the commodity.

Moreover, if fetishism referred to the erroneous belief that value is inherent in commodities independently of the labour process, then the discovery that value is connected to the labour process, once it was widely diffused, would put an end to fetishism, but Marx makes clear that he believes this not to be the case:

The belated scientific discovery that the products of labour, in so far as they are values, are merely the material expressions of the human labour expended to produce them, marks an epoch in the history of mankind's development, but by no means banishes the semblance of objectivity possessed by the social characteristics of labour.

(Marx, 1976:167)

Finally, in his criticism of Bailey, Marx makes clear that simply attributing value to a commodity in isolation does not exhaust the meaning of fetishism:

Bailey is a fetishist in that he conceives value, though not as a property of the individual object (considered in isolation), but as a relation of objects to one another, while it is only a representation in objects, an objective expression, of a relation between men, a social relation, the relationship of men to their reciprocal productive activity.

(Marx, 1971:147)

In order to see that exchange-value is the objective appearance of social characteristics to which Marx refers, consider the context of the discussion of fetishism in *Capital*. The discussion arises because Marx asserts that something mysterious has emerged in his analysis of exchange-value: 'A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' (Marx, 1976:163). The strangeness of commodities, that is, arises out of Marx's own analysis of commodities—an analysis which says nothing about erroneous understandings of the value. The mystery does not arise out of the experience of people living under commodity production; there is no discussion of such a thing in Marx's analysis of the commodity form.

The analysis which gives rise to the mystery, according to Marx, is the analysis of the commodity-form concluded in the third section of the first chapter of the first volume of *Capital* on 'The value-form, or exchange-value', which immediately

precedes the section on commodity fetishism. In that section Marx describes the objective character of commodities at some length. In his analysis of the value-form or exchange-value, Marx argues that commodities 'have the form of commodities, in so far as they possess a double-form, i.e. natural form and value form' (Marx, 1976:138). This reflects the familiar distinction between use-value and exchange-value. The mysteriousness has nothing to do with the natural form of the commodity as a use-value: 'So far as it is a use-value, there is nothing mysterious about it... The mystical character of the commodity does not... arise from its use-value' (Marx, 1976:163–4). It is the commodity-form itself which generates the perplexity: 'Whence, then, arises the enigmatic character of the product of labour, as soon as it assumes the form of a commodity? Clearly, it arises from this form itself (Marx, 1976:164).

Marx writes that it is the 'labour expended in the production of a useful article' which, under commodity production, is presented as 'an "objective" property of that article, i.e. as its value' (Marx, 1976:153–4). Moreover, Marx argues that the only objectivity that commodities possess as values, their 'purely social' objective character, they possess as products of identical human labour:

Let us remember that commodities possess an objective character as values only in so far as they are all expressions of an identical human labour, that their objective character as values is therefore purely social. From this it follows self-evidently that it can only appear in the social relation between commodity and commodity.

(Marx, 1976:138–9)

Commodities do not possess any other objective character. It is this objective character as products of labour that constitutes commodity fetishism.

Marx characterises commodity fetishism as a social relation between things: 'the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things' (Marx, 1976:165). Marx identifies the social relation between things as the value relation. In the section on the value form, Marx analyses this 'social relation between commodity and commodity' (Marx, 1976:139) from the simple form of value to the money form of value, in each case characterising the relationships as equality of various quantities of various commodities in the roles of the relative and equivalent forms of value. Marx's analysis is premised on the equivalence of socially necessary abstract labour and concludes with the familiar price-form in which the value of commodities is expressed in terms of money. The section on commodity fetishism follows this analysis immediately.

The source of the mystery, then, is that value takes on the appearance of abstract human labour expressed in the equality of the various commodities and the equality of commodities and money: a social relation, which appears as a relation between things. The social relation between things is the value relation between commodities. The human products which 'appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into

relations both with each other and with the human race' (Marx, 1976:165) are values understood as the expression of abstract human labour. Fetishism arises not because people fail to see that commodities are crystallised labour, but rather because under a system of commodity production, commodities appear in fact to be crystallised labour.

This conclusion raises a question concerning the sense in which this interpretation of commodity fetishism undermines or negates Marx's explanation of value. The use of 'fetish' to describe this implies that there is some illusory character to the notion that value is objectified labour. Insofar as the objective character of value is illusory, then it would appear to be an error to assert, as Marx seems to, that values are objectified labour. Is value the expression of socially necessary abstract labour or is this simply an illusion? Marx raises doubts about the possibility that exchange-value has an objective structure from the beginning of his chapter on commodities: 'exchange-value appears to be something accidental and purely relative' (Marx, 1976:126). Marx's use of the religious metaphor to describe commodity fetishism connotes some type of illusion, suggesting that there is something unreal, or at least of questionable objectivity, in exchange-values. Marx also calls our attention to the mysterious nature of exchange-value when he refers to values as 'congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour' which have 'phantomlike objectivity' (Marx, 1976:128). Marx also challenges the objectivity of exchange-values when he refers to the 'semblance of objectivity possessed by the social characteristics of labour' (Marx, 1976:167). This illusory character of value leads Cleaver to conclude that Marx's notion of commodity fetishism amounts to 'denouncing the analysis he has just undertaken' (Cleaver, 1979:65).

But while the objective character of value does have an illusory aspect to it, it is a 'prosaically real, and by no means imaginary, mystification' (Marx, 1970a: 49). Marx points out that the idea that there can be social relations between things is 'fantastic', but he says that this is 'what they are':

To the producers, therefore, the social relations between their private labours appear as what they are, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material relations between persons and social relations between things.

(Marx, 1976:166)

Commodity fetishism, then, is not simply an error such that people believe in something as if it were real when in fact it is only an illusion. It is a feature of how things actually are in commodity production.

Commodity fetishism is an activity in which people engage, a form of life. This is implied in Marx's characterisation of commodity fetishism cited above: 'the products of the human brain...enter into relations both with each other and with the human race'. That is, commodities in their value forms, which, as opposed to the natural forms, are 'products of the human brain', do actually and actively enter into relations with each other and with humans.

Specifically, it is the activity of exchanging commodities, and not simply their production, which constitutes fetishism by reifying abstract labour as value:

Men do not therefore bring the products of their labour into relation with each other as values because they see these objects merely as the material integuments of homogeneous human labour. The reverse is true: *by equating their different products to each other in exchange as values, they equate their different kinds of labour as human labour.*

(Marx, 1976:167, emphasis added)

That is to say, the particular labour which produces use-values becomes abstract labour which produces exchange-value through an activity, namely the activity of equating various products in exchange:

The different kinds of individual labour represented in those particular use-values, in fact, become labour in general, and in this way social labour, only by actually being exchanged for one another in quantities which are proportional to the labour-time contained in them... Universal social labour is consequently not a ready-made prerequisite but an emerging result.

(Marx, 1970a:45)

For Marx the objectification of labour as value is not a theoretical analysis which is imposed on commodity production from without, but rather it is the activity that occurs within a system of commodity production. That is, since people do equate their diverse labours through exchange, to say that the value of commodities is equal to the labour embodied within them in commodity-producing society is not an explanation of the source of exchange-value, but simply a description of what people actually do. Marx claims that it is not for any theoretical reason that this should or must occur, but instead that 'experience shows' that the equation of diverse labours is 'constantly being made' (Marx, 1976:135). The reification of the social relation, labour, is thus an activity constitutive of commodity production rather than an abstraction which stands apart from, and which therefore could be applied to, commodity production:

Since the exchange-value of commodities is indeed nothing but a mutual relation between various kinds of labour of individuals regarded as equal and universal labour, i.e. nothing but a material expression of a specific social form of labour, it is a tautology to say that labour is the only source of exchange-value.

(Marx, 1970a:35)

The mysteriousness of this activity of creating abstract labour through the continual equation of various particular labours, is due to the fact that the conclusion to which this behaviour leads, is bizarre. While the exchange-value

of a commodity does reflect its objective status as the product of abstract labour, Marx argues, this is literally absurd:

If I state that coats or boots stand in a relation to linen because the latter is the universal incarnation of abstract human labour, the absurdity of the statement is self-evident. Nevertheless, when the producers of coats and boots bring these commodities into a relation with linen, or with gold or silver...the relation between their own private labour and the collective labour of society appears to them in exactly this absurd form.

(Marx, 1976:169)

The illusory character and mysteriousness of commodity fetishism, then, flows from the central role in organising human life under a system of commodity production played by the illusory, mysterious and absurd substance, value or congealed universal human labour. Marx claimed that this absurdity is invisible because it is so commonplace:

Only the conventions of our everyday life make it appear commonplace and ordinary that social relations of productions should assume the shape of things, so that the relations into which people enter in the course of their work appear as the relations of things to one another and of things to people.

(Marx, 1970a:34)

Value, then, is a social relation which appears as an objective property of objects, as exchange-value; this objectivity is grounded in an activity, a form of life. The connection between labour and value is not simply a theoretical connection which might be discarded in favour of a superior theory. This point is reinforced by Marx's use of the religious metaphor to describe commodity fetishism, a use of language which echoes certain formulations in his earlier work *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels, 1970). In that work Marx mocked the Young Hegelians for believing that simply recognising that people allow their own ideas to rule over them is sufficient to overcome those ideas:

The phantoms of their brains have got out of their hands. They, the creators, have bowed down before their creations. Let us revolt against the rule of thoughts. Let us teach men, says one, to exchange these imaginations for thoughts which correspond to the essence of man; says the second, to take up a critical attitude toward them; says the third, to knock them out of their heads; and—existing reality will collapse.

(Marx and Engels, 1970:37)

This same criticism could be applied to interpretation of commodity fetishism presented by Elster and others and discussed above, according to which commodity fetishism is an erroneous belief that value is an intrinsic property

of commodities like weight. If this were the case, then the problem could be remedied just as the Young Hegelians suggest, by teaching people to take a critical perspective and see through the illusion to the reality of the situation.

In fact, the reification of labour as value is connected to and informed by the activity, the form of life, of people in commodity-producing society. Therefore, to overcome commodity fetishism it is necessary to change the way people live, i.e. change their form of life: 'The religious reflections of the real world can, in any case, vanish only when the practical relations of everyday life between man and man, and man and nature, generally present themselves to him in transparent and rational form' (Marx, 1976:173).

Just as Wittgenstein's argument suggests that a form of life is not simply the location in which a language-game occurs, then, this interpretation of Marx suggests that commodity production, or more broadly, commodity fetishism, is not simply the location in which value occurs. As an activity or form of life, commodity fetishism constitutes value as much as value organises the process of commodity exchange through which commodities are fetishised.

Conclusion

Propositions, according to Wittgenstein, and commodities, according to Marx, have a dual character. On one hand, each is very straightforward and clear: 'A proposition is the most ordinary thing in the world' (Wittgenstein, 1958:§93); 'A commodity appears...a very trivial thing, and easily understood' (Marx, 1976:71). On the other hand, they are strange: 'A proposition—that's something very queer,' (Wittgenstein, 1958:§93); 'A commodity...is...a very queer thing' (Marx, 1976:71).

In both cases, the strangeness is in some sense illusory, but is also factual in that it is associated with an activity. For Wittgenstein, the strangeness is the product of doing philosophy in a certain traditional manner rather than looking at the world from an ordinary point of view: 'When we do philosophy we are like savages, primitive people, who hear the expressions of civilised men, put a false interpretation on them, and then draw the queerest conclusions from it' (Wittgenstein, 1958:§194). For Marx, the strangeness is the product of the fact that people equate their particular labours as incarnations of abstract human labour in the exchange of commodities. The mysteriousness associated with language and value will therefore only be alleviated with a change in the activities in terms of which these language-games have meaning. Wittgenstein would have us change the way we live; Marx anticipates the end of commodity production.

This Wittgensteinian perspective on Marx has several implications. First, this suggests an alternative interpretation of Marx's position on the 'labour theory of value' which implies a very different relationship between theory and reality than is commonly assumed by a positivist or positivist-influenced perspective. Theory, at least in contemporary economics, is frequently viewed as a linguistic or formal expression which expresses some underlying relationships and which

can be compared with the empirical reality it purports to explain. On this view, the theory according to which abstract labour time and value are equal is an abstraction separate from the process of commodity production to which it might be applied. Above it has been argued that the relationship between abstract labour and value do not have the relationship of theory and reality which the theory is supposed to explain: the equality of abstract labour and value is viewed as an activity, a 'tautology', which can be described, but not compared.

Second, both Marx and Wittgenstein present a challenge to simplistic empiricism. Wittgenstein says: 'One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes' (Wittgenstein, 1958:§129); similarly Marx claims that 'Only the conventions of our everyday life make it appear commonplace and ordinary that social relations of productions should assume the shape of things' (Marx, 1970a:34). Both imply that simple observation will fail to capture important aspects of social reality. This is not to say that what is important are underlying or hidden meanings—on the contrary, both suggest that it is the familiarity of social practices which will cause important aspects to be missed. But Wittgenstein and Marx present the possibility that the observation of facts upon which positivistic conceptions of science depend is problematic.

Finally, this examination of value from the perspective of a Wittgensteinian language-game suggests that value remains an important category for the understanding of contemporary bourgeois society. The value language-game is one that continues to have relevance in the capitalist world today. There is a widespread recognition that the value of something may be different from its market price—thus creating the possibility for a 'good deal' or a 'rip-off'—but people generally have no access to knowledge of what a price of production, i.e. a price that is consistent with the reproduction of the economy as a whole with a uniform rate of profit, might be. In other words, value is still an important language-game. This implies that those people following Steedman (1977) who argue that Sraffa (1960) renders value an unnecessary category are missing out on a central category of bourgeois society.

Notes

- 1 The extent to which Wittgenstein altered his views from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations* is subject to debate. I am now persuaded that any shift in Wittgenstein's views was not as I expressed in an earlier version of this chapter. I am grateful to Rupert Read for helping me to understand the mistake in my earlier position. This paper is primarily concerned with Wittgenstein's later views, and the argument does not depend in any way on the nature of the difference between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*.
- 2 For more on this interpretation of the *Tractatus*, see Cray and Read (2000).
- 3 Nothing crucial in the argument made in this paper hinges on the criticism of Garver. Readers who are not persuaded by it should substitute 'non-linguistic component of a language-game' for 'form of life' where it occurs in the text.
- 4 The form of life is 'given' with respect to the language-associated action, but this is not to say that the status quo is 'given' with respect to other possible forms of life.

- 5 Smith also believed that commodities exchange in proportion to the quantities of labour embodied in their production, but only in the 'early and rude' state of society.
- 6 Foley similarly identifies commodity fetishism as an error within the consciousness of individuals who live under commodity production: 'Commodity relations tend to make people view others instrumentally rather than intersubjectively and to induce people to enter into personal and emotional relations with things' (Foley, 1986:29).

References

- Cleaver, H. (1979) *Reading Capital Politically* Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Cohen, G. (1978) *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Crary A. and Read, R. (2000) *The New Wittgenstein*, New York and London: Routledge.
- Elster, J. (1986) *An Introduction to Karl Marx*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Foley, D. (1986) *Understanding Capital*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Garver, N. (1994) *This Complicated Form of Life*, Chicago and LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court.
- Lewin, H. and Morris, J. (1977) 'Marx's concept of fetishism', *Science and Society* XLI(2): 172–90.
- Marx, K. (1970a) *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, New York: International Publishers.
- (1970b) *The German Ideology*, New York: International Publishers.
- (1971) *Theories of Surplus-Value*, vol. III, Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- (1976) *Capital*, vol. I, New York: Random House.
- Ricardo, D. (1951) 'Absolute value and exchangeable value', in *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo: Pamphlets and Papers 1815–1823*, edited by P.Sraffa, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, A. (1976) *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sraffa, P. (1960) *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities: Prelude to a Critique of Economic Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Steedman, I. (1977) *Marx after Sraffa*, London: Verso.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1958) *Philosophical Investigations*, New York: Macmillan.
- (1960) *The Blue and Brown Books*, New York: Harper and Row.
- (1961) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- (1980) *Culture and Value*, edited by G.H.von Wright, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (1982) *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, edited by G.H.von Wright and H. Nyman, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

5 Marx, Wittgenstein and postmodernism 1

Terrell Carver

If the meaning of words lies in their use, as Ludwig Wittgenstein suggested (1958:§43), then there are multiple uses because there are multiple users. Karl Marx has been read and used, not least by those who constructed Marxism, and indeed in their different ways.² A ‘mild’ form of postmodernism that leans on the later Wittgenstein (Carver, 1998:2–3) is well equipped to deconstruct in a helpful and progressive manner the debates that have held Marxism together, and arguably distanced Marxism from Marx himself.³ This is not necessarily a process that is apolitical or depoliticising, but rather one that can be utilised politically in moving from interpreting the world (as philosophers ‘merely’ do) to changing it, as Marx famously wrote (and did?) in his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach (*CW* 5:5).

In this chapter I focus on the biographical aporia that underlie the multiple readings of Marx and Wittgenstein, digging into differences that merit further exploration, and drawing out a certain similarity in their paradoxical relationship to philosophy. This necessitates a brief examination of the relevant biographical traditions and a critical look at how they were established. It also requires a limited and focused alignment of texts between the early Marx and the later Wittgenstein. In conclusion I hand these ideas back to readers, who may indeed leave ‘everything as it is’ (Wittgenstein, 1958:§124)—though I hope not.

Authors/lives/texts

Declaring the author dead, as postmodernists have famously done, has set readers free from a presumed authorial domination. This releases them to construct meanings (plural) from texts for themselves. Yet this move does not expunge authors entirely from readers’ consciousnesses. Any textual interpretation—even just reading ‘the words on the page’—always cries out for an authorial persona to speak the text to the reader, even if this persona is merely a shadowy or imputed one. Readers need some notion of purpose and action—a human agency essential to meaning—in order to proceed with the imaginary reader-author dialogues through which meaning is constructed (see Tompkins, 1980). If a text fell from the sky, nothing much could be done with

it unless there was some guesswork or investigation concerning authorship, i.e. the who, when and why of writing it.

Hence the hunger for biography and autobiography among readers is not surprising, and the importance of these life-narratives cannot be underestimated. They are handed down in a generally conservative way, i.e. the same stories are repeated and quasi-naturalised as truths/facts; and once on the record, these stories, even if contradicted or queried in the literature, remain as part of the tradition. Biography is itself a genre that privileges hindsight and slyly constructs the biographer as invisible but omniscient. There are also conventions of plot, characterisation and dramaturgy deemed appropriate to biography that are silently incorporated, hence taken for granted, and there are views/values concerning the career, gender/sexuality, life-trajectory, historical context, etc., of the subject that come into play (see Carver, 1996:56–66). What Hayden White has shown about emplotment in history applies equally well to biography and context-setting for edited texts, and it certainly applies to the way that interpretations of texts by Marx and Wittgenstein are constructed by commentators (White, 1973; 1987). Readers thus have the job of learning about commentators *as authors* when reading *their* texts, as well as learning about Marx and Wittgenstein when reading *theirs*.

In the biographical and memoir tradition both Marx and Wittgenstein present problems, not so much within any given account of their ideas and careers as between accounts written from quite different perspectives. Ultimately they are becoming quite ‘difficult’ people, due to the conservatism and retentive qualities of the biographical record that I have mentioned above. Today Marx and Wittgenstein are palimpsests, overwritten with contradictions about what they were doing and why.

Biography—subjects and biographers

Year I for Marx as a biographical subject is 1859, when he published his own autobiographical fragment in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Marx and Engels, 1980b:180–4). Friedrich Engels chipped in the same year with a two-part book review that retold the life and summarised the ideas (*CW* 16:465–77). Engels did this again and again, especially after Marx’s death in 1883, and there are other memoirs of Marx from family and diverse sources, generally from the 1870s onwards, but often recounting events up to thirty years earlier. Franz Mehring’s ([1918] 1936) *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life* recapitulated this material with great respect and set a hagiographical tone. After that, there is a deluge of biography.

From the 1960s onwards, however, Marx himself became more of a moving target, particularly in terms of what texts had become available and which ones were read as central and defining for the others. Thus the ‘humanist Marx’ was read off the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (which became available only in the late 1950s), rivalling the ‘orthodox Marx’, who had been conceptualised by Engels (since 1859) in relation to his published critique of political economy

(Thomas, 1991). More recently the 'postmodern Marx' has been read off Marx's *Capital* and the more obviously political and polemical works, but with presuppositions profoundly different from those of Engels and notably different from those of 1960s 'humanism' (Carver, 1998). Marx has changed for us, not simply because we have changed, but because scholarly discovery and selectivity have made him into a character different from the one recorded in his own time and for some generations after his death.

Wittgenstein as a biographical subject and textual object is probably not on this scale, but there are differences in the lives and biographical studies by David Edmonds and John Eidinow (2001), Kimberley Cornish (1998), Ray Monk (1991), Brian McGuinness (1988), David Pears (1985) and Anthony Kenny (1984), and the memoirs by Norman Malcolm (1984), Georg Henrik von Wright (1982), and the Rush Rhees collection (1981). As with Marx, there are collections of pictures and documents, and—a gap here!—unlike Marx, there is a movie by Derek Jarman (Eagleton *et al.*, 1993). These differences relate, among other things, to the strength and consistency of Wittgenstein's commitment to philosophy and the relationship between that and his political views.

What is philosophy, then? Depending on the biographer, it is an intensely personal search for truth, a kind of profession or career (such as being a 'don' at Cambridge), a covertly politicised and overtly moralised way of changing the world, or something that Wittgenstein himself at times, and perhaps rather oddly, regarded as impractical, a waste of time, and virtually shameful. While Marx's political career is less easy to understand than commentators imagine (and hence much more problematic), there is no doubt that he had political ambitions and some explicit practices of intervention (Carver, 1998:119–45). What is curious is the way that he became a philosopher posthumously and *malgré lui*. Neither philosophy nor politics is an unproblematic concept, nor therefore is the relationship between the two, and indeed exploring the Marx-Wittgenstein relationship itself is a way of making this clear.

Though 'Marx the man' has appeared as the major element of some biographies—a self-hating anti-Semite, a frustrated bon viveur, a crypto-Talmudic thinker, a typical male chauvinist—these personal and sometimes psychoanalytic aspects of his life (as constructed and imagined) have been much less an issue than they have been with Wittgenstein (Wheen, 1999; Barrett, 1983; Seigel, 1978; Tucker, 1972; Carmichael, 1968; Payne, 1968; Runes, 1959). In some ways Marx's relentless consistency in his works has inspired confidence, and more reputable biographers could almost factor him out 'personally' once he got over his early romances and embarked on the apparently well-marked Hegelian/Fuerbachian road to 'becoming a communist' (McLellan, 1973; Berlin, 1995). After that he simply wrote...and wrote...and wrote, to the point where his complete collected works (admittedly, together with Engels's) will run to about 114 volumes (<http://www.bbaw.de/vh/mega/ueber.html>).

Wittgenstein, by contrast, lived his life as a 'loner' and in fragments, pursuing various careers in engineering and architecture and school teaching. This also included seeking solitude in Norway, just managing to 'fit in' at

Cambridge, and generally being a supreme trial to his friends and acquaintances. His sexual activities have been the subject of much speculation and little information (Monk, 1991:369, 376–7, 401–2). Since 1960 Marx has been made problematic as the *alleged* father of an illegitimate child by the family housemaid (Carver, 1996:81–100; Carver, 1989:164–71). In both cases the ‘search for dirt’ has had little to go on, and even less explicit justification as to why this is supposed to be so important.

Wittgenstein’s English contemporaries constructed him as foreign and German (actually he was Austrian), but once he was dead, and subsequently well published and reviewed in English, this element dropped out of his reception into Anglophone philosophy, generally construed by its practitioners as universal. Both Marx and Wittgenstein attained an honorary Englishness eventually, and they speak to most of the world now through English translations that are coming under increasing attack, both for inaccurate editing of manuscripts and for stilted and inaccurate English (Carver, 1997; Venuti, 1996). As with Marx, much of Wittgenstein emerged posthumously as unpublished (and unpolished) manuscripts were assembled into books, given titles, then translated and published *seriatim*. There are profound textual difficulties with the *Nachläß* in both cases.

Readers’ problems are compounded when authors write texts that are not merely difficult or ambiguous, but also *provoke* interpretation because they are experienced as enigmatic, riddling, gnomic, aphoristic (Pleasants, 1999:41). Such texts follow writing conventions that alert readers to the idea that interpretation is required, because those texts are evidently not straightforward or factual or speaking plainly to the reader. Marx and Wittgenstein both did that, or seemed to do that (Marx’s drafts and published versions of a *Critique of Political Economy*, Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* and similar edited works). This raises certain questions. Do they alert readers in similar ways? What did they think readers should think about what they—the authors—were doing? What did they think that readers should think and/or do *after* reading the texts? Can the writing of these puzzling texts be termed a self-conscious strategy, or is it in either or both cases an unselfconscious one? If the latter, how does this unselfconscious author relate to the one who was presumably self-conscious about the rest of his activities at least some of the time?

Can there be an ironic strategy here, i.e. writing so as to frustrate the reader *as reader* and thus stimulate action ‘off the page’? That is, rather than write so as to argue the reader on-side with a view, perhaps there is an authorial strategy of getting the reader to put the text—and reading itself—aside and engage in behaviour that instantiates or creates meaning(s) in practice(s)—rather than continuing to read, which is intellectually creative but still ‘in the head’ and not ‘out in the world’ (Seery, 1999).

There is some textual support for this in both Wittgenstein and Marx. Wittgenstein (1980b:61) wrote: ‘I do not really want to be imitated. Not at any rate by those who publish articles in philosophical journals.’ And again: ‘I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But,

if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own' (Wittgenstein, 1958:x^e). Compare Marx's (1986:90) introduction to volume 1 of *Capital*, his masterwork: 'I assume, of course, a reader who is willing to learn something new and therefore to think for himself.'

This prompts me to argue that both Marx and Wittgenstein, at least at times, posed views in philosophy, questioned what philosophy is and should be, and invoked ironical strategies that politicised—at least potentially—the relationship between thought and action, academic discourse and political struggle. In the next section I take up these biographical and textual ambiguities in relation to Marx, about whom rather too much is already 'known', before moving on to a similar but briefer treatment of Wittgenstein, about whom it is surprisingly difficult to 'know' very much.

Marx: how many characters in search of an author?

Leszek Kolakowski (1978:1) opened his three-volume study *Main Currents of Marxism* with the apparently commonplace and uncontentious statement, 'Karl Marx was a German philosopher.'⁴ All the terms in this apparently factual proposition are in my view highly contestable. Perhaps most surprisingly, it is not even clear whether Marx, in relation to philosophy, was one person or two. He was in association for almost forty years (from around 1844 until his death) with Engels. For many years this partnership was taken to be sacrosanct, giving Engels an interpretative imprimatur over Marx's ideas, published works and manuscripts.

Indeed, Engels was not only Marx's first biographer but also the original biographer of the partnership itself. His multiple roles as populariser, editor and eventually literary executor became a full-time occupation during the twelve years by which he outlived Marx. In his lifetime Marx was certainly in intimate correspondence with Engels (from 1844), and almost wholly in financial dependence upon his resources and goodwill (from 1850). However, they wrote only three major works together (of which two were published at the time in the 1840s, and one many years later from manuscript—and all three were written in different senses of 'together'). Marx himself acknowledged Engels's own works very generously though not extensively in his published writings, but these were all references to major works that Engels had written and published before the partnership got under way.

These joint biographical details would not be of great importance had Engels not published very famous works on philosophical issues in later life. These were produced from the mid-1870s onwards, when Marx was ill and no longer publishing, and Engels continued writing on these subjects throughout the 1880s. Moreover, Engels's extensive notebooks were posthumously published after the turn of the century, and all these works became best-selling classics of Marxism. There is no doubt that from the 1870s onwards, the hitherto little-noticed Marx was in fact read by both the wider public and the academic audience through the lens of Engels's ideas. While doubts about Engels were expressed from around

the turn of the twentieth century onwards, it is only recently that this orthodoxy has been rigorously and extensively questioned, and the case put forward that the two writers had fundamental—if unacknowledged—differences in perspective on topics of philosophical interest (Carver, 1983).

All the issues traced so far have an important bearing on how, if at all, Marx was ever a philosopher. There is no doubt that from the 1870s onwards, Marxism was taken to have a critical bearing on previous philosophies and on philosophy itself, as traditionally conceptualised. As noted above, Marxism was a way of viewing Marx through Engels's eyes, and so the philosophical ideas that Engels published himself became relevant, as did his own conception of philosophy, and—conceivably—of himself as philosopher. In terms of a broad characterisation, it can be said that Engels saw his own work, and Marx's work as he interpreted it, as producing a convergence of science and philosophy, in particular reconciling the certainties propounded in contemporary physical science with the apparent uncertainties of human historical actions and development. Engels's model for this was the encyclopaedic systematising philosophy of Hegel, purged of its philosophical idealism and refounded on a materialism of matter-in-motion, rather inexplicitly linked to an economic determinism 'in the last instance' (Carver, 1982:62–78; Pleasants, 1999:23).

The extent to which the specific tenets of this view were endorsed by Marx explicitly, or were implicitly reflected in his own works, is controversial and possibly undecidable, as Marx in his own authorial voice was never more than gnomically critical about philosophical matters and about philosophy as a vocation. Thus it may be that Engels merely drew out what Marx intended to say, or indeed shared as an outlook. Alternatively, it may be that what Marx was trying to 'perform' in his own works was really rather different from what Engels stated in his, and that for Marx, when he was alive, this difference was not a real problem (Pleasants, 1999:20–1, 64; Austin, 1975; Butler, 1990:24–5).

It has been very difficult for orthodoxy in Marxism either to appreciate the 'early Marx' at all, or to reconcile what is there with the later writings, which Engels had famously praised as masterworks of science on a par with Darwin's, and as revolutions in philosophy surpassing Hegel's (Carver, 1982:37–61). It is even possible today to see the Marx who is most significant for philosophy as the 'early Marx', and indeed to argue this in various contrasting ways. It is still an open question how these interpretations of the 'early Marx' relate to his later publications and manuscripts, and to what extent the later works have a similar or contrasting significance for present-day philosophical studies. I shall return to this theme in my final section, 'Postmodernism', drawing the later Marx closer to the later Wittgenstein. This has the effect of undermining the commonplace view that the later Marx is somehow necessarily 'scientific' in the way that Engels claimed. For the moment, though, it is easier to make connections with the later Wittgenstein via Marx's early writings.

Early Marx

It is readily apparent from Marx's writings of the 1840s that he scorned traditional conceptions of philosophy as an activity, and traditional conceptions of the philosopher as an intellectual figure. It is thus an interesting question how and why he himself managed to contribute substantially to philosophy in the mid and later twentieth century, and to enter into the pantheon of major influences on philosophical thinking. Biographically it is important to recognise that by 1842 Marx was already radicalised in politics as a liberal constitutionalist and economic radical, when he began writing articles for a local Rhenish newspaper about agricultural poverty and rural hardship (Lubasz, 1975).

'Radicalised' is not too strong a word to use for that kind of outlook in those days, as advocates of even the formal democracy of widespread voting—never mind any notion of economic redistribution—were generally proscribed and indeed persecuted. Marx's career as a thoughtful reporter and local editor only flourished because of a brief liberalisation in official censorship, and the window of opportunity to express even moderate opinions concerning political and economic reform swiftly closed in 1843. Marx had previously been a student in legal and historical studies at the universities of Bonn and Berlin, moving in left-wing circles that criticised contemporary governments in the German states for a lack of constitutional checks on monarchical powers and of guaranteed rights for free expression, civil association and political participation.

How then did philosophy enter the picture? Precisely because of the reactionary character of the Prussian and other German regimes of the period, in particular because of the prohibitions on advocacy for wider rights of civil participation in politics, such political agitation as could be undertaken was necessarily somewhat coded and restricted in its audience. On the one hand religion and philosophy were acceptable subjects for academic debate within political limits, and on the other hand it was therefore possible to stretch those limits in speech and in print. This could be undertaken, provided that writers and audiences were academically insulated from any question of popular agitation and provided that the language through which this argumentation was conducted was merely puzzling to the censor, rather than openly seditious.

For nationalistic as well as intellectual reasons, Hegel's voluminous philosophical writings were well established in the academic and political culture of German universities, and in those writings Hegel had clearly incorporated a philosophy of history and a history of philosophy as appropriate ways for a philosopher to write. He had also written a philosophy of the state and politics, and further writings were published and edited posthumously as a set of standard works. This is to say that Hegel's work had incorporated very specific views on political history and ideas, and on the place of philosophy in public life, and that these subjects—in a contemporary, not just historical sense—were well in the philosophical mainstream.

The question of the day in the later 1830s and early 1840s was the extent to which Hegelianism was merely tracing out the conclusions of the master, or was

instead a creative appropriation of his method, which might indeed lead to new or even contrary views. In a politically charged context, Marx tackled Hegel's *Philosophie des Rechts* (*Philosophy of Law* or *Philosophy of Right*) precisely to work out for himself what was valuable in Hegel's method—given his own radical project of encouraging constitutionalism—and what could be rescued from Hegel's substantive views. In terms of the latter Marx found Hegel insufficiently sympathetic to the logic of widespread suffrage and democratic institutions, and in terms of the former he found him overly abstract and suspiciously ethereal. Nonetheless, it was clear to Marx that Hegelians thought they could do things with words. The question was how to use words effectively to create political change.

Thus Marx arrived at a critique of Young Hegelian philosophy and politics. This critique is interesting not merely for the substantive points Marx was able to make on both substantive and methodological counts, but also for his engagement with the practical linkages between ideas and action, particularly when action was largely proscribed and politics was therefore confined to a world of philosophical ideas. As a radical journalist he was already on the edge of a political underground, and after 1843 he was involved with suspect agitational groups of radical liberals and class-conscious socialists, working among like-minded émigrés in the German-speaking communities in Paris and Brussels. In his view philosophers and philosophy, as traditionally conceptualised, would never move the world.

This is not so much a political philosophy as a reconceptualisation of philosophy as radical engagement with mass action. This is not bizarre, as arguably the curtailment of feudalism and the introduction of representative government—as in France in the last days of the preceding century—were themselves important instances of philosophical ideas (of nascent liberalism) put into action, and this was indeed Marx's model. Following on from this position, Marx launched excoriating critiques of left-wing philosophers whose radicalism, in his view, remained in the realm of mere ideas and therefore lacked engagement with the realities of political struggle.

Marx and Wittgenstein versus philosophers and philosophy

Chief among these objects of Marx's criticism was the academic philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach. Marx's overall complaint was trenchantly put in a letter (to Arnold Ruge) on 13 March 1843: 'Feuerbach's aphorisms seem to me incorrect only in one respect, that he refers too much to nature and too little to politics. This latter is the only means by which present philosophy can become a reality' (*CW* 1:400). Countering Feuerbach, Marx produced his own eleven aperçus, tackling such philosophical staples as materialism, idealism, humanity, nature, society, activity, change, philosophy, and philosophers (*CW* 5:3–5). These *Theses on Feuerbach* are extraordinary for the highly compressed but startling way in which Marx reconceptualised the human social world, including why and how it should be represented by intellectuals, even touching importantly, though implicitly, on language and truth. While

Marx's text is ambiguous and aphoristic, that in itself aligns it today with styles of philosophy that celebrate a hermeneutic encounter between reader and text, and promote the validity of individual readings that develop philosophical richness through their very diversity.

This redefinition of philosophy was elliptically denominated by Marx as a 'new' materialism, to distinguish it from Feuerbach's version of the 'old' one, but Marx's text was much more critical of preceding philosophies than it was definitional for a new one, no doubt precisely because philosophy as an activity was so suspect to him in the first place. The 'new' materialism was very much one of human conscious activity and a transcendence of Cartesian dichotomies (Pleasants, 1999:79, 167), though deducing this from Marx's aphorisms means that the terms and implications of this view are much less than clear. Still, this was a very revolutionary conception in philosophy. Marx, of course, also intended it to be revolutionary in practical and political senses.

It follows, then, that truth is not a theoretical but a practical question, as Marx said in the second of his theses on Feuerbach: 'Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question' (*CW* 5:3).

It also follows that truth is not something that individuals arrive at or something that is held as such in individual minds, but rather something that is socially achieved as both human circumstances and humans themselves change through '*revolutionary practice*'. Having correctly resolved 'the religious world into its secular basis', Feuerbach then failed to see that the secular basis itself has cleavages and self-contradictions that must be understood and revolutionised. Within that secular basis Marx could see little point in Feuerbach's faith in 'the essence of *man*', arguing instead that what humans have in common that is of practical significance is not some abstraction supposedly held within each human individual, but rather 'the ensemble of...social relations' as they develop historically (*CW* 5:3-5).

Moreover, the abstract and 'isolated' human individual employed as a figure in Feuerbach's philosophy, was, in Marx's view, a social product and therefore a historically contingent reflection of contemporary social relationships. Feuerbach's 'contemplative materialism' was thus rooted in the civil or 'bourgeois' society of his time precisely because of the way in which individuals were conceptualised philosophically as minds gazing abstractly at matter, and because their supposed 'essence' was ascribed to them as some ahistorical and unchanging generality 'which unites the many individuals *in a natural way*'. In conclusion Marx famously redefined what philosophers should do, and hence what philosophy should be: 'The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it' (*CW* 5:3-5).

This could be very close to Wittgenstein's parable of philosophers as flies in fly-bottles (Wittgenstein, 1958:§309). Or it could be something very different and very confused. As with the *Philosophical Investigations*, what readers get out of such fragmentary yet stimulating aperçus depends on what they bring to

them and what they intend to do next. Interestingly, the later Wittgenstein, though controversial with philosophers *as a philosopher*, is nearer to academic acceptance than Marx (early or late). This is no doubt partly due to the difficulty of assigning Wittgenstein to any other classification zone in the library besides Philosophy, whereas Marx's (apparent) interests were much more obviously broad, broad enough to land most of his works in Sociology. Even compared with the Platonic dialogues—which invite and excite interpretation—Wittgenstein's discursive strategy is unusual—unique?—and perhaps only analogous to a few religious or mystic writers. The forbidding *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is famously written as if a Voice from nowhere' is uttering oracular and lapidary truths for all time. The *Philosophical Investigations*, of course, is famously quite different. Besides the obvious pasted-up quality of the investigations, absence of propositions, formal arguments, etc., one striking thing that is unusual is the cast of characters appealed to in the illustrative/expository snippets, e.g. dog, cat, mouse, child, 'children of a tribe', lions (but never woman? or women?). The *Philosophical Investigations* sometimes bear a distinct resemblance to German fairy tales (*Märchen*).

While Wittgenstein was one person, rather than ambiguously one and/or two, there is a lot of puzzlement and disagreement as to what sort of person he was and whether or not there was some overall personal trajectory or biographical thread in his life at all. The fragmented self seems to fit him, but then how is that linked to the production of the texts we have? This is an important question, as outlined above, because it affects the process through which readers construct meaning by reading a text in imaginary dialogue with an author, information about whom is provided through biography, contextualisation and commentary. Much the same considerations apply to Wittgenstein writing *as a philosopher*—what conception did he have of this, and when, and to philosophy as a writing practice, and possibly as (ironic) political practice, and when? How important were what we take to be overt political factors in this—nationality/ies, loyalties, wars, values, views, actions—and when?

Neither Marx nor (the later) Wittgenstein seemed to like being labelled a philosopher, and neither seemed to approve of philosophy as a practice, at least as it was done by their contemporaries, especially philosophy as a profession or vocation. It might be possible to see some similarities between Marx and the later Wittgenstein, precisely (but paradoxically) because they both had suspicions and anxieties about philosophy as an activity. Both were concerned not with doing philosophy in a way that their contemporaries could accept, but with doing—*something*—such that their contemporaries would be drawn up short and their self-understandings, and understandings of the world, disturbed. Marx's *Capital*, in places, has some of the qualities of the horror story or film, e.g. vampires, monsters, signs and marvels drawn from the non-Christian occult and the Christian book of Revelation (Carver, 1998:14–20). Marx was not a philosopher and not a non-philosopher, as we usually understand those terms. He did philosophy, but not for the reasons professional philosophers do philosophy. Insofar as we can even tentatively assign a purpose to what Wittgenstein was doing, that purpose was to

correct (in a therapeutic way) the erroneous thinking that leads people astray conceptually, traps them, as it were, in non-problems. To say that Wittgenstein was interested in social and historical issues would be a bit odd, but not perhaps wrong. Given that he was obviously deeply interested in real-life situations (albeit reduced in his texts to fictitious snippets), he can perhaps be regarded as the professional philosopher who had no faith in philosophy as professional philosophers produced it, but rather urged a pragmatic and commonsensical approach, suggesting that unselfconscious, indeed 'unphilosophical' thought and action, conquers all (Pleasant, 1999:1, 2, 4, 14, 24–5).

Ray Monk's account of Wittgenstein's political thinking during the 1930s rather supports this view, in that Wittgenstein is portrayed as 'a communist at heart', but deeply unsympathetic to (orthodox) Marxism as a philosophical system and political ideology. Monk relates that in 1934 Wittgenstein 'conceived the idea of giving up academic life altogether', going instead to work as a labourer in (Stalin's) Russia. Monk portrays this plan as congruent with Wittgenstein's desire, from time to time, to live a simple life, close to the elements, and also with his 'habit of following up the inspiration of the moment' (Monk, 1991:340–4).

During 1935 Wittgenstein, aided by numerous left-wing friends, secured interviews with Soviet representatives in England in order to pursue his ambition to work in Russia as a labourer, or possibly a doctor (another old ambition). In September he travelled by boat to Leningrad, and he spent about a month there and in Moscow discovering that his offer of manual work was not valued (whereas he was offered a variety of university posts in philosophy!). Monk presents Wittgenstein's politics as simplistic, but not naive and not uninformed. Wittgenstein identified with the ideals of full employment and material equality, detesting class inequalities, more horrified by petty dishonesty than regimentation, even if this conflicted with liberal intellectual values. Overall he appears politically to have been very interested in changing the world for ordinary people by stripping away a good deal of over-complex interpretation, especially of the philosophical (and pseudo-philosophical) kind (Monk, 1991:347–54).⁵

The similarity in the performative orientations of Marx and Wittgenstein consists in their undercutting certain customary philosophical presuppositions or assumptions by appealing to facts of ordinary life which we must accept, i.e. which it would be nonsensical or absurd or perverse to reject, especially facts about ordinary human beings and their ordinary activities in society, including what they say as well as what they do. Chief among the presuppositions undercut is the Cartesian method of beginning with doubt. The two have also evidently replaced the matter-consciousness and mind-body dichotomies, familiar in Cartesian epistemologies, with a set of presuppositions concerning the ordinary human being who lives in society, uses language and engages consciously in activities, e.g. producing things, playing games, etc. While it cannot be said that Marx and Wittgenstein discussed the same kind of things in the same kind of way (indeed, it is often difficult to tell with either writer exactly what they were discussing in exactly what kind of way),

there are arguably passages that suggest that they were both pushing against professional philosophies in two similar ways: they were making philosophy anthropocentric in terms of what people actually do (rather than in terms of what a disembodied intelligence would say), and they were disposing of philosophical problems by relegating them to professional philosophy as some kind of impractical 'displacement' activity (as opposed to ordinary life-activities, where these problems would not exist in practice) (Pleasants, 1999:20–1, 64).

Early Marx/late Wittgenstein⁶

In *The German Ideology* (1845–6) Marx wrote:

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can be made only in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and their material conditions of life.

(*CW* 5:31)

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men—the language of real life.

(*CW* 5:36)

And in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein wrote:

the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life... It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.

(Wittgenstein, 1958:§§23, 241; emphasis in original)

Of course we cannot separate his 'thinking' from his activity. For the thinking is not an accompaniment of the work, any more than of thoughtful speech.

(Wittgenstein, 1980a:§101)

Both Marx and Wittgenstein in these passages can be read as denying that philosophers adjudicate on truth by manipulating language correctly. Rather, truth is there (albeit opaque to philosophers) as language is employed in real-life activities while they take place. It would follow from this general point about language and life that specific philosophies contain 'problems' that keep philosophers busy, but have no practical bearing on the world. Indeed, in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein says:

When philosophers use a word—'knowledge', 'being', 'object', 'I', 'proposition', 'name'—and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must

always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home?—What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.

(Wittgenstein, 1958:§116; emphasis in original)

But what sort of activity is this? Both Marx and Wittgenstein, on this reading of their respective selves and texts, were hostile to the practice of philosophy. Again, in *The German Ideology* Marx wrote:

[W]hen things are seen in this way, as they really are and happened, every profound philosophical problem is resolved...quite simply into an empirical fact.

(*CW* 5:39)

This, of course, raises the question of what Marx regarded as an empirical fact or 'specific question' and how he expected these to be 'explained', if not in philosophy. Rather than opt for 'science' or some such, Marx opted for a concept of 'practice':

All social life is essentially practical. All the mysteries which lead theory towards mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.

(*CW* 5:3–5)

Wittgenstein famously said that philosophy really is 'purely descriptive', though without elaborating on what exactly that might mean in practical terms. He seems to have been saying that philosophy is not a master-science, nor a provider of 'any foundation' for knowledge in any area, and that it never reduces nor explains (Pleasants, 1999:23–5, 64, 77). A theory of Wittgensteinian revolutionary praxis may have been in his mind, and perhaps occasionally in his life, but it was not visible in his works in any direct way. Marx was more explicit as to what he thought should happen instead, writing in his 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: introduction' of 1844:

The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force, but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses.

(*CW* 3:182)

Postmodernism: conclusion

In my 'mild form of postmodernism' I have tried to distance myself from grand confrontations with modernity, the Enlightenment, postmodernity and hyperreality. Some would be inclined to wonder how there could be any postmodernism apart from these concepts and certain quite famous authorial

narratives about them. My move is rather to draw on the hermeneutic tradition, moving along through reader-response criticism and semiotics, i.e. the expansion of our notion of a text beyond the written word to anything inscribed with meaning. I am quite happy with the idea that truth is produced in human relations, using language and other forms of power, and that there are no meanings 'out there' in artefacts or materiality that guarantee any truths as reflected in language. What counts as truth is produced within shifting and conflicting realms of partial consensus and power-relations. I tend to be rather annoyed with charges of relativism and complaints that this removes scientific or ethical certainties. They were never there in the first place! Truth is political, and there are multitudinous and unpredictable ways of persuading people. The sooner 'we' get used to that, the more chance 'we' have of perhaps having some influence, rather than leaving 'everything as it is'—surely an ironic comment on philosophy, anyway! (Wittgenstein, 1958:§124; Pleasants, 1999:98).

I do not actually find it necessarily anachronistic to find something like this view—adumbrated, anyway—within at least some texts of Wittgenstein and Marx. While for Wittgenstein this has to be the later philosophy of the *Philosophical Investigations* and certain other post-war writings, for Marx there is no such clear periodisation. While overtly anti-philosophical in certain senses, even a work like *Capital* is not for that reason 'scientific' or even 'materialist' as some kind of alternative or antidote. After all, *Capital* is a critique of the 'economic categories', rather than a merely instrumental use of them to describe and predict (Carver, 1998:43–86). Simple-minded materialism never fitted Marx well anyway, as the *Theses on Feuerbach* amply state (*CW* 5:3–5), and there was thus an irritating and unexamined elision between the 'material' and the 'economic' among many commentators that should long ago have caused a red alert. Commentators have thrown so much of their own baggage into their scholarly contextualisations of Marx—his life and times—that in my view it is difficult to make any charge of anachronism stick. Anachronistic as against what?

It could well be argued that my reading is totalising with respect to all of Marx and the later Wittgenstein, and that it is of necessity or by design itself a contextualising narrative that presumes a truth while only apparently demonstrating it. My defence here is that I am happy to hear other views, whether partial or synoptic, about Marx and the later Wittgenstein, and moreover I regard some of the apparently totalising and possibly extreme elements of my own reading as diagnostic or therapeutic. That is, I am assuming it is more interesting to push a line of interpretation to a limit and then retreat—if necessary! Moreover, I am prepared to argue that this intellectual strategy is at least compatible with activities of political democratisation rather than fragmentation and impotence. After all, if 'the people' are to be trusted in ruling themselves, there is then little warrant for claiming that they are only licensed to do this in relation to some 'philosophical' framework propounded by the 'voice from nowhere', an authorial—and authority—presumption that Marx and Wittgenstein seem (in this reader's/writer's eyes) to have wanted to subvert.

Notes

- 1 References to the collected works in English of Marx and Engels in the text below will be abbreviated as *CW* followed by volume number and pages, e.g. *CW* 2:56–8. For the series reference see the list at the end of this chapter under ‘Marx, K. and Engels, F.’.
- 2 One way of characterising the history of Marxism has been a broad distinction into ‘scientific’ and ‘critical’ Marxism popularised in Gouldner (1980); see also Carver (1998:234–6) on ‘multiple Marxes’.
- 3 For a view of the later Wittgenstein that is similar to mine but yet sharply refuses any links to postmodernism, see Pleasants (1999:2, 183 n. 1).
- 4 In this section I have drawn on the text of my chapter ‘Karl Marx’ in *The Blackwell Guide to the Modern Philosophers: from Descartes to Nietzsche*, ed. Steven M. Emmanuel (Maiden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 370–7; I am very grateful to Blackwell for kind permission to reproduce this material.
- 5 I am grateful to Nigel Pleasants at this point in particular for alerting me to the significance of this episode in Wittgenstein’s life and for help with the research.
- 6 In this section I draw on an unpublished manuscript ‘Marx and Wittgenstein’ dating from the early 1970s, written by John M. Harris and myself, with his kind permission.

References

- Austin, J. (1975) *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Barrett, M. (1983) ‘Marxist feminism and the work of Karl Marx’, in B. Matthews (ed.) *Marx: 100 years On*, London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Berlin, I. (1995) *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, London: Fontana.
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge.
- Carmichael, J. (1968) *Karl Marx: The Passionate Logician*, London: Rapp and Whiting.
- Carver, T. (1982) *Engels*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (1983) *Marx and Engels: The Intellectual Relationship*, Brighton: Harvester/Wheatsheaf.
- (1989) *Frederick Engels: His Life and Thought*, London: Macmillan.
- (1996) *Gender is Not a Synonym for Women*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- (1997) ‘Translating Marx’, *Alternatives* 22(2), 191–204.
- (1998) *The Postmodern Marx*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Cornish, K. (1998) *The Jew of Linz: Wittgenstein, Hitler and Their Secret Battle for the Mind*, London: Century.
- Eagleton, T., Jarman, D. and McCabe, C. (1993) *Wittgenstein: The Terry Eagleton Script, the Derek Jarman Film*, London: British Film Institute.
- Edmonds, D. and Eidinow, J. (2001) *Wittgenstein’s Poker: The Story of a Ten-Minute Argument between Two Great Philosophers*, London: Faber.
- Gouldner, A. (1980) *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of a Theory*, London: Macmillan.
- Kenny, A. (1984) *The Legacy of Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Kolakowski, L. (1978) *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 1: *The Founders*, translated by P. Falla, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Lubasz, H. (1975) ‘Marx’s initial problematic: the problem of poverty’, *Political Studies* 24(1), 24–42.
- McGuinness, B. (1988) *Wittgenstein: A Life*, London: Duckworth.
- McLellan, D. (1973) *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought*, London: Macmillan.
- Malcolm, N. (1984) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, 2nd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Marx, K. (1986) *Capital*, vol. 1, Harmondsworth: Penguin and New Left Review.

- Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1975a) *Collected Works*, vol. 1, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
 —(1975b) *Collected Works*, vol. 3, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
 —(1976) *Collected Works*, vol. 5, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
 —(1980a) *Collected Works*, vol. 16, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
 —(1980b) *Selected Works in One Volume*, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Mehring, F. (1936) *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life*, London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Monk, R. (1991) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, London: Vintage.
- Payne, R. (1968) *Marx: A Biography*, London: W.H.Allen.
- Pears, D. (1985) *Wittgenstein*, London: Fontana.
- Pleasants, N. (1999) *Wittgenstein and the Idea of a Critical Social Theory: A Critique of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar*, London: Routledge.
- Rhees, R. (ed.) (1981) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Runes, D. (ed.) (1959) *A World Without Jews*, New York: Philosophical Library.
- Seery, J. (1999) *Political Returns: Irony in Politics and Theory from Plato to the Antinuclear Movement*, Boulder, CO and London: Westview.
- Seigel, J. (1978) *Marx's Fate: The Shape of a Life*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Thomas, P. (1991) 'Critical reception: Marx then and now', in T.Carver (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tompkins, J. (ed.) (1980) *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Tucker, R. (1972) *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*, 2nd edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Venuti, L. (1996) 'Translation, philosophy, materialism', *Radical Philosophy* 79, 24–35.
- Whean, F. (1999) *Karl Marx*, London: Fourth Estate.
- White, H. (1973) *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
 —(1987) *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1958) *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell.
 —(1980a) *Zettel*, 2nd edition, Oxford: Blackwell.
 —(1980b) *Culture and Value*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wright, G.H.von (1982) *Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Part III

Wittgenstein and Sraffa

6 Sraffa's influence on Wittgenstein

A conjecture

Keiran Sharpe

I was helped to realise these mistakes—to a degree which I myself am hardly able to estimate—by the criticism which my ideas encountered from Frank Ramsey with whom I discussed them in the last years of his life. Even more than to this—always certain and forcible—criticism I am indebted to that which a teacher of this university, Mr P.Sraffa, for many years unceasingly practised on my thoughts. I am indebted to *this* stimulus for the most consequential ideas of this book.

(Wittgenstein, 1958:viii).

Introduction

Any assessment of Sraffa's influence on Wittgenstein must begin with this bald testament. Yet the statement is problematical, since we know almost nothing of the *nature* of that influence except from hearsay—neither Sraffa nor Wittgenstein wrote a memoir (which is one of the great lacunae in intellectual history). Moreover, since the interchange was largely conversational, we are unlikely to find much explicit evidence on exact points of impact. This naturally presents the intellectual historian with a conundrum, for in that case what can possibly be said about the stimulus to change which Sraffa's criticism effected? Any attempt to reconstruct what went on must be highly conjectural.¹

There are, in general, two methods that might be deployed in this situation. The first is that of exegesis and interpolation. However, the facts here are so few that it is doubtful that this method could take us very far on its own.² Nevertheless, we are obliged to make as much as we can of what there is, and to ensure that our analysis does not contradict the little data we have to hand. The second method is a kind of hypothetical exercise: that is, to surmise what Sraffa knew and to imagine the kind of things that he must have—or would most likely have—said to the writer of the *Tractatus*. This method is conjectural, if not fictional, but we will have fulfilled our licence to use it if the explanation derived 'rings true'.

The particular problem with which we are confronted here is to 'tell a story' that reconciles the following two sets of facts. The first concerns known references relating to Sraffa's effect on Wittgenstein's thinking. The first element of that set is

the prefatory acknowledgement in *Philosophical Investigations* which heads this piece. The second piece of evidence, which corroborates the first, is Wittgenstein's remark that, after talking to Sraffa, he felt 'like a tree from which all its branches had been cut' (von Wright, 1958:15). That being said, this remark is somewhat deflated by von Wright in his own subsequent assessment: 'That this tree could become green again was due to its own vitality. The later Wittgenstein did not receive an inspiration from outside like that which the earlier Wittgenstein got from Frege and Russell' (von Wright, 1958:15–16). This personal interpretation, however, seems inconsistent with another reflection made by Wittgenstein himself in 1931:

I don't believe I have ever *invented* a line of thinking, I have always taken one over from someone else. I have simply seized on it with enthusiasm for my work of clarification. That is how Boltzmann, Hertz, Schopenhauer, Frege, Russell, Kraus, Loos, Weininger, Spengler, Sraffa have influenced me.

(Wittgenstein, 1980:19)

Perhaps the best way of reconciling this evidence is to say that Sraffa did indeed have a considerable impact on Wittgenstein's later thought, but it was not the laying out of a programme that 'inspired' Wittgenstein; rather, Sraffa forced Wittgenstein to think things radically anew, disabused him of old habits of thought, and gestured towards the 'right' direction. This reading is consistent both with the evidence here and also with some further facts and observations which are given below. In any case, however one chooses to interpret the record in this regard, it goes only to the *degree* of influence, and says nothing about the content of what ideas Sraffa impressed upon Wittgenstein; hence it is of limited analytical interest.

The third fact is more useful in this regard; it is Wittgenstein's comment to Rush Rhees that Sraffa's greatest effect was to make him think in an 'anthropological' manner (Monk, 1990:261). This is useful to know since it allows us to argue plausibly that Sraffa was something of a conduit to Wittgenstein for Marxian ideas on language and action. Finally, there is the well-known anecdote in which Sraffa, upon making a dismissive Neapolitan gesture to Wittgenstein, asked: 'And what is the "logical form" of *that?*' (or 'What is the "grammar" of *that?*')—a gnomic enquiry which apparently broke the hold of the picture theory of language on Wittgenstein (Malcolm, 1958:69).

The second set of facts is biographical and needs to be stated only in its essence.³ In 1925 Sraffa published the article: 'Sulle relazioni fra costo e quantità prodotta' which criticised the partial equilibrium framework of the great British economist—and holder of the first Chair in Political Economy at Cambridge—Alfred Marshall. This article is most notable in the current context for its containing an explicit enquiry into the role that *criteria* play in allowing analysis to proceed—an issue which, of course, Wittgenstein investigated at length under somewhat different auspices in *Philosophical Investigations*. In 1926, a shortened version of Sraffa's 1925 article was published in English in *The Economic Journal* which was at the time edited

by Keynes. In light of the article, and in view of the increasing difficulties Sraffa faced in Italy owing to his Marxist connections, Keynes invited Sraffa to lecture in Cambridge in 1927. Sraffa met Wittgenstein in 1929 upon the latter's return to Cambridge after an absence of sixteen years, and the two engaged in conversation on a regular basis until 1946, except for their separate visits to the continent prior to the war and those interruptions caused by the war itself. It was, in the end, Sraffa who terminated at least the theoretical dialogue between the two, citing Wittgenstein's intransigence as an interlocutor as the reason (Monk, 1990:487).

Sraffa was a Marxist, and though never a member of the Italian Communist Party he was a fellow-traveller. He was an intimate of Gramsci and was a key intermediary between Gramsci and the outside world during the latter's imprisonment by the Fascist government between 1926 and 1937. Gramsci's views on Sraffa are interesting and are germane to my hypothesis on the nature of Sraffa's influence on Wittgenstein. Writing in 1924, Gramsci held the view that, while Sraffa was 'certainly still a Marxist' and 'believes the future belongs to our party' he 'has never joined our ranks...[and] lives on the fringes of our movement and propaganda'. Moreover, he thought at the time that 'S. has so far not been able to rid himself of all the ideological residues of his democratic-liberal intellectual background, that is to say, normative and Kantian, non-Marxist and non-dialectical' (Gramsci, 1924a:26; 1924b:24-5). It was probably the case that this ambiguity on Sraffa's part was owed in part to his having 'too many scientific scruples'⁴ to commit himself wholly to any particular Marxist ideology. This noted characteristic of Sraffa's—that he was intellectually fastidious—is an attribute that is well known⁵ and was commented on by more than one acquaintance and friend. Although it made intellectual commitment and theoretical progress painfully difficult for him, it made him a tenacious critic since he refused to allow matters to be glossed over or brushed aside. Both these facets of his intellectual character are reflected in his contribution to the discussions of the Cambridge 'Circus' on the early drafts of Keynes's *General Theory*. Consider, for example, Austin Robinson's judgement of Sraffa's engagement in those debates:

I find it extraordinarily difficult to guess his contribution. As a critic it was undeniably very considerable indeed. As an eliminator of mistakes and red herrings and as a puncturer of other people's over-inflated bright ideas it was immense. I do not myself remember him as a major provider himself of bright new ideas.

(Robinson quoted in Potier, 1987:50)

This view is interesting as it allows us to get some idea of the role Sraffa may have played in his dialogue with Wittgenstein.

Two further historical facts need to be mentioned which are of some import to my conjectured account. The first is Bukharin's lecture, given in London in 1931 to the Second International Congress of the History of Science and Technology, in which he explicitly attacked the epistemology of the *Tractatus*.⁶ The second is

the belated publication of Marx's and Engels's *The German Ideology* in 1932—the first flourish of Marx's later, 'scientific' thought. Sraffa—as a scrupulous scholar, a convinced if critical Marxist, and a bibliophile—obtained copies of both Bukharin's lecture and *The German Ideology*. One may surmise that both must have had some influence on his thinking and that he passed on these ideas to Wittgenstein. For reasons I shall discuss below, this is a more than plausible conjecture.

With these preliminary facts in place, I can proceed to partially reconstruct the character of the conversation held by Sraffa and Wittgenstein over the 1930s and 1940s.

Sraffa and the *Tractatus*

In this section, I propose to give an account of the kind of criticism which Sraffa is likely to have made of the *Tractatus*, and to follow through some of the apparently logical consequences of that criticism. In order to present a continuous account of the nature of the argument, it is intended to leave the evidence supporting the various implicit claims made here until the next section of this chapter. Thus the reader is asked to suspend his or her disbelief for the duration, and to bear with the story till then.

The particular hypothesis that I wish to put forward here is the idea that Sraffa must have asked Wittgenstein a question—or series of questions—of the following sort: is a relationship a 'fact' where a fact is understood in the sense of the *Tractatus*? Or, since that enquiry is perhaps too unwieldy, and to be more exact, is a 'relational act' a fact—where a relational act is, say, an embrace, a yell, a laugh, a nod, a gesture of disgust, an order, an obeisance, and so on? And if it is, what kind is it? But if it is not, then how is it accounted for? Specifically, how does one account for actions apparently being meaningful? These queries, or something like them, strike one as something that Sraffa *must have asked* Wittgenstein since they resonate so well with the two known sets of facts.

Now, on a simple reading, the *Tractatus* account is able to deal with 'abstracted' or 'generalised' propositions about relations quite readily. That is, it seems able to deal with propositions of the sort: $\mathfrak{R}xy$, where the interpretation is, 'x stands in relation, \mathfrak{R} , to y' (Wittgenstein, 1961:4.012). On the *Tractatus* view, the statement is meaningful if it corresponds to or pictures a possible state of the world (4.03)—i.e. if there are such things as x and y which can stand in relation \mathfrak{R} to each other. The statement is then held to be true—i.e. corresponds with a fact—if it is the case that $\mathfrak{R}xy$ (4.25). Such examples as might readily spring to mind are easily handled within this framework of understanding. Thus, consider the cases: x='the cat', y='the mat' and \mathfrak{R} ='sat on'; or x='a small object', y='the Earth' and \mathfrak{R} ='accelerates towards'; x='Caesar', y='Pompey' and \mathfrak{R} ='defeated at Pharsalus'; and so on. $\mathfrak{R}xy$ has a natural interpretation and fairly evident means of verification for each of these examples. None of them is problematical for the theory of meaning of the *Tractatus*. The only matters they raise are practical ones concerning the best means of verification. But these are issues for scientists, historians, etc., and are not proper for philosophers.

However, things go awry for the *Tractatus* when we interpret the relationship, R_{xy} , as being a *social* relation between two people, x and y (such as friendship, comradeship, partnership, neighbourly relations, managerial relations, etc.). For then the question, 'Is it the case that R_{xy} ?' becomes much less tractable. Even when matters are narrowed down somewhat, so that the question is, 'Does act a in context $\{A\}$ make manifest—communicate—the fact that R_{xy} ?', the matter is problematical. In either case, we have to ask: *what is it* for R_{xy} to be the case? or, perhaps, *what is it* to behave in an R -ly manner? It should be immediately noted that this problem does not arise in the above examples, for it seems clear in each of those cases what it is for x to 'be on' y , or to 'accelerate towards' it, or to 'defeat' it, and so on. However, it is not immediately clear what it is to be in some relationship, or to communicate ' R -liness' by behaving in certain ways—as is seen whenever one tries to give a definition of R -liness or to convey a sense for it. (One need only ask oneself what is it to be a friend, comrade, partner, neighbour, manager, etc. to see that this is the case.)

Suppose, for example, that one begins one's attempt to define a relationship by giving examples—i.e. by saying that to behave in an R -ly manner is to behave 'like this' in 'such and such a circumstance'; or 'like that' under 'these conditions'; or in 'this manner' in 'this context'; and so on. It is quickly seen, however, that, as a *scientific method*, this is hopeless if it does not provide us with a *general means* for identifying R -liness in each new case. Which is to say that just listing off examples does not, of itself, tell us what it is about the circumstances that allows us to assert that R_{xy} is the case—it does not tell us what the circumstances have in common. All we have is an apparently ad hoc list of what it would be for R -liness to be the case in each given context. But because this procedure of listing off instances provides no connection from one case to the next—i.e. because it provides no method about how to proceed—we are always left with the question, no matter how many examples are given: what allows us to determine in each context what counts as being R -ly in *each and every* subsequent case (including the case in question)? The implication here is that if we are to have an exhaustive definition of what it is for R_{xy} to be the case, the set of examples—the 'anthropological manual' for R -liness—would have to go on for ever. So simply giving examples and allowing inferences to be drawn is hopeless—the template for understanding what constitutes R -liness that this method provides is infinitely long and so is of no avail to (human) understanding at all.

In order to escape this problem, *criteria* are needed which will establish what it is for R_{xy} to be the case, and which allow us to compare the proposition ' R_{xy} ' against the world in each and every case. That is, what is required is an extensive rule of the sort R_{xy} : $\{A\} \rightarrow a$. Thus, if R_{xy} is the case, this will manifest itself as a in the context $\{A\}$. But this immediately creates a problem also, since we need to assess whether $\{A\}$ is the case. So we need another rule, $\{A\}$: $\{B\} \rightarrow b$. (Or, in words, $\{A\}$ is the case if, in the context $\{B\}$, b .) But this just begs the question, 'Is it the case that $\{B\}$?' and so on. To make things concrete, consider the following example. Suppose that Peter and Paul are friends, so that if Peter is in trouble and

needs a £10 loan, Paul will provide it. The question then is: is Peter in trouble? Peter is taken to be in trouble if he is adversely affected by circumstances from which he is unable to extricate himself. He is adversely affected if, say, his material–social conditions are declining. A decline in material and social conditions is said to have occurred if he can no longer engage in normal social interaction. Normal social interaction is constituted of...and so on. Thus, to return to the general point, there are, in any social situation, ever-widening circles of context, so that if a rule is to provide criteria for what is the case it has to be an infinitely deep hierarchy of rules. The idea that criteria-giving rules might allow us to say what it is for $\mathfrak{R}xy$ to be the case is therefore hopeless, since the set of rules is an open sequence (i.e. is never-ending).

Hence, however we try to define \mathfrak{R} -liness—by example-giving (and relying on a kind of induction) or by positing criteria-providing rules (and relying on a kind of deduction)—we end up with an infinite regress. Yet if $\mathfrak{R}xy$ is to constitute a fact on the *Tractatus* account it must be well-defined—i.e. it must have a definite logical form. But this is not the case, since its definition is infinitely long. The upshot seems to be that, as $\mathfrak{R}xy$ is not a fact, it cannot be understood. However, this cannot be generally correct. For example, nothing could be clearer than the following proposition: Peter and Paul are friends and Paul lent Peter £10. Moreover, such a proposition is plainly—if perhaps not only—fact-stating. So the *Tractatus* account of understanding must be wrong, since people who make statements like the one just given are licensed to make them, and are understood when they do so.

Nor does the *Tractatus* allow us to get a handle on one of the more obvious facts about our understanding of intentional conduct—viz. that it is defeasible. Which is to say that an act may have one interpretation in one context but, if the context is widened, we may change our understanding of what the ‘real’ relationship between x and y is. On the *Tractatus* view, a state of affairs is either true or false and, once ascertained to be true, cannot be made false since all states are independent (Wittgenstein, 1961:2.061). This is plainly not the case with intentional action, yet we generally understand people when they behave in certain ways, even if our understanding is contingent on the context. So, again, the *Tractatus* must be wrong since it cannot account for our understanding of intentional action.

This, then, is the hypothesised—and *radically edited*—critical part of Sraffa’s exchange with Wittgenstein over the theory of meaning contained in the *Tractatus*. Yet we may also reasonably conjecture that, in that exchange, the elements of a constructive solution to the critical problem were suggested. Specifically, it seems reasonable to conjecture that the following argument—proceeding from criticism to constructive programme—was made in the Sraffa–Wittgenstein dialogue.

A principal problem with the *Tractatus* account is that it models understanding as a correlation between a mental state and the world where the correlation is mediated by the shared logical form. We have seen, however, that this cannot explain a common phenomenon, viz. our understanding of social action. It fails in this case because it fails to provide definite *criteria* for ascertaining what it is for

a social relation to be instantiated by action. Yet such criteria are essential to our understanding of social phenomena, since they are needed to allow us to determine what it is that is going on in any instance. These criteria, moreover, must be *public* if they are to play a genuinely *social* role—i.e. if they are to allow the playing out of interpersonal relations. Agents, in other words, must *share the criteria* if they are to understand each other. The upshot of all this is that the subjectivistic/mentalistic conception of understanding of at least social facts is nugatory. We ought instead to assert that agents' actions are understandable, not because they 'map' into the mind the appropriate thought via a shared logical form, but because they are normative with respect to existing social practices. That is, agents understand each other because they share social norms of behaviour. Thus, if there is a 'logic of action', it is not one shared with the 'objective' world since the world does not determine conduct (Marx, 1977:300); but, rather, the logic of action is embedded in, and reflects, the given social relations. In other words, the 'grammar' in terms of which actions are constructed and understood is essentially social in character—i.e. is a kind of 'social grammar'. Our understanding of the way people live out their relationships, therefore, implies the rejection of the idea that there is a correlation between mental states and the world, and implies instead that we look to see how people can come to share in a set of social relations. This is to say, the real question is: how may individuals be socialised into a given set of social relations so that they can behave in an intelligible manner and make sense of the actions of others? Or, in other words, how do people acquire the social grammar? At the societal level, this question becomes one of how social relations are reproduced as a whole.

Even if we accept the above arguments, and accept the need for a social grammar—i.e. a socially mandated set of criteria-giving rules—there is still the problem of the indeterminateness of those rules and criteria. For, if we understand behaviour because we have criteria for what constitutes being in some relationship given concrete conditions, we must accept that those conditions may never be fully specified—there is always the ghost of an infinite regress. However, if understanding is constituted by an embedded social grammar, then the possibility arises of there being implicit 'stopping rules' which foreclose any infinite regress. Hence, implicit in the grammar may be the assertion that the context appropriate for determining what specific action is being or has been undertaken is itself to be taken as given.⁷ Indeed, such stopping rules *must* be given if we are to have determinate criteria for what it is that is the case in specific instances. If there were no truncation of context, then we could not understand anything (as finitely rational agents). Since, however, we plainly *do* understand things and *do* have criteria for determining what is going on, we must *in fact* be able to take the circumstances against which actions are measured as given. Thus, for example, in the case of Peter and Paul we do not need to unwind the whole infinite chain of rules and criteria to understand the expression-in-action of Paul's giving Peter £10 out of friendship. The statement is comprehensible to anyone who has shared in the practice of friendship. All that needs to be known is that Peter and Paul are

friends and that they and we know what is involved in being a friend. So understanding any particular action lies not only in having a social grammar, but in accepting that, at some point, the regress of criteria and context give out—we have to take some things as given when we proceed. In the terms of the literature, we accept a ‘background’ of social data (such as what it is to be a friend) which is itself unquestioned in any specific case.⁸ Social acts are then understood by those who share in a common agreement of what constitutes the ‘background’ in each case.

Thus concludes my fable on the broad thrust of Sraffa and Wittgenstein’s conversations on the latter’s thought. I will summarise the structure of the account by drawing out the four key points implicit in the criticism of Wittgenstein’s early theory of understanding. I began by supposing that Sraffa posed the following question to Wittgenstein: what is the meaning of this act? (or, equally, how does an act communicate a social relation?); and noted (second) that this begged questions about criteria. Specifically, it gave rise to the questions: what are the criteria for some social relation being the case? And are the criteria finite? Third, it was suggested that the solution to the problems raised in the posing of these questions lay in the thought that acts are meaningful because they are normative with respect to social practices. While that allowed the social grammar to play its proper role in explaining social action, this account was as open as the other (i.e. the *Tractatus* account) to a never-ending specification of context. This pointed to the conclusion that, in order to avoid the problems of infinite regress which afflicted the mentalist account and made it untenable, a background of context needed to be taken as given. This, no doubt, is rather a long bow to have strung and it remains now to justify having done so.

Social relations and criteria of identity in Sraffa

The above argument seems, superficially at least, to attribute some key ideas of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy to the conversations that he and Sraffa conducted during the 1930s. Specifically, it seems to suggest that the following ideas owed their origins to those conversations: the importance that criteria play in understanding; the fact that understanding action requires us to look at social practices and the rules—or grammar—which govern them; and that understanding presupposes a background of context which is itself taken as given. This is not to say, of course, that Sraffa himself originated these ideas. Rather, what is intended is the suggestion that Sraffa and Wittgenstein in dialogue discussed the stated problems, and together drew the kinds of conclusions proposed. It may well have been the case—and, one supposes, probably was the case—that Sraffa did no more than pose questions and problems at each stage of the argument, while Wittgenstein took the constructive steps forward. This rendition fits in with the known facts; viz. that Sraffa’s critical acumen was acute (as, for example, evidenced by his contributions to the Cambridge Circus); that it was Sraffa’s ‘unceasing’ *criticism* that Wittgenstein valued; and that Sraffa, in his later life, downplayed the

significance of his positive contribution to Wittgenstein's later philosophy (Potier, 1987:48).

That being said, it remains now to justify the four points noted at the end of the last section which constitute the core structure of my case. The *prima facie* evidence for the first claim—that Sraffa asked Wittgenstein how action is understood—is that it seems the natural interpretation of what Sraffa was getting at with his Neapolitan gesture and subsequent query. Thus, a conjectured fuller rendering of that incident might plausibly go as follows. Sraffa to Wittgenstein: 'You say that a proposition is meaningful because it shares its logical form with a possible state of affairs; and that it is true if the state of affairs is the case. Well [gesture], what is the logical form of *that*?' (Or, equally, 'What kind of state of affairs is *that*?') This hypothetical interpretation is also consistent with Rush Rhees's remark that Sraffa's influence was to point Wittgenstein in an anthropological direction: that is, into an inquiry as to how people make themselves understood.

There is, moreover, evidence from Sraffa's work on economics which makes it clear that he was interested in explaining agents' actions; and that he thought that this had to be done in terms of existing social relations. Take, for example, the following passage extracted from his 1926 *Economic Journal* article on the reasons for customers selecting one vendor over another:

The causes of the preference shown by any group of buyers for a particular firm are of the most diverse nature, and may range from long custom, personal acquaintance, confidence in the quality of the product, proximity, knowledge of particular requirements and the possibility of obtaining credit, to the reputation of a trade-mark, or sign, or a name with high traditions, or to such special features of modelling or design in the product as—without constituting it a distinct commodity intended for the satisfaction of particular needs—have for their principal purpose that of distinguishing it from the products of other firms. What these and many other possible reasons for preference have in common is that they are expressed in a willingness (which may frequently be dictated by necessity) on the part of the group of buyers who constitute a firm's clientele to pay, if necessary, something extra in order to obtain the goods from a particular firm rather than from any other.

(Sraffa, 1926:544–5)

The first thing to note about this account is that it contains an answer to an implicit question: how are the customers' actions—of paying 'over the odds' for goods—to be understood? The second point to note is that the explanation lies in the specific kinds of institutional arrangements in which the agents are involved (i.e. in 'long custom' or 'acquaintance', or in the role of 'credit' and 'trade-mark[s]', etc.). That is to say, the behaviour is comprehensible because of the existing relationships between the buyer and the seller, and the actions are normative in the context of those relations. Of course, this presupposes a knowledge of how those particular institutions operate (which itself requires

that one should know something about how a capitalist economy operates, and so on); but given that background knowledge, we can make sense of the behaviour. The most obvious feature of all this, of course, is that the explanation of action is an essentially *social* explanation (i.e. makes reference to social entities). This is not surprising given Sraffa's inclinations towards the traditions of the classical economists and Marx, all of whose conceptions of economic activity were essentially social.⁹ It is important to note, however, that the dominant modern tradition in economics—neo-classical theory—against which Sraffa's primary work, *The Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities* was directed,¹⁰—eschews explanations of economic activity in terms of the social relations of production and consumption. Instead, it proposes an ultimately subjective account of agency in which consumers aim to maximise 'utility' *whatever that is* (or, in more modern terms, to attain their most preferred outcomes *whatever they are*). That Sraffa was opposed to a purely subjective account of action along these lines, without reference to 'objective' social factors, is implicit in some remarks he makes in a letter to Asimakopulos:

Now utility has made little progress (since the 1870ies [sic]) towards acquiring a tangible existence and survives in textbooks at the purely subjective level. On the other hand, cost of production has successfully survived Marshall's attempt to reduce it to an equally evanescent nature under the name of 'disutility', and is still kicking in the form of hours of labour, tons of raw material, etc.

(Sraffa, 1971, quoted in Salvadori, 1998:16)

The Sraffian complaint against a subjectivist account of consumption is that it is either false or vacuous. It is false if it contends that people simply have given preferences for things such as Alfa Romeos independent of the existing social relations, since it is evidently not the case that such preferences can be given *a priori* to individuals. (What could it mean for an infant to have a preference for an Alfa Romeo—or any other car for that matter—when s/he is 25 years old?). On the other hand, if the explanation is along the lines: 'I prefer Alfa Romeos to BMWs because the latter are *démodé*,' then the real preference is over some other 'object' such as 'fashionability'. But this reification is hopeless for exactly the reasons given above. Which is to say, as soon as we ask for criteria for fashionability we obtain an infinite regress; but this will not do, for we want fashionability to be well defined so that we can have preferences over it and between it and other objects of choice. So, as soon as we try to find criteria to individuate what it is that agents have preferences over, we end up in incoherence. (To call it an 'evanescence' is in fact a kindness.) We cannot account for choice in this way.¹¹

In fact, Sraffa's awareness of the problem of finding objective criteria for individuating the objects of analysis is as old as his contribution to economics itself.¹² It begins with his 1925 article in the *Annali di Economia* and its analysis of industries subject to non-constant returns to scale. In that article, Sraffa

dealt, *inter alia*, with the problems that long-run rising (falling) costs cause for a partial equilibrium—Marshallian—analysis of competitive industry behaviour. He begins by noting that, if costs are rising (falling) it must be because some factor is becoming relatively (less) scarce.¹³ Yet all factor prices are supposed to be constant under the *ceteris paribus* assumption of long-run Marshallian analysis as are the prices of competitor industries. So it must either be the case that the factor whose price is rising (falling) only enters as an input into the industry in question, or we have to take into account the effect of the increasing (decreasing) factor scarcity on the costs and prices of other industries in order to assess the overall effect on the industry in question. But this then requires us to expand the definition of what constitutes the 'industry' under analysis to include these other, previously separate, industries. This, however, just increases the likelihood of coming across yet other factors whose prices will be rising (falling) in those industries excluded from the current (broader) definition, so that a further widening of definition is required. And so on. This then means that, in the end, for non-constant returns to scale industries, we have to analyse the whole economy at once—or at least we have to analyse the interrelations of all those commodities that enter into the production of all other commodities in the economy¹⁴—if we are to say anything concrete about changes in values as quantity produced changes. Yet the interrelations of the whole were thought by Sraffa to be beyond the scope of economic analysis as it then was, as he makes clear in the following passage taken from his 1926 *Economic Journal* article:

If diminishing returns arising from a 'constant factor' are taken into consideration, it becomes necessary to extend the field of investigation so as to examine the conditions of simultaneous equilibrium in numerous industries: a well-known conception, whose complexity, however, prevents it from bearing fruit, at least in the present state of our knowledge... If we pass to external economies, we find ourselves confronted by the same obstacle, and there is also the impossibility of confining within statical conditions the circumstances from which they originate.

(Sraffa, 1926:541)

Thus, as Sraffa saw it, the discipline faced something of a dilemma: the Marshallian method was generally incoherent, and the alternative was inadequate.¹⁵ That the analytical 'crisis' in which the Marshallian orthodoxy found itself was caused by its failing to find the right *criteria* for what constitutes an industry with rising (or falling) costs is made explicit in the following quote from the original 1925 paper:

[I]t remains to be seen if...the absence of a classification of industries according to the criterion of the variability of cost is really due to the lack of data currently available and to the inability of scholars, or if, rather, the failing cannot be found in the very nature of the criterion according to

which the classification should be conducted. In particular, it remains to be seen if the *fundamental division* is formed by objective circumstances inherent in the various industries, or instead is dependent on the point of view of the person acting as observer; or, to put it in another way, whether the increasing and decreasing costs are nothing other than different aspects of one and the same thing that can occur at the same time, for the same industry, so that an industry can be classified arbitrarily in one or the other category according to the definition of 'industry' that is considered preferable for each particular problem, and according to whether long or short periods are considered.

(Sraffa, 1925:278, quoted in Salvadori, 1998:17)

Shortly after this article appeared, and certainly by 1928, Sraffa proposed a method of analysis which avoided this problem and allowed for the examination of the interactions of the economy as a whole.¹⁶ In this method,¹⁷ a 'core' analysis of value is undertaken, taking as given: the vector of gross outputs; the available set of productive techniques; and either the real wage or the rate of profits—such data being sufficient to determine the relative prices of the system and the distribution of the surplus output between wages and profits. The key point of interest here is the reasoning behind taking the output vector as a datum of the analysis. From the above discussion, the reason is clear—it allows the analysis of competitive pricing relations to proceed without having to make any assumption as to returns to scale. This means that a determinate analysis of value is possible, taking into account only the other two conditions (i.e. technology and a distributive variable). If, on the other hand, outputs are not taken as given, then, in order to determine prices in the case of non-constant returns, we should have to specify behavioural functions as to how agents—producers and consumers—respond to variations in others' prices as the outputs demanded and supplied vary. That is, we would have to determine simultaneously the general equilibrium of all the quantities and all the values for the economy as a whole. This, however, was something that Sraffa sought to avoid, since it would have involved the analysis of 'extra-core' relations, which were not thought by him to be amenable to formal analysis.¹⁸ In particular, it would have involved a contrived and artificially formalistic treatment of consumption behaviour, detached from its 'real'—social, practical and institutional—context. Which is to say, it would have required the positing of utility functions (or preference maps) specified over arbitrary domains of objects with determinate functional form yet divorced from actual historical conditions. Sraffa was opposed to such a method for the reasons given earlier. This is not to say, of course, that the analysis of consumption behaviour—or of any of the determinants of the other data of the 'core'—was abandoned in this method, only that it was to be dealt with at a second, less formal level, taking into account the real nature of the society in question. This method is broadly consistent with the approach of classical economics, as Garegnani argues:

In fact the flexibility resulting from the classical reasoning 'by stages' and the recognition it implies of the multiplicity and variability of the relations examined outside the 'core' [as against the 'well-defined general quantitative relations of the core' itself], appear to be a more or less conscious recognition of the role which broader social, institutional and political factors, in a word historical factors, play in economic phenomena, particularly in the spheres of distribution, accumulation and technical change.

(Garegnani, 1987:562-3)

Thus, I have in place now the premises of my hypothesis: viz. that Sraffa was concerned to provide an account of action in terms of the social relations of production and consumption in which agents were embedded; that appropriate criteria are needed to individuate the entities of analysis, and that this gives rise to the possibility of the regress of context; and, finally, that, in order to make analysis tractable, a certain context may therefore have to be taken as given (which itself, however, might be susceptible to further analysis). It seems reasonable to conjecture that these points were raised by Sraffa in his conversations with Wittgenstein and they gave rise to the kind of argument described in the second section above, albeit in rather more protracted form. That being said, it needs to be emphasised again that the claim is *not* that it was Sraffa himself who arrived at the conclusions there described, but only that he must have raised these issues at some point in his conversations with Wittgenstein and, we may presume, the relevant conclusions were drawn by the latter.

I conclude this section by briefly mentioning the imprint that *The German Ideology* and Bukharin's lecture might have left on the Sraffa-Wittgenstein 'debates'. In particular, three excerpts—two from the former and one from the latter—are relevant to my case:

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour... Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc.—real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process.

(Marx and Engels, 1974:47)

Language is as old as consciousness, language *is* practical consciousness that exists also for other men, and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men. Where there exists a relationship, it exists for me: the animal does not enter into '*relations*' with

anything, it does not enter into any relation at all. For the animal, its relation to others does not exist as a relation. Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all.

(Marx and Engels, 1974:51)

Any empirical subject *always* goes beyond the bounds of ‘pure’ sensual ‘raw material’; his experience, representing the result of the influence of the external world on the knowing subject in the process of his practice, stands on the shoulders of the experience of other people. In his ‘I’ there is *always* contained ‘we’. In the pores of his sensations there already sit the products of *transmitted* knowledge (the external expressions of this are speech, language and conceptions adequate to words). In his *individual* experience there are included beforehand society, external nature and history—i.e. social history. Consequently, epistemological Robinson Crusoes are just as much out of place as Robinson Crusoes were in the ‘atomistic’ social science of the eighteenth century.

(Bukharin, 1931:12–13, as quoted in Easton, 1983:116)

Since my task here is not to make exegetical connections between Marx’s thought and Wittgenstein’s, I will simply suggest that there are parallels between these propositions and various parts of *Philosophical Investigations*, notably: the critique of ostensive definition (§§1–38); the discussion on rule-following (§§138–242); and the emphasis on humanity’s common anthropological condition (Wittgenstein, 1958: Part 2, xi). Indeed, so close are some of the parallels between both these sets of remarks (and the works as wholes) and certain key ideas of *Philosophical Investigations* as to make highly plausible the assumption that Wittgenstein had received copies—excerpted or complete—from Sraffa. It is noteworthy in this regard that Wittgenstein’s thinking began to show its ‘anthropological turn’ around 1932.

These remarks are also clearly related to the putative position of Sraffa in the imagined ‘conversation’ described in the second section of this chapter. That being the case, I will simply reiterate the, by now, familiar point; viz. that it seems not merely unlikely but almost incredible—given our knowledge of Sraffa’s intellectual disposition, of his critical acuity (acknowledged by Wittgenstein) and of the trajectory of Wittgenstein’s deliberations from *The Blue and Brown Books* through to *Philosophical Investigations*—that Sraffa did not make these ideas known to Wittgenstein either directly or indirectly.¹⁹

Conclusions

The problem that I have confronted throughout this paper has been this: what was the nature of Sraffa’s influence on Wittgenstein likely to have been? The thesis that I have put forward is the following: that, as a result of his conversations with Sraffa, Wittgenstein must have been aware of the problems

with the asocial epistemology of the *Tractatus*; that the meaning of at least social action generally depends on agents having criteria to determine what is going on, and that this may result in ever-expanding definitions of context (probably Sraffa's most original and significant contribution to the discussions); and finally that social actions are understandable because agents share a 'life-process' which is manifested in their social relations. I have not suggested that this was a one-way process of ideas from Sraffa to Wittgenstein—in fact, I have rejected that view. Rather, I have submitted the much lesser claim that Sraffa is likely to have made Wittgenstein aware of these issues, while Wittgenstein himself ultimately resolved them in his later analyses and radically extended their implications. In proposing this thesis, I have tried to make as many connections as are possible with the extant evidence on Sraffa's character and his intellectual inclinations, as well as with his more substantive thinking on matters economic. The case that I have put forward is necessarily conjectural, but it is one which I think, on the balance of probabilities, lies with the *relator*.

Notes

- 1 It is one of the ironies of the history of thought that Sraffa himself felt forced to adopt a similar conjectural method in his definitive interpretation of Ricardo's intellectual biography. Specifically, he conjectured the existence of a missing manuscript or letter or conversation in which Ricardo developed a coherent theory of profit and value (Sraffa, 1951:xx–xxii).
- 2 As Quine would have it, our interpretation is radically underdetermined by the available evidence.
- 3 The 'bibliography' is of Sraffa since, in the current context, that of Wittgenstein may be assumed to be relatively well known.
- 4 This remark of Gramsci's is recorded by Sraffa (1931) himself.
- 5 The slow rate of accomplishment—though not of work—on the two great projects of his career—the editing of Ricardo's *Works and Correspondence* and *The Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities*—is legendary.
- 6 The thrust of Bukharin's lecture can be seen in the following two quotes:

The real subject, i.e. social and historical man...does not in the least resemble the stenographer, inventing 'convenient' signs in shorthand, into whom the philosophising mathematicians and physicists desire to transform him

(*B.Russell, Wittgenstein, Frank, Schlick, and others*).

The only true position is held by dialectical materialism, which rejects all species of idealism and agnosticism, and overcomes the narrowness of mechanical materialism (its ahistoricism, its anti-dialectical character, its failure to understand problems of quality, its contemplative 'objectivism', etc.).

(as quoted in Easton, 1983:132 and 29, italics in original)

- 7 This escape route, it should be noted, is not open to a *Tractatus* type account because, if language has to track the world, arbitrarily given stopping rules—or the arbitrary truncations of context—are not allowed if the world itself is infinitely complex.
- 8 See, for example, Searle (1995: ch. 6) and Taylor (1995: ch. 9); cf. Wittgenstein (1981: §530; 1969:§94).
- 9 Classical economics is that broad tradition stretching back to William Petty and continuing through Quesnay to Adam Smith and Ricardo. For a discussion of their general approach see Garegnani (1987: sec. II).
- 10 The subtitle to that book is *A Prelude to a Critique of Economic Theory*.
- 11 This thought—that to account for choice we need to pay serious attention to what it is that agents can possibly want and that this may have consequences for theory—is only now intruding into economics. See, for example, the discussion of ‘external correspondences’ in Sen (1993) and the reference there to Davidson.
- 12 This point is not novel—it has been made by Davis in two articles (1988) and (1993).
- 13 I have adapted Sraffa’s argument here by assuming that quantities of factors are measured in ‘efficiency units’ so that his treatment of increasing returns—which is premised on there being technological progress—can be rendered symmetrically to his treatment of decreasing returns.
- 14 Such commodities as enter into the production of all other commodities Sraffa was later to term ‘basic’ (1960:§§6–7).
- 15 There is, of course, an obvious way out of this dilemma, viz. the positing of general constant returns to scale. This was, indeed, Sraffa’s own initial inclination as he tells us in the Preface to Sraffa (1960). However, he quickly gave it up in light of its empirical shortcomings.
- 16 That the method had been developed by 1928 is attested to by Sraffa in the Preface to Sraffa (1960), in which it is first fully applied.
- 17 The method was later to be called the ‘surplus approach’ by others, notably one of Sraffa’s PhD students, Pierangelo Garegnani (see Garegnani, 1987).
- 18 For a discussion of the constructivist methodology of Sraffa (1960) see Dore *et al.* (1989:7).
- 19 There is, of course, other—circumstantial—evidence that Wittgenstein’s thinking had been influenced by Marx, either directly or indirectly. Consider, for example, the comments he makes on Ramsey in 1931:

Ramsey was a bourgeois thinker. I.e. he thought with the aim of clearing up the affairs of some particular community. He did not reflect on the essence of the state—or at least he did not like doing so—but on how *this* state might reasonably be organised. The idea that this state might not be the only possible one in part disquieted him and in part bored him. He wanted to get down as quickly as possible to reflecting on the foundations—of *this* state. This was what he was good at and what really interested him; whereas real philosophical reflections disturbed him until he put its result (if it had one) to one side and declared it trivial.

(Wittgenstein, 1980:17)

The language in the opening sentence has obvious Marxian overtones; but, more importantly, the idea that ‘real’ philosophy involves questioning the foundations of ‘this state’ seems profoundly Marxian.

References

- Bukharin, N. (1931) ‘Theory and practice from the standpoint of dialectical materialism’, in *Science at the Cross Roads*, papers presented to the International

- Congress of the History of Science and Technology by the Delegates of the USSR (1971 edition), London: Frank Cass.
- Davis, J.B. (1988) 'Sraffa, Wittgenstein and neoclassical economics', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 12 (1): 29–36.
- (1993) 'Sraffa, interdependence and demand: the Gramscian influence', *Review of Political Economy*, 5 (1): 22–39.
- Dore, M., Chakravarty, S. and Goodwin, R. (1989) *John von Neumann and Modern Economics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Easton, S. (1983) *Humanist Marxism and Wittgensteinian Social Philosophy*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Garegnani, P. (1987) 'Surplus approach to value and distribution', in J.Eatwell, M. Milgate and P.Newman (eds) *New Palgrave: A Dictionary of Economics*, London: Macmillan.
- Gramsci, A. (1924a) 'Letter to Togliatti, Scoccimaro, Leonetti, etc.', in P.Togliatti (1962) *La formazione del gruppo dirigente del P.C.I. nel 1923–24*, Rome: Riuniti; as translated and printed in J.-P.Potier (1987) *Piero Sraffa*, London: Routledge.
- (1924b) 'Problemi di oggi e di domani', in *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 3 series, 1st year, nos 3–4; reprinted in A.Gramsci (1971) *La costruzione del Partito Comunista: 1923–26*, Turin: Einaudi; as translated and printed in J.-P.Potier (1987) *Piero Sraffa*, London: Routledge.
- Malcolm, N. (1958) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Marx, K. (1977) *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, edited by D.McLellan, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1974) *The German Ideology (Part One)*, edited by C.Arthur, London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Monk, R. (1990) *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, London: Vintage.
- Potier, J.-P. (1987) *Piero Sraffa*, London: Routledge.
- Salvadori, N. (1998) 'Sraffa on demand: a textual analysis', mimeo.
- Searle, J. (1995) *The Construction of Social Reality*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Sen, A. (1993) 'Internal consistency of choice', *Econometrica* 61 (3): 495–521.
- Sraffa, P. (1925) 'Sulle relazioni tra costo e quantità prodotta', *Annali di Economia II*, as translated and reprinted in N.Salvadori (1998) 'Sraffa on demand: a textual analysis', mimeo.
- (1926) 'The laws of returns under competitive conditions', *Economic Journal* 36 (144): 535–50.
- (1931) 'Letter to Tatiana Schucht', as reprinted in *Nuove lettere di Antonio Gramsci con altre lettere di Piero Sraffa*, Rome: Riuniti; as translated and reprinted in J.-P.Potier (1987) *Piero Sraffa*, London: Routledge.
- (1951) 'Introduction', in *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo*, edited by P. Sraffa, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1960) *The Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1971) 'Letter to A.Asimakopulos', as partly reprinted in N.Salvadori (1998) 'Sraffa on demand: a textual analysis', mimeo.
- Taylor, C. (1995) *Philosophical Arguments*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1958) *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd edition, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1961) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D.Pears and B.McGuinness, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- (1969) *On Certainty*, Oxford: Blackwell.

—(1980) *Culture and Value*, Oxford: Blackwell.

—(1981) *Zettel*, 2nd edition, Oxford: Blackwell.

Wright, G.H.von (1958) 'Biographical sketch', in N.Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, London: Oxford University Press.

7 A Marxist influence on Wittgenstein via Sraffa

John B. Davis

This chapter looks at possible indirect influences of the Marxist tradition on the later ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein via the contact between Wittgenstein and the Italian economist Piero Sraffa. Sraffa was influenced by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (Bharadwaj, 1989; Ginzburg, 1998; Naldi, 2000), and though Wittgenstein's thinking has no apparent direct link to Gramsci's, a case can be made for saying that Sraffa had an impact on Wittgenstein that specifically reflected Gramsci's influence on him. Though the evidence that Gramsci influenced Sraffa is solid, and the evidence that Sraffa influenced Wittgenstein is equally tangible, interpreting these influences is subject to considerable controversy. Let me consequently begin by identifying the difficulties involved in making this argument, and thus suggest the way in which I attempt to make the argument in this chapter.

It is first important to emphasise that, because the connections suggested here cross boundaries between very different types of thinking—Gramsci's ideas were about politics and the state, Sraffa's were about economics, and Wittgenstein's were about traditional philosophical topics—the argument for this particular channel of influence needs to be couched in terms of broad philosophical traditions in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. In this respect, I distinguish between certain continental European and British traditions of ideas, and argue that the pathway from Gramsci to Wittgenstein through Sraffa reflects an influence of the former on the latter. Specifically, the European influence was wielded through the theoretical practice of *critique*—the notion that ideas must be evaluated in terms of their historical roles. This type of thinking stemmed from the Hegelian tradition and was largely absent in the dominant Anglophone approach to philosophy of language but, I argue, was applied to the latter by Sraffa, and then by the later Wittgenstein—at least in some part on account of Sraffa's influence. Second, I emphasise that the focus in this chapter is only on one possible influence on Wittgenstein's later ideas. I do not claim that Marxist or Sraffa's ideas were fully constitutive of Wittgenstein's later ideas or otherwise exhaust their meaning and importance. Third, a last caveat concerns this chapter's approach. Because the acknowledged and direct connections between Gramsci and Sraffa and between Sraffa and Wittgenstein are few and controversial, my argument does not proceed

so much by analysing a pattern of influence, but rather by identifying shared positions across the three individuals. Two of these shared positions are focused upon in this chapter. I argue that a Gramscian-like concept of ‘catastrophic’ equilibrium and a Gramscian-like concept of immanence can be found in the thinking of both Sraffa and the later Wittgenstein, though much modified in nature and used for different purposes by each.

The organisation of the chapter is as follows. In the first section I describe how Gramsci’s ideas originated in his thinking about political power and theory of the state as a means of maintaining class hegemony. Then I set forth his ideas in connection with the European tradition of critique, in order to explain the origins of his two notions of catastrophic equilibrium and immanence. In the second section I turn to Sraffa to show his attachment to the European tradition of critique and also the way in which he draws on these two fundamental Gramscian ideas in emphasising monopoly in the market system and the idea of what I call ‘justified abstraction’. Here the focus is Sraffa’s critique of Alfred Marshall’s ideas about equilibrium rather than his later economics. In the third section I briefly describe the critical encounter between Sraffa and Wittgenstein. Then I discuss Wittgenstein’s later ideas to argue that they show a similar attachment to the European tradition of critique, while making use of notions like catastrophic equilibrium and immanence in the explanation of rule-following in language-games and the concept of family resemblance. The fourth and last section makes concluding comments about the interaction between continental European and British traditions of ideas, based on the displacement of Sraffa and Wittgenstein from Europe in the period of war and turmoil at the beginning of the twentieth century. Here I attempt to say a few things about what make for ‘revolutionary’ developments in ideas.

Gramsci and the tradition of critique: catastrophic equilibrium and immanence

Hegel’s contribution to the idea of critique came in the form of his account of dialectical development of thought, whereby one form of thought is evaluated and taken up in subsequent, more complex forms. Marx made this process historical and material, and placed classes in conflict and opposition to one another in order to demonstrate the working out of the process. Gramsci, caught up in and leading the political struggles of the working class in Italy at the beginning of the century, brought Marx’s thinking to bear on the contest for power. Central to this was a changed view of the state. The Social Democratic Second International had treated such institutions as the Church, the schools and universities, unions, political parties, the media, etc., as repressive apparatuses on analogy to coercive state apparatuses such as the police, the courts, the prisons, the army and the government, but had still defined the state instrumentally as a class dictatorship based on the exercise of brute force. Gramsci, beginning in his early *Ordine Nuovo* period, however, developed a theory of ideological state apparatuses based on his concept of

hegemony. Exercising state power meant more than just controlling the machinery of government. It also meant organising class domination through the creation of a world view within 'private', non-state institutions. In this latter respect, the dominant class or class fraction exercises hegemony and intellectual and moral leadership (*direzione*) that complements its exercise of brute force. State power, in effect, insinuates itself throughout a whole array of non-state social institutions.

Gramsci's use of the concept of critique involved an unveiling of hidden structures of power. By locating instruments of class domination within what were conventionally regarded as non-state institutions, he showed that these institutions were not benign with respect to class conflict, while at the same time exposing their ideological nature. He thus advanced the understanding of the Italian political process by demonstrating an unappreciated historical role played by ideas in that process. This meant that the idea of the state operative in the European Social Democratic parties of the time needed to be abandoned. The state was not simply an agent or instrument of big monopoly capital. With political power operating through a range of non-state institutions, different ruling class factions exercised different types of power in different arenas. Italy was at a point, Gramsci believed, at which these different factions were on the verge of immobilising each other, thus jeopardising the overall class power of the bourgeoisie, with a severe political crisis a possible outcome. In such circumstances, an 'heroic' personality might emerge to create a dictatorship, because the forces in conflict '*balance each other in a catastrophic manner*; that is to say, they balance each other in such a way that a continuation of the conflict can only terminate in their reciprocal destruction' (Gramsci, 1971:219; emphasis added). This balance was framed as a kind of equilibrium—a catastrophic equilibrium—by Gramsci. 'In the modern world, the equilibrium with catastrophic prospects occurs... between forces whose opposition is historically incurable' (Gramsci, 1971:222).

Thus Gramsci's critique of conventional notions of the state, bourgeois and Social Democratic, generated a new conceptual device to help account for the process. How are we to understand this concept? The idea of a catastrophic equilibrium involves a rejection of the holist idea of society as a unified totality, albeit a totality explained in terms of class domination. The holist concept of a totality implies both that the social whole includes its parts, and that the parts acquire their meaning according to their integration within the whole. But Gramsci's view of a catastrophic equilibrium is of an unsustainable juxtaposition of opposed and discordant forces, the resolution of which in the form of a new class hegemony destroys one side of this opposition, rather than raising it up and preserving it in the Hegelian sense of *Aufhebung*. The parts of the social whole consequently do not acquire their meaning from the whole, because they seek to be exclusive of one another, re-casting the whole solely in terms of their own image. The idea of a catastrophic equilibrium is thus that of an unstable, transient balance in a state of affairs, one in which past and future can be radically disjoined in an unpredictable and abrupt manner. In effect, history rather than logic explained the evolution of societies.

Gramsci's critique of the instrumental conception of the form of the state also had as an underlying foundation a parallel critique of economism, the notion that there exist objective laws of historical development similar to natural laws that determine the path and character of political struggle. His ideas had grown out of his experience as a leader of the working-class movement in the Turin factory councils. Placing importance on linking theory and practice, he understood Marx to be the founder of the philosophy of praxis that combined British political economy, German idealist philosophy and French revolutionary politics. However, he believed (Gramsci, 1971:388 ff.) that Marx's philosophy had subsequently been mistakenly given both an idealist interpretation (in Italy particularly by Croce, briefly a Marxist) and a philosophical materialist interpretation (by orthodox Marxists Plekhanov and Bukharin). Both interpretations exhibited a tendency to rely on metaphysical rather than historical explanations, which had the effect of substituting arguments between intellectuals and party members for investigation of the historical struggle of the working class. He thus called for recovery of Marx's original tripartite nexus, characterising it specifically as *immanentist* in being based upon a thoroughly historicised understanding of the concrete and material development of history: 'The philosophy of praxis continues the philosophy of immanence but purifies it of all its metaphysical apparatus and brings it onto the concrete terrain of history' (Gramsci, 1971:450).

Gramsci's immanentist interpretation of the philosophy of praxis—alternatively, his rejection of all forms of transcendence—is specifically a doctrine regarding the interpretation of generality or universals in the Hegelian tradition. Hegel, following Kant's rejection of the idea of bare particulars ('intuitions without concepts are blind'), similarly rejected the idea of an abstract universal, arguing in favour of concrete universals which require more 'intimate' relation with the particulars they involve. Needless to say, the sense in which concrete universals involve their particulars is philosophically complex and also subject to a range of interpretations within the Hegelian tradition. Moreover, just how Gramsci believed the concept of a concrete universal was to be understood has been subject to considerable controversy. Nonetheless, his rejection of the idea of transcendence, for example, as expressed in his assertion that 'man is historical becoming' justifies saying that he rejected the idea of an abstract universal. It is this development of the European tradition of critique, I suggest, that most clearly represents his philosophical side. Together with his characterisation of the historical process in terms of the idea of catastrophic equilibrium, it represents two key aspects of his Marxism that can be re-located in modified form in Sraffa's early economic thinking.

Sraffa and critique of neo-classical economics: monopoly and justified abstraction

Sraffa was forced to flee Italy after Mussolini came to power. Prior to his arrival in Cambridge, he had regular contact with Gramsci, and though he was a supporter of the working class, his degree of attachment to Gramsci's particular political

positions is unclear. Later, however, after Gramsci's imprisonment, Sraffa became important for him as a contact with the outside world. Gramsci also drew upon Sraffa's assistance for books and materials for the writing of what subsequently became his *Prison Notebooks*. Sraffa, in turn, maintained his working-class political allegiance, though his work was almost exclusively devoted to reconstructing economic theory. This latter began with his critique of key assumptions of Marshallian neo-classical economics (Sraffa, 1925; 1926; cf. Maneschi, 1986), then continued with his editing of the writings of the classical economist David Ricardo, and finally culminated in his radical reconstruction of economic thinking in his book *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities* (Sraffa, 1960).

My focus in this chapter is on Sraffa's critical evaluation of Alfred Marshall's neo-classical economic ideas as the first clear evidence that a method of reasoning encountered through Gramsci was to have a key place in Sraffa's own work. It is true that Sraffa's later *Production of Commodities* was more explicitly designed as a work of critique, specifically of neo-classical economic concepts of production and capital. But Sraffa's known reported impact on Wittgenstein in the 1920s (cf. Malcolm, 1958; Roncaglia, 1978; Davis, 1988; Andrews, 1996), subsequently acknowledged by Wittgenstein in the preface to his *Philosophical Investigations*, came before Sraffa had gone very far in developing his *Production of Commodities* thinking. Moreover, though Sraffa and Wittgenstein continued to be in contact with one another in Cambridge after this time, there is little evidence that Sraffa's subsequent work on *Production of Commodities* figured in either their conversations or the development of Wittgenstein's philosophical thinking.

How, then, did Sraffa develop his critical approach in his papers on Marshall? Central to this question is Sraffa's critical treatment of Marshall's understanding of independence between industries (cf. Panico and Salvadori, 1994; Mongiovi, 1996). Marshall's partial equilibrium method of analysis of separate industry supply functions makes industries relatively independent in the sense that a change in the quantity of output produced by one industry leaves the quantities produced by other industries unchanged. But this involved a short-run analysis, and changes in one industry's output raised the question of whether in the long run there were diminishing or increasing returns to scale: that is, whether average costs of all industries rose or fell with the expansion of any one industry. In one respect, supposing that this occurred was compatible with Marshall's analysis of industry independence. If variations in an industry's output operated directly only on the cost function of the representative firm of that industry, this affected the price in that industry, which might subsequently affect prices in other industries, possibly causing further changes in their cost functions. But these latter influences were indirect (in the sense that they were conveyed through the change in other industry costs), and were compatible with Marshall's assumption of a relative independence between industries. However, were variation in a single industry's output to operate directly on the cost function of representative firms in all industries, then the industries were mutually inter-dependent, and Marshall's partial equilibrium analysis broke down.

Marshall had tried to argue that increasing and diminishing returns were of the sort compatible with the first case. In the case of diminishing returns, he assumed that an increase in industry output required more intensive use of some primary factor of production in scarce supply but only in the expanding industry. Thus there were only indirect and no direct effects on other industries. Sraffa, however, argued that it was highly unlikely that such primary factors were used in just one industry. In the increasing returns case, Marshall had to assume that such returns were external to the firm and internal to the industry of which it was a part, so that they directly affected the cost function of the representative firm of the industry, but only indirectly affected those of representative firms in other industries. Sraffa noted, however, that Marshall had been fully cognisant of the fact that, in the real world, there were increasing returns external to both the firm and the industry. Thus in both cases (diminishing and increasing returns) Marshall's analysis could not support his initial conception of the relative independence of industries.

To see the significance of these arguments, it is important to recognise that a particular concept of economic equilibrium was at the centre of the debate. Marshall's motivation for treating industries as relatively independent from one another had been to provide an account of price on an industry-by-industry basis in terms of symmetrically opposed forces of supply and demand. Essentially, each industry could be understood solely in terms of its own underlying supply and demand conditions, because changes in the supply conditions of any one industry had only indirect effects on the supply conditions of the others. But when Marshall's highly restrictive assumptions about the nature of returns were ruled out, so that indirect effects of changes in an industry's output on the cost functions of other industries were replaced by direct effects, then the underlying forces determining industry prices could neither be compartmentalised on an industry-by-industry basis, nor were they any longer describable in terms of the symmetrically opposed forces of supply and demand. In effect, the forces determining industry prices were communicated through a network of cross-cutting production relationships between industries that transferred the effects of changes in cost of production in any one industry to the prices of all industries (cf. Davis, 1993).

The idea that supply-and-demand forces operated everywhere in essentially the same way made historical development an insignificant factor in explaining markets. Indeed, that the same principles always operated in the same manner made supply and demand timeless sorts of principles much like laws of nature. Sraffa rejected this conception of the economic world, and believed that laws in economics were historically specific. To bring this understanding to bear on neoclassical economics involved showing that the key concept of equilibrium which Marshall employed was not adequate for explaining markets, and in fact was not even adequate on its own terms. That is, because it was internally inconsistent, Marshall's account could not sustain his view of markets in supply-and-demand, partial equilibrium terms. Moreover, the way in which that account broke down demonstrated that a more historical understanding of equilibrium forces in markets was needed. For Sraffa, that more historical understanding led

to a conception of capitalist economies as subject to a process of radically discontinuous change, in which conditions supporting a temporarily settled state of affairs also contained the seeds of a disruption of that state of affairs. Sraffa's conclusion to his 1926 critique of Marshall was thus that the competitive market system, as Marshall had explained it, ultimately collapsed once a more realistic view of increasing returns was incorporated in it.

How, then, do these ideas relate in particular to Gramsci's concepts of catastrophic equilibrium and immanence? I suggest that Sraffa used the former in connection with his understanding of the development of monopoly in markets, and used the latter in connection with his understanding of what was involved in making justifiable abstractions in economics.

The idea that equilibrium is a temporarily settled state of affairs that contains the seeds of its own breakdown is not unlike Gramsci's use of the concept of catastrophic equilibrium. In his 1920s account, Sraffa argues that the development of monopoly is a likely outcome of increasing returns that remain internal to the representative firm of an industry. Monopolies then develop not only at the expense of other firms, but also at the expense of the system of balanced competition that Marshall saw as the essential characteristic of the market system. Thus the presence of internal increasing returns across industries signalled an unstable and transient set of circumstances in which market power and barriers to entry would ultimately replace a system of free competition. The equilibrium Sraffa described as being implicit in Marshall's thinking was consequently catastrophic in Gramsci's sense of the term in that it characterised 'forces whose opposition is historically incurable'.

Sraffa's critique of Marshall's treatment of variable returns was also accompanied by a complaint about his methodology (Davis, 1998). The classical economists, Sraffa noted, had understood diminishing and increasing returns to be rooted in dissimilar economic phenomena, and accordingly did not explain them at a higher level of abstraction as instances of one general type of principle. Marshall, accordingly, 'found it necessary to introduce certain modifications into the form of the two laws' as inherited from the classical economists, in order to merge them into a 'single "law" of nonproportional returns' (Sraffa, 1926:537). This reflected Marshall's conviction that 'the essential causes determining the price of particular commodities may be simplified and grouped together' so as to explain prices in markets solely in terms of the 'forces of demand and supply' (Sraffa, 1926:535). Clearly Sraffa thought this recourse to abstraction and 'essential causes' unjustified. Without saying what his view of proper abstraction was, we can say that, for Sraffa, what was objectionable in Marshall's methodology was its recourse to abstraction understood in terms of other abstractions, rather than in terms of the relevant underlying concrete phenomena. Sraffa, then, did have an understanding of justifiable abstraction. It probably goes too far to regard this understanding as involving a commitment to an immanentist idea of a concrete universal, especially since Sraffa's ideas are elaborated in terms of arguments about the equilibrium concept in economics rather than in terms of an appraisal of historical forces that was Gramsci's concern.

Nonetheless, the motivation is similar in each. Both tie concepts and generalisation closely to the historical process, and reject the idea that concepts and generalisation operate in a timeless, transcendental space. Thus it seems fair to say that Sraffa drew on Gramsci's thinking in his own first significant attempt at critique in economics.

Wittgenstein and the critique of meaning: rule-following and family resemblance

The episode in which Sraffa is said to have caused Wittgenstein to doubt his early *Tractatus* ([1921] 1961) framework involved a critique of that early framework. Wittgenstein had understood the meaning of a term to be the object which that term names, and had then sought to explain language as a configuration of names that could be mapped out in a logical structure of thought. Sraffa, however, asked Wittgenstein to explain to him the logical form of a gesture, giving as an example a famous Italian gesture used to express contempt (Malcolm, 1958). A gesture, of course, has its meaning in specific contexts, and thus cannot be grasped purely as a piece of language. In posing his question to Wittgenstein, then, Sraffa required that Wittgenstein consider how concepts function in practical settings. Indeed, the gesture in question could be delivered in an obscene manner. Thus Sraffa also unveiled meaning hidden from ordinary view, since one had to understand context to know whether a gesture had this additional dimension.

When Wittgenstein abandoned his *Tractatus* picture theory of meaning, he recognised that representation is only one of the uses to which language is put. Thus, understanding how language is used in particular practices in people's everyday experience is as important as understanding its representational features. 'Look at the sentence as an instrument, and at its sense as its employment,' Wittgenstein said (1958:§421). This was famously explained in terms of the idea of a 'language-game', or the idea that language is used in localised connections to accomplish particular kinds of things. A language-game, moreover, is linked to the notion of a 'form of life'. '[T]he term "language-game" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life' (*ibid.*:§23). Both of these notions, it seems fair to say, reflect a kind of critique not unlike that which we see in Gramsci and Sraffa. In the first place, understanding concepts and ideas depends on placing them in their practical context. Second, doing so often reveals features of those concepts and ideas that are otherwise not obvious. In effect, in his later philosophy, Wittgenstein problematises the whole notion of 'language itself as an object of study.'

How, then, ought one to understand a language-game? Central to Wittgenstein's answer is his treatment of how to follow the rules of a game. Following a rule competently depends upon seeing how that rule functions in its language-game, within the form of life in which it is embedded. This is fundamentally a *practical* rather than an *intellectual* (interpretive) task: 'any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot

give it any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning' (*ibid.*: §198). In effect, then, obeying a rule entails commitment to a set of practices and, Wittgenstein emphasises, ultimately has to be done 'blindly' (*ibid.*: §219). Indeed, to only '*think* one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule' (*ibid.*: §202). This presents a far different picture of rules and rule-following from that found in a purely language-oriented point of view. When rules and rule-following are a part of a set of activities and entire forms of life, they are interwoven with other rules and practices rather than being discrete entities. This further complicates the meanings we give to words which become in fact 'a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing' that at most have a 'family resemblance' to one another (*ibid.*: §66).

How do these ideas relate to those advanced for Gramsci and Sraffa above? My argument is that the chief points of contact between these ideas of Wittgenstein and those of Gramsci and Sraffa arise from the former's emphasis on rule-following and family resemblance. Rule-following relates to the emphasis Gramsci and Sraffa place on equilibria (or settled states of affairs of any sort) as being transitory and temporary. Family resemblance relates to their understanding of reasonable abstraction and generalisation.

The idea that equilibrium might be catastrophic may seem foreign to Wittgenstein's later ideas. But a less dramatic rendering of the term 'catastrophic' as unstable and changeable can be argued to capture an important dimension of Wittgenstein's understanding of what is involved in following rules in a language-game. Following a rule is not a matter of associating the past uses of a term with their occasions of use, and then inductively applying that term in like circumstances in the future. Following a rule presupposes a commitment to participate in the form of life in which that language-game is played. Such commitment on the part of many individuals establishes a framework in which meanings may evolve, as when individuals apply and accept the use of a term in new contexts. Consequently, if we see language-games as having equilibrium-like properties, in the sense that a collection of meanings within a language-game at any one time possess a set of relatively identifiable relationships towards one another, then because these relationships may be transformed and reconfigured as the language-game is played, these equilibrium relationships may also become 'unstable' and 'changeable'.

Wittgenstein's idea of the meaning of a concept as a family resemblance suggests much the same idea, though in a more static sense. Putting aside change in meaning, a concept at any one time constitutes a combination of applications and senses that stand in uncertain relation to one another, since no central or essential sense unites all the ways in which the concept may be used. Thus, the family resemblance notion suggests that concepts are like equilibria that contain discordant elements—a notion not far removed from Gramsci's catastrophic equilibrium idea.

Wittgenstein's *Investigations* philosophy is often seen as a rejection of metaphysics and of the forms of abstraction on which metaphysics depends. But this hardly implies that he rejected the very idea of generality itself. Rather, for Wittgenstein,

generality is a product of family resemblance—the generality of a concept is produced out of the myriad overlapping and criss-crossing senses in which that concept is used. This means, however, that since there is no single—therefore essential—meaning shared by all of the ways in which an expression is used, we accordingly have no way of specifying concepts apart from describing their actual uses and conditions of application. Indeed, it seems for Wittgenstein that the entire business of investigating abstract concepts is suspect. Thus while it may be awkward to use the idea of a concrete universal in connection with Wittgenstein’s later views, nonetheless his image of a concept as being constituted out of a family resemblance effectively embeds particularity of use in the very idea of generality.

In offering these remarks about rule-following and family resemblance here, I do not wish to enter into the voluminous debates between philosophers over the meaning and significance of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. Rather, the purpose here is to attempt to show how Wittgenstein’s later orientation may have connections to a critical tradition of ideas that was introduced into Cambridge by Sraffa. What seems interesting in this attempt is that it makes a case for a Marxist influence, albeit translated and indirect, on the later Wittgenstein. The strength of this case, however, depends in part on seeing different traditions of ideas as coming into contact. Prior to his return to Cambridge in the 1920s Wittgenstein was entirely at home in the early analytic, logical atomist philosophy of Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore. But then he came into contact with Sraffa, to whom he records, in the preface to *Philosophical Investigations*, his indebtedness ‘for the most consequential ideas of this book’ (1958:x). I close, then, by looking very briefly at the issue of interacting traditions of ideas.

Interaction of European and British ideas: the displacement of Sraffa and Wittgenstein

My argument in this chapter is that a European tradition of ideas deriving originally from Hegel played a role in the later development of Anglophone philosophy of language, and specifically had an impact on the later thinking of Wittgenstein by way of Sraffa. Moreover, the particular interpretation of Hegel’s thinking involved came by way of Marxism, as formulated by Gramsci in his philosophy of praxis. The argument that Sraffa was the key intermediary may seem odd on the surface, since Wittgenstein was Austrian and should have been no less aware of the critical tradition in European thinking than Sraffa. Were this true, there would not have been a role for Sraffa in influencing Wittgenstein’s later ideas. But as is well known, Wittgenstein was not well acquainted with or interested in the Hegelian tradition. Also, although he had an interest at one point in socialism (and visited Russia in the hope of seeing socialism in practice), he had very little appreciation for Marxism either as a body of ideas or as a political programme. Accordingly, his early work is entirely consonant with work already carried on in Cambridge by Russell, Moore and others. Sraffa’s

subsequent contact with Wittgenstein can accordingly be seen as a vehicle for bringing the European critical tradition—or at least its thrust—to his attention.

Wittgenstein's later work is often regarded as revolutionary. It is revolutionary in that it not only challenged his own (and Russell's and Moore's early ideas), but in that it brought into question the entire approach to philosophy of language dominant in Britain at the time. Wittgenstein's earlier *Tractatus*, while a remarkable contribution, was not revolutionary in the way in which the later *Investigations* was. Why, then, did Wittgenstein become 'revolutionary' in his later work? This long-debated and perhaps unanswerable question has usually been examined in terms of Wittgenstein's genius as a philosopher and his personal intellectual development, and has been little investigated in terms of Sraffa's possible influence on Wittgenstein. But this seems to presuppose that developments within philosophy derive entirely from the nature of ideas within philosophy. It is reasonable to think, of course, that ideas from economics or even politics would not be influential in changing ideas in philosophy. No doubt this has led some to disregard Sraffa's known influence on Wittgenstein. But the argument here is that it was Sraffa's philosophical views—not his economics—that influenced Wittgenstein. Sraffa presumably never explained Marshall's partial equilibrium analysis to Wittgenstein. Rather, he applied the sort of philosophical critique he had advanced against Marshall to Wittgenstein's early assumptions.

However, I am not attempting here to explain the revolutionary nature of Wittgenstein's later philosophy in terms of Sraffa's *personal* influence. I am suggesting, rather, that individuals are bearers of intellectual traditions, and that it is their contact with one another as such bearers that produces revolutionary changes in ideas. Thus Sraffa's displacement from Italy to Britain by the rise of Mussolini brought two histories of ideas into proximity with one another that had previously been largely separate. But there is a special dimension to this particular occasion of contact. When such contacts occur, more often than not, communication between individuals is not successful, because their different paradigmatic orientations involve such different structures and organisation of ideas as to effectively preclude it. Certainly Sraffa was not the only individual working in Britain whose intellectual antecedents were not familiar or at home there. Nor was he the only such individual with whom Wittgenstein came into contact. But his particular inheritance—the critical tradition—offered a means of engagement with British intellectual work which other non-British traditions may not have possessed. That is, by showing contradictions in Marshall's neoclassical system that derived from its critique as a system of ideas functioning within an historical framework, Sraffa was able to make relevant his own thinking about the market economy. Sraffa's ideas were revolutionary in economics, then, specifically because they were from the European critical tradition that often operated by revealing a hidden 'historicist' dimension to systems of ideas which claimed to be timeless and universal in their abstraction. And such revelation could be the undoing precisely of their claims to universality.

Wittgenstein arguably took up his revolutionary mantle from Sraffa through this particular intermediation. By exposing his own earlier ideas to critical examination, he demonstrated the place and priority of his later framework. Again, this is far from saying that the content of Sraffa's thinking about economics is what is revolutionary in the later Wittgenstein. Rather, it is to say that Wittgenstein's later philosophical ideas were revolutionary because they presupposed the same philosophical posture of critique that Sraffa's (and Gramsci's) approaches possessed. In the British thinking of the first half of the twentieth century, which largely lacked a way of reflexively seeing ideas functioning within historical and social contexts, bringing this way of thinking to meaning and language was indeed revolutionary. Thus it seems that revolutionary shifts in ideas may not be so much a matter of what individuals reason and argue (though this is not to deny Sraffa and Wittgenstein's respective remarkable intellectual abilities). Rather, such shifts seem to come about because of confrontations between entire traditions of ideas. Some such confrontations, obviously, are more productive than others. In the instance examined here, a particularly productive confrontation in traditions of ideas has been argued to have involved the reformulation and re-application of ideas central to the Marxist tradition to twentieth-century philosophy of language in Britain.¹

Note

- 1 I am indebted to Gavin Kitching and Nigel Pleasants for helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

References

- Andrews, D. (1996) 'Nothing is hidden: a Wittgensteinian interpretation of Sraffa', *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 20, 763–77.
- Bharadwaj, K. (1989) 'Piero Sraffa: the man and the scholar—a tribute', in *Themes in Value and Distribution. Classical Theory Reappraised*, London: Unwin Hyman.
- Davis, J. (1988) 'Sraffa, Wittgenstein and neoclassical economics', *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 12, 29–36.
- (1993) 'Sraffa, interdependence and demand: the Gramscian influence', *Review of Political Economy* 5(1), 22–39.
- (1998) 'Sraffa's early philosophical thinking', *Review of Political Economy* 10(4), 477–91.
- Ginzburg, Andrea (1998) 'Sraffa and social analysis: some methodological aspects', unpublished.
- Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, edited by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith, New York: International.
- Malcolm, N. (1958) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Maneschi, A. (1986) 'A comparative evaluation of Sraffa's "The laws of returns under competitive conditions" and its Italian precursor', *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 10, 1–12.
- Mongioli, G. (1996) 'Sraffa's critique of Marshall: a reassessment', *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 20, 207–24.

- Naldi, N. (2000) 'The friendship between Piero Sraffa and Antonio Gramsci in the years 1919–1927', *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 7(1), 79–114.
- Panico, C. and Salvadori, N. (1994) 'Sraffa, Marshall and the problem of returns', *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 1 (2), 323–43.
- Roncaglia, A. (1978) *Sraffa and the Theory of Prices*, Chichester: Wiley.
- Sraffa, P. (1925) 'Sulle relazione fra costo e quantità prodotta', *Annali di Economia* 2, 277–328.
- (1926) 'The laws of returns under competitive conditions', *Economic Journal* 36, 535–50.
- (1960) *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1958) *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1961) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Part IV

Disjunctions

8 Wittgenstein, Winch and Marx

Ted Benton

As a philosophy student in a provincial university in the mid 1960s, I found myself instantly attracted to Wittgensteinian philosophy. Proponents of the Oxford-influenced analytical philosophy then dominant in academic philosophy quite deliberately avoided, even rather contemptuously dismissed, the sort of direct intellectual engagement with pressing moral and political issues which had brought me into the discipline. In the face of this disappointment, practitioners of the Wittgensteinian legacy provided a welcome alternative vision of a more engaged and 'serious' intellectual commitment: they practised their philosophy as if it really mattered! I shared with fellow students the pleasures of 'discipleship': watching B movies in the afternoons, giving away trees to one another, and repeating Wittgenstein's philosophical jokes. But these were also times of political radicalisation: the anti-war movement, the civil rights and later 'black power' movement in the USA, the growing labour and student unrest in the UK, and throughout Europe. New ideas found their way into our student culture: the thoughts of Chairman Mao, Marcuse's denunciations of 'one-dimensional' consumer capitalism, and the beginnings of an awareness of the renewal of creative Marxist thought in France, Italy and elsewhere. By the late 1960s these ideas were being debated with unforgettable intensity in student protest demonstrations and occupations, but remained excluded from the academic syllabus.

Before going to university I had developed strong leftist political commitments, partly from my early experiences as a working-class boy growing up in the so-called 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire', partly from my previous experiences as a trainee teacher and subsequently teaching in a pioneer comprehensive school. The political ferment of the late 1960s was, therefore, a kind of political re-awakening for me; I came to reflect on the extent to which the experience of becoming a philosopher in the Wittgensteinian tradition had been one of depoliticisation, of disengagement from the wider public sphere: the air of seriousness and commitment turned out to be rather narrowly focused on one's personal relationship to intellectual work. The sort of public political engagement to wider social issues which I increasingly needed was largely absent. This self-questioning was brought to a head by the abrupt surfacing of the moral and political gulf between myself and my most admired Wittgensteinian tutor.

This began to make sense of some sources of puzzlement which had already emerged, unresolved, in my Wittgenstein studies. One was Wittgenstein's national identity. The thinker and his thought had been thoroughly appropriated, first through the relationship to Russell, then through the development of the later work at Cambridge, as a distinctively British 'product'. But were there no German-language philosophical influences on Wittgenstein? Didn't he now and again make references to Schopenhauer and others? Could we identify sources for his ideas in the continental philosophical traditions? Such questions were taboo. They never figured in our lectures, and we were unmistakably discouraged from asking them. Wittgenstein was not just an honorary Englishman, but, more significantly, a 'one-off', a philosophical genius, *sui generis*. A second puzzle was related to this, but much more specific. In his preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein (1963:vii) had written:

Even more than to this—always certain and forcible—criticism I am indebted to that which a teacher at this University, Mr P.Sraffa, for many years unceasingly practised on my thoughts. I am indebted to *this* stimulus for the most consequential ideas of this book.

A little undergraduate research was necessary for me to make the discovery that 'Mr P.Sraffa' was an eminent Marxist economist, author of a book entitled *The Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities*. Wittgenstein's acknowledgement was profound and quite unequivocal, yet no echo of the voice of a man who could write about the commodification of human labour had ever been heard in the Wittgenstein of our classes and lectures.

Subsequently, as a philosophy lecturer located in a sociology department, I had the opportunity to explore these questions about the possible relationship between Marxism and Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Against the common view on the left that Wittgenstein's philosophy was fundamentally conservative ('philosophy... leaves everything as it is'; Wittgenstein, 1963:§124), I tried to find parallels between Marx and Wittgenstein which might make sense of the latter's acknowledgement to Sraffa. In the absence of the biographical insights now available to us through the excellent work of Ray Monk, I sought evidence in the texts. First, Wittgenstein's view of philosophical questions as puzzles which arise when language escapes from its place in the everyday practice of social life. This has its parallel in Marx's and Engels's notion (derived from Feuerbach) of intellectual alienation: 'Hitherto men have always made up wrong ideas about themselves... The products of their brains have got out of their hands. They, the creators, have bowed down before their creations' (Marx and Engels, 1976:23). The parallel extends also the therapeutic practice of resolving philosophical puzzles. Compare:

One of the most difficult tasks confronting philosophers is to descend from the world of thought to the actual world... The philosophers only have to dissolve their language into ordinary language, from which it is abstracted, to recognise it as the distorted language of the actual world

and to realise that neither thoughts nor language in themselves form a realm of their own, that they are only manifestations of actual life.

(Marx and Engels, 1976:446–7)

with:

What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.

(Wittgenstein, 1963:116)

This way of thinking about philosophy in both Wittgenstein and Marx is linked to their common view of language as intimately interwoven with social practice, and of meaning as similarly dependent on the interpretative context of practical life. In Wittgenstein, this is most clearly illustrated in his concepts of language-game' and 'form of life', and is the central point of his 'private language' argument. For Marx and Engels:

Language is as old as consciousness, language *is* practical, real consciousness that exists for other men as well, and only therefore does it also exist for me; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men.

(Marx and Engels, 1976:51)

Set against the most obvious reading of the dictum 'philosophy leaves everything as it is', philosophy is also characterised by Wittgenstein (1963:§109) as a 'battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language'. The language of philosophy, abstracted from its practical context of life, imposes on us mis-apprehensions of that life. It is systematically misleading to the extent that real intellectual struggle is needed to get a clear view of the way things are. There is a possible opening out here to something like the Marxian notion of ideology, not as a deliberately constructed lie, but as a distortion of consciousness spontaneously produced by the very forms of social experience. In Wittgenstein's thought, 'bewitchment' arises from the difference between practical mastery of skills such as language-use ('knowing how to go on'), and being able to give an articulate account of the practice. The difference between knowing the sound of a clarinet and being able to describe it is another example Wittgenstein uses. Philosophical puzzles, and the mis-apprehensions of practical life from which they derive, are symptoms of this difference. Wittgenstein (1963:§664) makes the point with a distinction between 'depth' and 'surface' grammar. The latter is close to our ordinary understanding of grammatical form, and misleads us into supposing that the sentence 'I have a pain in my ear' locates some object in the same way as 'I have a stone in my shoe', but some mysterious sort of object to which only the utterer of the sentence has access. Assembling reminders of how pain-talk is taught and learned, how it is used to elicit help or sympathy, is Wittgenstein's way of leading his readers to the 'depth grammar' of such language-uses.

There is a striking parallel here with Marx's own use of the contrasts between surface and depth, appearance and reality, to characterise the difference between ideological forms of consciousness—those, in capitalist societies, formed on the basis of the experience of market exchange—and objective concepts formed on the basis of analysing the causally more fundamental relations of production.

However, striking as these parallels are, it would be wrong to read too much into them. We now know that Wittgenstein was strongly sympathetic to Stalin's Russia, for reasons which probably had little to do with the realities of that regime, but he was no Marxist in his philosophy. In Marx, the critique of ideology is not simply a matter of putting an end to philosophical puzzlement. Rather, it is linked to a critical relationship to a mode of social life which systematically produces forms of mis-apprehension in its subjects, mis-apprehensions which bind them to unacceptable forms of unfreedom and dependency. When we talk of workers pricing themselves out of a job, of rises and falls in the demand for labour, and so on, we are thinking of human labour as a kind of commodity. This is, one might say, the 'surface grammar' of labour-market talk. But this is an odd sort of commodity which systematically enslaves and impoverishes those who sell it, while enhancing the power and wealth of those who purchase it. Odder still that it is produced not in factories but in families, who produce it without thought of the profitability of its sale. Marx's exposure of the 'depth grammar' of the labour market is given in his systematic critical theory of capitalist production, with its value-theory and central concepts of surplus value and exploitation.

By contrast, Wittgenstein is solely concerned to provide descriptions of such imaginary or exemplary 'language-games' as are required to dispel specific philosophical puzzles—in logic, theory of meaning, epistemology, aesthetics or philosophy of mind. He was not a proto-social theorist, and would certainly have been strongly opposed to the sort of systematic social-theoretical project to which Marx was committed.

In the 1970s and subsequently, it was just such a project of systematic and explanatory social theory that I was concerned to defend—but in such a way as to preserve what still seemed to me to be key philosophical achievements in Wittgenstein: the recognition of language-use as inseparably tied to social practice, the multiplicity of the uses of language in social life and, above all, the private language argument. At that time, the deepest challenge to such a recon-ciliation was Peter Winch's brilliantly iconoclastic *The Idea of a Social Science*. Though there are some internal tensions in that work, it was, I think reasonably, generally read as an appropriation of Wittgenstein's treatment of linguistic meaning as rule-following in favour of an anti-positivist, hermeneutic methodology for the social studies. At the core of this assimilation of Wittgenstein to hermeneutics was an extension of Wittgenstein's account of meaning to include non-discursive forms of social action, and a closely connected view of social relations as 'expressions of ideas'. Winch's key conclusions were:

- 1 The proper purpose of sociological (anthropological, etc.) enquiry is to grasp the meanings assigned to their actions and relationships by participants in the forms of social life under investigation: participants' understanding is authoritative, since it is their rules, not those invented by the investigator, which provide the criteria of identity for the social practices in which they engage.
- 2 In this respect, as in others, the social studies are quite unlike the natural sciences, so that it is a fundamental mistake to conduct or represent the social studies as sciences.
- 3 Though, Winch concedes, there may be some case for a limited development of technical concepts in the social studies, these are allowable only if they clearly 'presuppose' or are 'logically tied to' participants' own forms of understanding.

Challenging and powerfully argued as Winch's demolition of 'the idea of a social science' was, it was open to criticism at a number of points. First, the assimilation of the meaning of non-discursive action to that of language-use is questionable. Sometimes a non-verbal gesture or facial expression does have a verbal equivalent, but this is not always or even generally the case with non-verbal social action and interaction. At the symposium from which this book emerged, the participants were required to stand as the fellows entered the dining hall at mealtimes. Practices such as this may be said to 'show', or 'express' not so much ideas as relations of power and status. For the sociologist or social historian, interpreting them might involve tracing their history, investigating the material, cultural, conscious and unconscious sources of the reproduction and persistence of such rituals in some institutions while they have fallen into disuse elsewhere: asking current participants how they understand the ritual would certainly be of interest, but would provide only a small part of the evidence needed for a thoroughgoing enquiry of this sort.

But the answers given by the participants expose yet another problem for Winch's view of social practices or relations as 'expressions of ideas'; in this case, the workshop participants volunteered quite a wide range of interpretations of their conformity to the ritual: a wish to avoid embarrassing our hosts, a desire not to undermine the position of college servants who had issued us instructions, a calculation that the issue was too insignificant to mount what would inevitably appear to be a protest, and so on. It might even have been that some of those participating did so out of respect for the senior fellows, out of a desire to be accepted into the community, or even out of a simple wish to conform. So, one and the same action could express a very wide range of participants' ideas about what they were doing and why. The identity of social practices and the ideas they express cannot be sustained.

Though Winch's philosophy of science famously renders problematic mutual understanding between radically different cultures, what it seems to understate is the intellectual challenge involved in understanding one's own culture and society. Wittgenstein's emphasis on the distinction between

practical know-how, being able to follow a rule, on the one hand, and being able to give an account of a practice or state the rules implicit in it, on the other, might have alerted Winch to this. If philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of the intelligence by means of language, then, on Winch's own account of the language-like character of social life, understanding of social relations and practices must likewise involve just such a battle. If, as is manifestly the case, this battle does not yield consensus, either among participants or among their professional interpreters, then what has Winch to offer by way of criteria for deciding between rival accounts?

An important strand in Winch's case against the possibility of practising social studies as sciences is his contrast between the regularities which derive from rule-following and the regular event sequences which figure in causal laws in the natural sciences. In Winch's view, the search for causal laws in social science rests on a fundamental confusion between these two types of regularity. Again, Winch's argument is not conclusive. First, it rests on his unquestioning acceptance of a broadly Humean account of causal laws as characterising 'constant conjunctions' in our experience of event-sequences. Alternative accounts of causal laws, such as the critical realist view of them as tendencies of underlying mechanisms, are available, and would at the very least require a reworking of Winch's anti-naturalist argument. Second, having distinguished social action from other possible objects of study in terms of their meaningfulness, Winch makes an illicit jump to the claim that the sole aim of the social studies is to interpret the meanings of social actions. Only if this were true would the argument that the rule-regularities constituting the meaning of social actions are not causal regularities demonstrate the inappropriateness of causal explanation in the social studies. So, for example, Durkheim's classic study of suicide deployed statistical evidence to support his claim that religious confession, family situation, occupation and other aspects of their 'social milieu' were causally efficacious in either disposing individuals towards or preserving them from suicide. More recent sociological work linking social class and occupational positions to morbidity and mortality rates also claims to make causal connections between social facts and differential life-chances. Now, a Winchian or other anti-naturalist philosopher of social science might well dispute the methodological or philosophical basis for such causal claims. However, to do so successfully, they would not be able to rely, as Winch does, on the claim that they confuse the two types of regularity: social scientists are well aware that they are not attempting to interpret the meanings of suicidal action, or indeed the meanings for participants of family membership or religious confession. They are investigating the causes and consequences of these various states and conditions, often causes or consequences of which the participants may be unaware.

Finally, Winch's anti-causal argument is problematic in his own terms, since it assumes that participants' understanding itself is limited to the hermeneutic processes of achieving mutual understanding of meanings. It supposes, in short, that all social action is what Habermas calls 'communicative action', leaving out of account 'strategic action': that is, action

through which actors seek to achieve their aims by behaving in a calculative and instrumental way in their dealings with other individuals and institutions. Strategic action certainly presupposes hermeneutic understanding, but it also involves complex causal imputations, prediction, counterfactual judgements and so on. In all complex societies (probably *all* societies) actors successfully negotiate their way through social life only in virtue of more-or-less complex and sophisticated stocks of rule-of-thumb causal knowledge and social-theoretical skill. Often this is more tacit than articulate, but when practical dilemmas, moments of personal crisis, moral or political challenges and so on bear in upon us, we are all liable to articulate and intellectually scrutinise such tacit underpinnings of our lives. As Gramsci put it 'everyone is a philosopher'. The response of a manual worker employed by a university in the south of England provides a clear example. He wrote a letter to the 'house magazine' in protest at a decision by management to use e-mail for future communication with employees:

May I point out that a large proportion of University staff have no access to computer terminals nor email. These include electricians, plumbers, fitters, carpenters, cleaners, porters, technicians, gardeners, groundsmen and me. Are we, the manual brigade, being marginalised by an elitist computerised administration who consider us a lower caste not worthy of information or an opinion?... We may be light on computer skills but we do have real skills, which include the skill to pull the plug.

This text clearly involves the deployment of a complex and sophisticated causal understanding of institutional relationships, including concepts of class and status ('caste'), the differential positions in hierarchical relationships of administrators and 'the manual brigade', and the consequences for access to means of communication, but at the same time the reciprocal dependency of upper positions in the hierarchy on the practical co-operation of the lower. This example suggests that if we follow Winch in assigning authority to participants' understanding, then we have to allow the legitimacy of causal theories in the social studies, since these are already present in the way participants understand their society and how to deal with the challenges it throws up for them. Again, a key anti-naturalistic argument appears to fall.

Against Winch's anti-naturalistic arguments, the above considerations favour the following three theses:

- 1 Society may properly be regarded as a causal order which exists and has effects sometimes independently of either the particular beliefs of social actors or the shared understandings of communities. Indeed, the exercise of the causal powers established with social structures may play a part in the shaping of those forms of understanding.
- 2 Participants' understandings unavoidably include causal social theorising, provoked and necessitated by the exigencies of negotiating everyday life.

- 3 Social scientists are themselves also lay actors, and their tacit theorising as such is an important source of 'raw materials' in social scientific theorising. However, they have in virtue of their professional training and institutional location access to rigorously collected data, empirically grounded accounts of other societies and historical periods, and opportunities to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of rival fully articulated causal social theories. The causal theories they develop are therefore not different in kind from those of lay participants, and will in part be established through and testable by dialogue with lay theories, but at their best they will have more depth, scope, and reliability, and be more broadly empirically grounded.

A further, increasingly pressing, difficulty for an anti-naturalist philosophy of social science such as Winch's is its failure to grasp the 'metabolism' between human societies and their naturally given conditions of existence. Humans are themselves materially embodied, while forms of social life persist at all only insofar as they have social organisation, technical skills and so on sufficient to sustain the bodily functions of their members, as well as the material and energy requirements of their social life through continuous interchange with nature. As the organisational forms and dynamics of contemporary capitalism render this metabolism increasingly hazardous and problematic, so our requirement for social scientific work capable of integrating social and natural scientific forms of understanding becomes more urgent.

For reasons such as these, it has seemed to me important to resist Winch's strong anti-naturalism. However, it remains an open question how far Wittgenstein's philosophy is implicated in this. How defensible was Winch's assimilation of Wittgenstein to a radical hermeneutics in the social sciences? And, indeed, were there aspects of Winch's own philosophical work which cut against the dominant reading of his early and most influential text?

First, Winch's extension of the Wittgensteinian view of linguistic meaning to include the meaning of social action is at the heart of two particularly problematic implications many readers have seen in Winch's *Idea of a Social Science*. The first of these is that radically different cultures, systematically at odds with one another in the pattern of meanings they employ, will be mutually unintelligible. The anthropologist's attempt to understand another culture (a 'primitive society', as Winch put it) is bound to fail. The second, intuitively implausible, implication is that participants in forms of social life cannot be mistaken about the nature of their own social life: for Winch, it is participants' understanding, not that of their external observers, which defines what is going on. Winch adamantly repudiated both implications, but whether he could have done so consistently remains to be seen.

However, it seems clear that the key move underlying these problems is not licensed by Wittgenstein's own view of meaning. It seems clear that Wittgenstein invents and describes 'language-games', to show, among other things, that what settles linguistic meaning is the practical context of social

interaction with which language-use is interwoven. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein (1963:§198) says:

‘Whatever I do is, on some interpretation, in accord with the rule.’—That is not what we ought to say, but rather: any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning.

The embedding of language-use in customs, institutions or ‘forms of life’ establishes what is to count as correct or incorrect usage. But what settles meaning cannot itself be open to interpretation. If the meaning of social action also ‘hangs in the air’, then we are locked into an infinite regress: in the absence of an extra-linguistic context of practical interaction all interpretations must ‘hang in the air’.

Over and again Wittgenstein emphasises how the language-games we play are possible only because certain facts about our own nature and that of material objects, media and substances hold true. For example:

And if things were quite different from what they actually are—if there were for instance no characteristic expression of pain, of fear, of joy; if rule became exception and exception rule; or if both became phenomena of roughly equal frequency—this would make our normal language-games lose their point. The procedure of putting a lump of cheese on a balance and fixing the price by the turn of the scale would lose its point if it frequently happened for such lumps to suddenly grow or shrink for no obvious reason.

(Wittgenstein, 1963:§142)

This takes us still further from the anti-naturalism of *The Idea of a Social Science*. Not only does Wittgenstein’s view of the dependence of the institution of language-use on the context of practical social interaction imply that social life is not wholly constituted by linguistic meaning, but the persistence of social practices themselves is contingent on underlying consistencies in human nature and the natural world. These features of both ourselves and the natural world are, for Wittgenstein, preconditions for meaningful social interaction, and for language itself. They are therefore prior to and independent of the language-games they enable us to play, the meanings they allow us to express. Though Wittgenstein would not have licensed this move, there seems no good reason why his illustrations should not be represented in the form of transcendental arguments, with realist conclusions about both human and external nature: conclusions which cut strongly against the cultural relativism and ‘language-fundamentalism’ of the readings of both Winch and Wittgenstein himself that have been associated with the hermeneutic and ‘linguistic turn’ in recent social science.

But there are passages in *The Idea of a Social Science* itself which also cut against this dominant reading (notably Winch 1963:17, where his treatment of the Humean problem of induction is a transcendental argument from analysis of our everyday

object-language). More significantly, the later essay on 'Understanding a primitive society' (1970) directly addresses the problem of cross-cultural intelligibility in terms close to Wittgenstein's more naturalistic view of human nature. In this essay, Winch is much clearer about the target of his attack: a scientific, or reductive, ethnocentric imposition of 'our' system of meaning upon 'other' cultures, obliterating the distinctiveness of 'their' way of living in and making sense of the world. The argument focuses on the rationality or otherwise of Zande magical practices. Winch rejects two possible positions on this: that there is just one standard of rationality, Western scientific rationality, and the Zande practice fails to meet its requirements, and that there are plural rationalities, though Western scientific rationality is superior. It has seemed to some readers that he must therefore be committed to a third logical possibility: that there are plural standards of rationality, with no culturally neutral criteria by which to evaluate their relative merits (relativism). In fact, Winch (1970:197, 99). attempts, very plausibly, to define a fourth possibility:

we have to create a new unity for the concept of intelligibility, having a certain relationship to our old one and perhaps requiring a considerable realignment of our categories. We are not seeking a state in which things will appear to us just as they do to members of S [alien society], and perhaps such a state is unattainable anyway. But we are seeking a way of looking at things which goes beyond our previous way in that it has in some way taken account of and incorporated the other way that members of S have of looking at things. Seriously to study another way of life is necessarily to seek to extend our own—not simply to bring the other way within the existing boundaries of our own, because the point about the latter in their present form is that they *ex hypothesi* exclude that other.

So the serious effort of coming to understand a culture different from our own is not an *a priori* impossibility. On the contrary, it has an important ethical and critical purpose: it will add to our understanding of the diversity of possible ways of living and assigning meaning to life, and through that give us a clearer understanding of the (prior) limits of our own.

But Winch still has to resolve the problem which his anti-naturalistic, hermeneutic philosophy of social science poses for him: given that cross-cultural understanding is both possible and desirable, how can it be achieved? In the final, intriguing and suggestive passages of 'Understanding a primitive society', Winch gets to grips with this question. Where, he says, we are puzzled by an aspect of an alien culture, we may look for clues as to its significance by appealing to certain 'bridgeheads'. These are provided by what he calls 'limiting notions', and they are three in number: birth, death and sex. Beyond appealing to the authority of Vico and T.S.Eliot, Winch provides little in the way of argument for his choice of this trinity and no others. Indeed, what he means by a limiting notion remains unclear. There seem to be four criteria at work in his discussion. First, they are inescapably involved in every sort of human society: what I will

call the universality criterion. Second, they are 'limiting' in the sense that they are not events in life, but mark its boundaries. It is clear what this means in relation to birth and death, but what about sex? Though Winch does not seem resistant to Eliot's equation of sex with copulation, it becomes clear that what he has in mind is something close to what would now be called gender-identity, but thought of in a rather rigid and 'essentialist' way. He says: 'The life of a man is a man's life and the life of a woman is a woman's life: the masculinity and the femininity are not just components in the life, they are its mode' (1970:110). So sex, or gender, is a 'limiting notion' in the rather different sense that it is an underlying condition or state which determines our mode of being in the world and shapes our sense of what is significant in it. Finally, the limiting notions set, for any particular form of social life, the possibilities inherent in it for doing good or evil. So, we might say, they establish its 'ethical space', identify what aspects of a form of life will be morally significant.

Now, I think these ideas are full of promise, but for Winch they are deeply paradoxical. This is for two related reasons. First, the claim to universality. Winch says all 'known' human societies, seeming to suggest that he is offering a fallible empirical generalisation. But he offers no evidence in support of this, and in any case it would involve him in a vicious circularity. Any such generalisation could only be arrived at once cross-cultural understanding had been achieved, whereas the limiting notions are supposed to provide us with necessary conditions for such cross-cultural understanding. Still more seriously for Winch himself, if we follow the methodology of *The Idea of a Social Science* and assign authority to participants' own understanding, then there is nothing universal at all about the limiting notions. A Christian, a Hindu and an atheist will have radically different views of death. Only for the atheist, interestingly, is death a limiting notion in the required sense. Again, even if we are sceptical, as is now fashionable, about the ethnography of Margaret Mead and other cultural anthropologists, it would be hard to justify the assumption that gender identity is lived in the same way in all cultures and through all historical periods. Even the relatively short time that has elapsed since Winch wrote these texts has seen deep shifts in the constitution of gender relations, such that his comments seem to come from another—almost unrecognisable—world.

So, if birth, sex and death are to be understood hermeneutically, in terms of the specific cultural formations to which they belong, then they are not human universals: they are as diverse and incommensurable as the other contents of radically different cultures. If the 'limiting notions' are to do the philosophical work Winch assigns to them they must be given a meaning independent of that assigned to them in any particular culture. Only if this can be done can they operate as 'bridgeheads' between radically different cultural universes. And, further, the criteria of identity in terms of which the student of another culture recognises 'sex', 'birth' or 'death' will be ones drawn not from the form of life under study, but from the context and purposes of her own enquiry: the cost to Winch of conceding the 'limiting notions' is the abandonment of the hermeneutic, anti-naturalistic methodology of *The Idea of a Social Science*.

This can be taken still further. What is interesting about Winch's selection of the sex, birth and death trinity is that not only are these shared features of all human social forms, but they are also shared between humans and other species. Might this mean that we have, in this shared natural basis for the diversity but mutual intelligibility of *human* societies, also a basis for cross-species understanding? And, taking into account what Winch says about the edifying, self-transformative character of a serious study of another culture, might this not suggest a comparable ethical and cognitive point in serious study of the forms of life of non-human species? This is naturalism of a particularly radical kind (to which, incidentally, I am very sympathetic)!

Winch, of course, is aware of this direction of thought, and quickly moves to block it: 'Unlike beasts, men do not merely live, but have a conception of life. This is not something that is simply added to their life; rather, it changes the very sense that the word "life" has, when applied to men' (1970:108). But what, we might ask, grounds this systematic ambiguity in the word 'life'? Is there really no semantic connection at all between our use of the words 'life' and 'death' when we are talking about humans and when we are talking about animals? Why is Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblance' not brought into play here? And if Winch is to insist on the radical separation between humans and animals on the basis of the former's conception of life and death, then what is to stop the imposition of a radical boundary between different cultures in virtue of their different conceptions? Back to relativism!

So there is a persistent tension in Winch between the naturalistic drift of much of his thought on the one hand, and an over-riding ontological commitment to anti-naturalism on the other. My suggestion is that though Winch deploys Wittgenstein as crucial philosophical support for his radical anti-naturalism, especially in *The Idea of a Social Science*, it is rather the philosophical legacy of Wittgenstein that underlies the naturalistic tendencies in his thought. Wittgenstein has no difficulty with the notion of human universals. On the contrary, as we have seen, the existence of 'natural expressions' of inner states is necessary for our acquisition of a language for talking about our mental life at all. Addressing Winch's own problem of cross-cultural understanding, Wittgenstein says: 'The common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language' (1963:§206; see also §§242, 244, 281). And, notwithstanding apparently anti-naturalistic asides on understanding lions and truth-telling dogs, Wittgenstein does not work with the sort of dualism of beast and man to which Winch is so strongly committed: And now look at a wriggling fly and at once these difficulties vanish and pain seems to be able to get a foothold here' (*ibid.*: §284). And again: 'What is the natural expression of an intention?—Look at a cat when it stalks a bird; or a beast when it wants to escape' (*ibid.*: §647).

What might we do with Winch's 'limiting notions', taking them in the light of Wittgenstein's naturalism? They offer us a way of thinking about human commonality with other species, not inconsistent with Marx's notion of

humans as 'active natural beings', whose material requirements both enable and constrain the possible forms of social life. At the same time, Winch's insistence on the irreducible plurality of human cultural forms serves to restrain over-zealous 'reductive' tendencies in social theory. Rather, the idea of limiting notions has the potential to enable social theory to comprehend cultural diversity as so many ways of giving sense to shared features, 'nodal points', which constitute the distinctive character of a human life. All cultures must have cultural and institutional ways of dealing with death and bereavement, with gender difference, sexual reproduction and the care of children, but there is no reason to suppose they will deal with these 'inescapable' features of human existence in the same way. Winch's notion that these nodal points in what Marx called our 'species being' also define the ethical space of a form of social life is also an illuminating one. Ethical disagreement can be grounded in, though never ultimately resolved by reference to, the dilemmas posed by alternative ways of addressing the shared requirements for a human existence. Even here, though, Marx must have the last word. Winch's reduction of human commonality to birth, sex and death paradoxically runs the risk of a biologically reductionist reading (the very opposite of what he intends). By contrast, Marx puts at the centre of his view of social and historical life the unavoidable social character of our metabolism with nature: the necessity of co-operative human engagement with nature in order to derive the material requirements of individual and collective life. The ethical implications of the social division of labour, the forms of social oppression and exploitation which flow from it, the social distribution of the products of labour, and the consequences of destructive over-exploitation of nature, remain among the most pressing issues facing us, yet (despite occasional mention elsewhere) this 'limiting notion' fails to make an appearance alongside Winch's 'trinity'.

References

- Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1976) *Collected Works*, vol. 5, London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Monk, R. (1991) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, London: Vintage.
- Winch, P. (1963) *The Idea of a Social Science*, 1st edition, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- (1970) 'Understanding a primitive society', in B. Wilson (ed.) *Rationality*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 78–111.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1963) *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell.

9 Towards a critical use of Marx and Wittgenstein

Nigel Pleasants

It is indeed the business of philosophy and genuine theory to provide the basis for critical evaluation of the forms of life

(Bernstein, 1976:74)

If I describe reality, I describe what I find among men. Sociology must describe our actions and our valuations... It can only report what occurs.

(Wittgenstein, quoted by Waismann, 1965:15)

Philosophy can no more show a man what he should attach importance to than geometry can show a man where he should stand.

(Winch, 1972:191)

Introduction: Marx and Wittgenstein?

As Gavin Kitching observed in the introduction to this volume, at first sight Ludwig Wittgenstein and Karl Marx appear to be about as far apart as it is possible for two philosophers to be. Marx was a systematic constructor of ‘grand theory’ who claimed—in his later work—to have laid open to view the economic ‘laws’ of the capitalist mode of production, and the law-like tendencies of historical progression from one mode of production to another. Wittgenstein, on the other hand—in his later work—denounced philosophical ‘theory’ and ‘explanation’, and advocated careful description of our commonplace everyday actions and uses of language as a therapeutic means by which to overcome the metaphysical conceit of academic philosophy. Anyone who has the barest familiarity with Marx’s *Capital* and Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* will be aware of striking differences in the form and content of these two mature works. Nevertheless, there have been a number of attempts, starting with Rossi-Landi’s seminal ‘Towards a Marxian use of Wittgenstein’ (reprinted in Chapter 10 of this volume), to investigate, or construct, possible connections/relationships between these apparently disparate thinkers.

These attempts at relating Marx and Wittgenstein can be classified into broadly three kinds:¹

- 1 Those hypothesising a possible actual influence of Marx on Wittgenstein, suggesting that Wittgenstein made use of, or developed (not necessarily consciously), some of Marx's ideas or analyses (e.g. Benton, 1976; Janik and Toulmin, 1973; Rossi-Landi).² Various biographical reports indicate that Wittgenstein had *some* experience of Marx's, or Marxist, writings, though how much is not clear (see Rhees, 1981). This is a matter mostly of historical interpretation and speculation, in the domain of intellectual history.
- 2 Those seeking to discern some hitherto unnoticed similarities in the epistemological, ontological, philosophical or sociological views articulated or insinuated by Marx and Wittgenstein (e.g. Easton, 1983; Giddens, 1979:4; Israel, 1979; Rossi-Landi; Rubinstein, 1981). Again, while interesting and provocative, this project is nevertheless a somewhat conventional scholarly exercise in textual interpretation and theoretical construction. In both this and the previous approach the aim of the comparative exercise is extrinsic to the aims of Marx and Wittgenstein themselves.
- 3 Those seeking to use methods or ideas derived from Wittgenstein to reconstruct certain aspects of Marx's thought (or vice versa), or to use ideas and methods from both to inform social and political criticism (e.g. Kitching, 1994; Rossi-Landi). This project is perfectly encapsulated by the thoroughly Wittgensteinian epigraph to Rossi-Landi's article: 'Do not seek for the *meaning* of a philosopher, seek for his use.' I think this epigraph exemplifies the right attitude to both Marx's and Wittgenstein's writings and, moreover, it expresses an attitude which is *intrinsic* to their work (i.e. their hostility to philosophy as a body of doctrine, or 'philosophising' as a worthwhile activity in and of itself).

My own work and thought on Marx and Wittgenstein, as I shall explain in the following section, has been significantly stimulated and shaped by approach (2) above, but I now endorse (3) as the one that best exemplifies the 'spirit', if not the 'letter', of their writings. In the course of this development I have come to see approach (2) as an unwitting example of the kind of thinking to which Wittgenstein was implacably opposed and sought to subvert. This change has followed in the wake of a change in my understanding of what Wittgenstein seeks to stimulate in and through his later writings.

This essay (like many others in this volume) has a pronounced autobiographical and first-personal mode of expression—which is quite central to the approach to Marx's and Wittgenstein's work that I commend. After expositing my preferred 'reading' of Wittgenstein, I will outline how this carries over to my understanding of Marx's use and significance in social and political criticism. I shall then seek to demonstrate how my 'reading' of Wittgenstein informs the project of critical social understanding, a project which I take to constitute the core of Marx's endeavours (see Kitching, 1988). This I shall pursue through an engagement with Peter Winch's 'Wittgensteinian' 'idea of a social science'. Winch has been castigated by radical critics and orthodox social theorists alike for the advocacy of social and

political conservatism that they (mis)read in his work. While critical of Winch's *theory* of social phenomena, I shall try to show that, and how, his much-discussed article 'Understanding a primitive society' indicates a fruitful conception of critical social understanding and social criticism.

Reading Wittgenstein, and Marx in the light of Wittgenstein: from theory to description

As a second-year undergraduate student of philosophy and sociology, I came upon Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and Winch's *Idea of a Social Science* at about the same time (the former on a course in epistemology, and the latter on a course in sociological theory). Winch's book provided me with an orientation to Wittgenstein's philosophy, and a framework within which to interpret it. Textual evidence indicates that this book has exercised a similarly formative influence on most of those social and political theorists and social scientists who exhibit any interest in, or understanding of, Wittgenstein's philosophy (see Pleasants, 1999: ch. 3). It took me a long while to realise just how much my own initial understanding of Wittgenstein owed to Winch's interpretation rather than to a genuine grasp of Wittgenstein's philosophical project. I will examine Winch's interpretation and application of Wittgenstein's philosophy in the next section of this essay.

Philosophical Investigations had a seemingly revolutionary impact on my philosophical thinking. Wittgenstein's remarks provided me with what seemed to be a revelatory insight into the nature of human beings. In particular, I was struck by what I took to be his portrayal of mind, consciousness and meaning as fundamentally *social* phenomena (I was under the thrall of Winch's way of reading Wittgenstein social-theoretically—see next section, below). Wittgenstein's 'private language argument' seemed to show that even our most personal private thoughts and experiences are, despite appearances to the contrary, actually 'constituted' by the social community that we form with others. This 'argument' provided me with an 'ontological picture' (Pleasants, 1999) of the nature and genesis of our basic modes of existence and categories of experience. The compositional form of this picture was that individual experience of consciousness, meaning, etc., is the 'commonsense appearance' of the underlying socially constituted 'reality'. Wittgenstein's private language argument seemed to reveal this 'reality'—albeit in a non-scientific, indeed anti-scientific way.

I thereby managed to convince myself that the very idea of an individual experience, or an individually generated thought, which was not fundamentally social in origin and form, is simply incoherent—an incoherence perpetuated by orthodox 'bourgeois', 'scientific' philosophy. Moreover, this 'socialised' view of the essence of human beings nicely complemented my moral and political stance, for it seemed to entail that life in individualistic, capitalist society was a kind of negation, or denial, of the kind of social beings that we humans essentially are. I believed that Wittgenstein's private language

argument added philosophical authority to Marx's (1989a:244) anti-Feuerbachian aphorism to the effect that 'the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual...it is the ensemble of the social relations'. My original proposal for graduate research (influenced by the literature on Marx and Wittgenstein cited above) was to develop this conviction that Marx's substantive analyses of capitalism and prognosis for socialism could somehow be 'grounded' in the ontological picture of the socially constituted individual that I derived from Wittgenstein's private language argument.

However, despite the 'radical' application of my reading of Wittgenstein, in another sense—a sense that I did not notice at the time—I received his philosophy in much the same manner as I had the other great philosophers, such as Plato, Descartes, Hume and Kant. That is, I interpreted Wittgenstein's remarks as explanatory arguments showing that things were really very different to how previous philosophers had portrayed them and how they seemed to be in our everyday, unreflective thought. The idea that consciousness and meaning are inherently the product of social relations seemed to be both philosophically radical and strongly counter-intuitive. So, despite the apparent radicalness of my understanding of Wittgenstein's philosophy, in a deeper sense that understanding remained consonant with philosophical practice and purpose as traditionally pursued.

In addition to my enthrallment with the new picture of human experience that I (thought I) found in *Philosophical Investigations*, I was also impressed by Wittgenstein's critique of traditional (bourgeois?) Platonic, Cartesian, Lockean and Kantian philosophy. I enthusiastically endorsed, without much thought as to their implications, such statements as the following:

We may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all explanation and description alone must take its place.

(Wittgenstein, 1968:§109)

And:

Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness.

(Wittgenstein, 1972:18)

I tried to take on board Wittgenstein's denunciation of the philosopher's 'craving for generality' which he says issues from 'preoccupation with the method of science' (1972:17). My understanding was that traditional philosophers construct illusory pictures of human experience as a consequence of their rarefied philosophical theorising, an abstract mode of inquiry which divorces itself from real lived practice and sociality, and which reduces social context to the thoughts

and actions of isolated individuals. In a word, I regarded such philosophers as blind to the 'ensemble of the social relations'.

But I did not notice that my 'Wittgensteinian' picture of socially constituted mind, meaning and consciousness was *also* an 'essentialist' account of human being, arrived at through 'explanatory theory', and therefore of exactly the same form as the traditional philosophy that I thought I had rejected. I saw my own favoured ontological picture just as an accurate account of real life, while denigrating other ontological pictures as 'metaphysical' products of abstract philosophical theory. This is a strategy common to many Wittgensteinian philosophers: on the one hand, one's own account is seen and portrayed as a description of what all ordinary non-philosophers believe (or would believe if they could be bothered to examine the issues). And on the other hand, non-Wittgensteinian philosophers are accused of distorting reality through their metaphysical theories and simply talking 'nonsense'. There is perhaps a close analogy here with traditional Marxists, who privilege their own theoretical schemata as corresponding to 'objective reality' while all non-Marxist views are dismissed as 'ideology'. Moreover, it must be admitted that neither Marx nor Wittgenstein themselves were always entirely innocent of attempting this 'conjuring trick' (Wittgenstein, 1968:§308).

When I eventually came to see the contradiction between my endorsement of Wittgenstein's critique of traditional philosophy and my 'Wittgensteinian' picture of 'the human essence', my earlier 'revolutionary' insight was counter-revolutionised. The result of this counter-revolution is that I now take the view that to follow Wittgenstein is to take entirely seriously his recommendation of description in place of 'explanatory' theory. And I try to maintain awareness that the 'craving for generality' and privileged insight into 'reality' can afflict the Wittgensteinian philosopher too.

My view of Wittgenstein's use now is that he demonstrates a way of approaching, and thinking about, the problems and phenomena that interest us, but he offers no special philosophical 'insight' into the phenomena or problems themselves. This way consists in the 'Socratic' presentation of *reminders* about things which, in some way or other, 'we have always known' (1968:§109), but which in various ways we forget, overlook, ignore, deceive ourselves about or become habituated to. Wittgenstein (1968:§122—amended translation) describes his particular way as that of 'perspicuous presentation [*Darstellung*]', the aim of which is to 'produce just that understanding which consists in "seeing connexions"'. This method, of providing 'reminders' through 'perspicuous presentation', 'earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things' (*ibid.*). It is somewhat misleading to call this a 'method' (or a 'reading', or an 'interpretation'); it is, rather, the adoption of a certain *attitude* to the questions that engage one (see Pleasants, 1999: ch. 1).

The most profound consequence of this change in attitude is to recognise, or acknowledge, that Wittgenstein has *nothing* substantive to teach about the things which arouse one's philosophical (and practical) puzzlement. When this is understood and accepted one is thereby moved to give up the quest for a peculiarly

Wittgensteinian—or any other—philosophical perspective, and to concentrate one's attention instead on the issues themselves.³ By this I do not advocate anything quite so apocalyptic or portentous as 'The End of Philosophy', as some Wittgensteinians are wont to do. To the extent that philosophy is about reflecting on and questioning that which is ordinarily taken for granted, as in the Socratic tradition in which I now see Wittgenstein, it is essential to the Wittgensteinian 'attitude' I am commending. What is to be avoided is the tendency—of both Wittgensteinians and Marxists—to automatically assume there must be an authentic 'Wittgensteinian' or 'Marxist' line on whatever engages their interest. In slogan form: philosophy as *activity* is healthy (as Wittgenstein insisted in both his early and late writings); philosophy as *product*, in the form of off-the-shelf theories and ontological pictures, is unhealthy and militates against critical reflection. As Wittgenstein himself once asked: 'What is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is to enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc., and if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life?' (quoted by Malcolm, 1958:39). Conversely, to the extent that philosophy (as activity) is useful, it lies in its capacity to improve one's thinking about 'the important questions of everyday life'.

In a sense, Wittgenstein's way of looking at things really does 'leave...everything as it is' (1968:§124). But it also, at the same time, *changes* everything, for it (can), as he says, *change* the way we look at things (*ibid.*: 144).⁴ This change does not come easily or quickly, and it requires a sustained effort of will rather than intellect,⁵ hence Wittgenstein's (1968:§66) exhortation to '*look and see...don't think, but look!*' To an extent, I regard the successful reading of Wittgenstein as a 'therapeutic' process, the end-state of which is the change in attitude that I am gesturing at. Then, if one is to learn from, or make use of, Wittgenstein's 'way of seeing', one must seek to extend and apply it to new problems, and these problems must be of *personal* interest and significance. As Wittgenstein says of his 'Lecture on ethics' (1965), 'I spoke in the first person. I believe that is quite essential. Here... I can only appear as a person speaking for myself (quoted by Waismann, 1965:16). For me, this encapsulates the stance that one should adopt in reflecting on, and discussing, matters of moral and political significance.

My way of following Wittgenstein carries over to my approach to Marx too. I consider my 'reading' of Wittgenstein to be liberating from a social, political and moral point of view precisely because it does *not* yield any substantive (theoretical or philosophical) picture of such phenomena, or account of the issues. Because I now renounce the idea of any peculiarly Wittgensteinian perspective on the phenomena that Wittgenstein examined in *Philosophical Investigations* and other work, I feel no temptation to construct Wittgensteinian theories, or pictures, of the aspects of social and political life that concern me. Unlike most social and political theorists who seek to make use of Wittgenstein's philosophy (a prime example being Winch, the subject of the following section), I attach no particular *explanatory* or 'revelatory' significance to such notions as 'language-game', 'form of life', 'rule-following', 'grammar', etc. Nor do I think that Wittgenstein's remarks on language, meaning, etc., have any special bearing on how to think about, or

see, social, political or moral life other than as demonstration of a fruitful attitude to assume when addressing such issues. For me, Wittgenstein's philosophy neither supports a 'Marxist' view of the social world nor contradicts it, but I believe it can enhance and enrich it.

As I have said, what I get from Wittgenstein is a certain way of looking at things—but nothing on *what* one should be interested in looking *at*. Marx, on the other hand, plays a more substantial role in that he points towards some aspects of the social world that should be of deep concern to anyone interested in social, political and moral issues. Even so, the Wittgensteinian attitude carries over to my use and understanding of Marx, in that interest in, and commitment to, the issues takes primacy over any commitment to his ideas or theories. The latter, in my view, are not the kinds of thing *worth* being committed to in and of themselves (see Kitching, 1988).

Wittgenstein's approach stimulates a critical attitude towards traditional philosophical issues and problems; this critical attitude can be extended to reflecting upon, and questioning, aspects of social, political and moral life. This aim, I believe, is best pursued via 'perspicuous presentation' and description rather than 'explanatory' theory. Marx provides a descriptively perspicuous account of both the 'structure' of modern industrial society and the developmental process of its formation. His description of its structure is important in the way that it draws attention to some of the 'seen but unnoticed' (Garfinkel, 1984) basic conditions and presuppositions of our actions, beliefs and values—that is, what Wittgenstein (1979:§94) calls our 'inherited background'. He does just what we should expect of a good social critic: he tries to get us to see, and to acknowledge, and to question, fundamental features of our life-world that are unnoticed largely because of their pervasiveness and familiarity. And his account of the process of development of modern society—regardless of its accuracy in all matters of historical detail—is important in the way that it shows us, through historical description, that the world we take for granted as a 'natural', 'inevitable', 'objective' reality was previously very different in form and substance, and most likely will be so again. Much of what Marx puts forward as the 'premises' of his 'materialist conception of history' (in *The German Ideology* and Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*) are, I suggest, best seen as 'reminders' in Wittgenstein's sense, not theoretical axioms of the traditional Marxist kind.

The point of Marx's descriptions, of course, is not simply to give an accurate account of how things are but to encourage people to see that there is something *wrong* with things the way they are. This critical intent was perceived most clearly by social philosophers of the Frankfurt School. However, the whole tradition of 'critical theory' has, in my opinion, foundered on an obsessive quest for the Holy Grail of a critical *theory* capable of enlightening citizens as to the true nature of their social conditions. This has culminated in the 'critical social theory' of Jürgen Habermas, a theoretical endeavour in which substantive social criticism has been abandoned in favour of philosophical 'meta-critique' (see Pleasants, 1999: ch. 8). In my view, a

more promising way of doing social criticism would be to provoke people into reflecting on what they do and know in the course of their everyday social life. This process might be stimulated by 'reminding' them (and ourselves), through 'perspicuous description', of some of the consequences and implications of their (our) actions and how these relate to their (our) basic intuitive sense of decency and justice. This, I submit, will not be achieved through promulgation of purportedly explanatory or revelatory theory, but only by coaxing and cajoling people into seeing what they actually do, or contribute to doing, to their fellow creatures and natural environment, and then questioning the moral adequacy of this way of life.

In his later work, Marx focuses upon commodification and the institutions and practices which constitute and sustain it. Commodity production and exchange is depicted as the fundamental 'material' basis and form of social life in the modern industrial, capitalist mode of production. The institutional form and practices constitutive of the modern capitalist way of life are legitimised and normalised to such an extent that participants experience these conditions not as alienating and exploitative, but just as the 'natural' mode of being.

In my view, critical reflection upon commodification and the exploitation and alienation that it engenders can be enhanced when motivated by the Wittgensteinian attitude and 'way of seeing' that I have outlined. I will expand on this later, after an examination of the one philosopher—Peter Winch—who has single-handedly provided the service of translating Wittgenstein's unsystematic remarks into a form accessible to social scientists and social and political theorists (including Marxist theorists). In my view, it turned out to be mostly a bad influence, setting up 'tram-lines' of interpretation along which Wittgenstein has invariably been propelled, thereby bypassing his potential significance to their (our) concerns.

Peter Winch and the idea of a social science

Winch's *The Idea of a Social Science* ([1958] 1990) was a seminal exercise in what nowadays is called 'social ontology' (see Pleasants, 1999; 2000a). In a word, Winch sought to ascertain the essence ('Idea', in the Platonic sense) of human and social phenomena—'the notion of a form of life as such' (Winch, 1990:41). The avowed purpose of this 'ontological' enquiry was to establish the essential features to which any systematic means for studying human/social phenomena must conform. This was to be done through a philosophical examination of 'the nature of reality as such and in general' (*ibid.*: 8). Having divined the essential nature of social reality, Winch could then alert practitioners of 'the social studies' (his preferred term for the social sciences) to the possibilities and limits of their enquiries. Needless to say, Winch believed that the social studies were labouring under a wrong, or confused, conception of 'the nature of social phenomena in general' (*ibid.*: 41).

The picture of social ontology that Winch constructed can be summarised as follows: 'all behaviour which is meaningful (therefore all specifically human

behaviour) is *ipso facto* rule-governed' (*ibid.*: 52); it is impossible to 'follow' a rule 'privately', thus all human behaviour and experience is conceptually tied to the form of life of a particular community of socially interacting individuals. There is, therefore, an 'internal relation' between individuals' 'ideas' or self-conceptions and the social relations that they form in communion with one another. This 'relation'⁶ means that social relations are what they are in virtue of the ideas, interpretations and meanings that the constituent individuals attribute to them; conversely, the ideas, interpretations and meanings of individuals are what *they* are in virtue of the social relations in which these individuals are embedded (*ibid.*: 118).

Because of this internal relation, Winch argues, social phenomena (social relations, organisation, systems, structures) cannot be conceived 'scientifically', in terms of cause and effect (i.e. 'external') relations between the individual and the social. Therefore, in order even to identify and characterise adequately the core features of a society, the 'social student' must, on pain of *misunderstanding* that society, ground their account in the concepts, categories and ideas which are internal to and constitutive of that way of life. In other words, social life must be described in terms familiar to its participants, *not* in alien technical terms that have their home only in the specialised disciplines of the social studies. Thus the main task for the social studies is to identify and *understand* the rules, concepts and ideas which alone give various forms of social life whatever sense and meaning they possess. If not in complete contrast (though most social theorists think it is)⁷ this conception of social study certainly provides a challenge to the social scientific quest for causal, explanatory theories which purport to identify the mechanisms and structures 'underlying' and 'generating' the 'surface' features of social behaviour and individual experience.⁸

The principles of construction that informed Winch's ontological picture of the 'human essence' were derived from his reading of Wittgenstein's 'private language argument' and remarks on rule-following behaviour. Alluding to Wittgenstein's (1968:§124) aphorism that 'philosophy...leaves everything as it is', Winch (1990:102) characterised philosophy as '*uncommitted enquiry*'. Winch's picture of social ontology, and his diagnosis of the possibility and limits of social study, was particularly objectionable to Marxist social scientists, for it seemed to prescribe the most extreme form of conservatism *vis-à-vis* social reality, and to restrict the explanatory ambitions of social science to nothing more revelatory nor critical than a survey of the self-conceptions and self-evaluations of the members of a social group. On the assumption of guilt by association, Wittgenstein's philosophy itself was seen as irredeemably 'bourgeois'. Wittgenstein's 'conservatism' was denounced by the Frankfurt School critical theorist Herbert Marcuse (1964:173), who complained that Wittgenstein's philosophy 'leaves the established reality untouched; it abhors transgression'. Much the same criticism was also propounded by the prominent Marxist theorist Perry Anderson ([1968] 1992:66–8). Second-generation 'critical theorists', spearheaded by Karl-Otto Apel ([1966] 1980) and Habermas ([1967] 1988), endorsed this charge of 'conservatism' and helped it become the orthodox judgement on the implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy and Winch's prescription for social studies (but they also

drew upon both of the latter as resources for the construction of their own social-theoretical theses; see Pleasants, 1999: ch. 3).

I have little sympathy with this critique of Winch (nor, *a fortiori*, of Wittgenstein). The 'conservative' criticism misses what to me is the obvious point that to say *philosophy* leaves things as they are neither entails nor implies that they *should* be left as they are. The natural implication is, then, that if one really wants to change things, doing philosophy is not the way to go about it (I pick up this point later, in the following section). And this, of course, is exactly what Marx said in his *Theses on Feuerbach* and *The German Ideology*.

However, I do criticise the way in which Winch presents his '*a priori* philosophising' (Winch, 1990:8) as a natural extension of Wittgenstein's philosophy to social study (see Pleasants, 1999: ch. 3). What Winch sought to do was to produce an account of 'social phenomena in general' that accorded with what he took to be Wittgenstein's profound insight into the nature (essence) of 'language', 'meaning' and 'rules' (*à la* approach (2) in my typography of approaches to Wittgenstein's philosophy). In so doing, Winch actually perpetuated the traditional mode of philosophical practice. However creative, ingenious, provocative and influential was *The Idea of a Social Science*, it did not exemplify Wittgenstein's 'way of seeing' through 'perspicuous presentation' and reminders of what 'we have always known'. On the contrary, it exhibited a philosophical 'craving for generality' of just the kind against which Wittgenstein warned, and it continued the Kantian tradition of '*a priori* philosophising' to which, I believe, Wittgenstein was steadfastly opposed and sought to subvert.⁹ While Winch's Marxist and other social-theoretical critics objected to what they took to be his dismissal of theory and explanation *per se*, it was really the particular ('conservative', 'relativistic') *content* of his general social theory that evoked their disapproval.¹⁰

Critical social understanding

Winch's 'Understanding a primitive society' ([1964] 1970) is, in my view, a much better application of Wittgenstein's 'way of seeing'. In this article Winch criticises the scientific aspects of the conception of social understanding propounded in E.E.Evans-Pritchard's anthropological classic, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. The central point of Winch's article was not, as most of his critics wrongly suppose, a sceptical misgiving about the possibility of understanding a so-called 'primitive society'.¹¹ Winch did not call into question Evans-Pritchard's anthropological skills or his knowledge of Zande life and culture. Far from it, Winch begins his article with praise for the subtlety and sensitivity of Evans-Pritchard's ethnography (1970:79–80). What he challenges is the critical comparison that Evans-Pritchard draws between the alleged 'irrationality' and 'mysticism' of the 'social content' of the Zande world view, and the 'rationality' and 'objectivity' of the 'social content' of the Western world view (*ibid.*: 80).

Winch was motivated by a much more subtle, profound and reflexive cluster of questions, such as: why should we be interested in a ‘primitive society’? what could we learn from such a study? what might it help us to see about ourselves and our own social conditions of existence? These questions serve as a ‘reminder’, in Wittgenstein’s sense, that description just for its own sake is pointless. Rather, we need to be gripped by some relevance which motivates our interest in the phenomena to be studied, and some aim or purpose which the description might serve. Winch argued that a ‘perspicuous presentation’ of Zande beliefs and practices (the resources for which are to be found in Evans-Pritchard’s study), along with suitable ‘reminders’ on what we know about—but have ‘forgotten’ or overlooked in this context—*our own* way of life, should dissolve our desire to make crude, indeed ‘primitive’, critical-evaluative comparisons between the Zande and the Western way of life.

Winch’s arguments evoked the wrath of social scientists and social/political theorists across a wide left-to-right political spectrum. They worried that his argument entails that: (1) there are no universally applicable ‘critical standards’ or ‘criteria of rationality’ by which to assess the validity and sense of social practices and institutions; therefore, (2), it is not possible to establish that Western science and technology are vastly superior ways of coping with the physical and social environment than ‘primitive’ magic; and (3), if (1) and (2) are to be accepted, critical evaluation of our own practices and institutions is effectively proscribed.

But Winch’s critics did not read him with sufficient care, for he stated quite unambiguously that his argument does not entail:

accepting as rational all beliefs couched in magical concepts or all procedures practised in the name of such beliefs. This is no more necessary than is the corresponding proposition that all procedures ‘justified’ in the name of science are immune from rational criticism.

(ibid.: 83)

And in a later essay, Winch (1987:207) reiterated that he had never argued, ‘absurdly, that ways in which men live together can never be criticised, nor even that a way of living can never be characterised as in any sense “irrational”’. One of the main purposes of ‘Understanding a primitive society’, Winch (*ibid.*) explains, was to point out that ‘there are more kinds of criticism than one’. He was seeking to provide philosophers, social scientists and social/political theorists with a ‘reminder’ of something important about criticism that is known in everyday life, but somehow ‘forgotten’ in professional theoretical endeavour.

The controversy which ensued from Winch’s article became known as ‘the rationality debate’ (Habermas, 1991:66), and it quickly descended into an interminable, abstract and narrow theoretical musing on ‘critical standards’ and ‘criteria of rationality’. The debate thereby entirely missed Winch’s much more subtle and profound question, which is the very *raison d’être* of his critique of Evans-Pritchard: namely, what is the point of studying some (apparently) radically alien form of life, and what might be gained from

comparing it to one's own? It is easy to be beguiled by the spectacle of (what to us appear to be) weird and bizarre practices such as Zande witchcraft, but what aroused Winch's deeper interest was 'the concept of *learning from* which is involved in the study of other cultures' (Winch, 1970:106). Thus, 'seriously to understand another way of life is necessarily to seek to extend our own' (*ibid.*: 99). In other words, what Winch was trying to do was to bring in some much-needed *reflexivity*¹² into the investigative practices and explanatory assumptions of social science and social philosophy.

What does Winch think might be learned from the study of other cultures, and in particular, 'the study of a primitive society' (*ibid.*: 78)? He thinks we might use the occasion as a stimulus and aid to reflection on the "'alienation" characteristic of man in industrial society' and 'the peculiar form which the evil of oppression takes in our culture' (*ibid.*: 106, 107). Winch's statement of intent is, then, clearly a *critical* one: to stimulate critical reflection on the taken-for-granted conditions of our (as members of modern industrial Western societies) social existence. Moreover, not only is Winch's aim critical, it is critical in a way that should immediately elicit the interest of *Marxist* social critics, for the concepts of *alienation* and *oppression* are, or should be, central to their endeavour.

In my view, Winch's questions are much more interesting and important than the tedious metaphysical debate pursued by his critics on how to know, and prove, whether or not witches *really* exist.¹³ However, it must be said that having raised these questions, Winch does hardly anything of worth—or, indeed, intelligibility—in addressing them. He makes some very brief esoteric assertions on 'consumption' and 'production', and alleges that Marx's 'confusions' on these are themselves 'symptoms' of the alienation characteristic of industrial society (*ibid.*: 106). I confess that I do not know what Winch was trying to get at with these comments, and suspect that he was none too clear either.

In lieu of seeking to elucidate the significance of the critical concepts of alienation and oppression that he invokes, Winch (1970:107) directs the reader instead to Simone Weil's posthumously published collection of essays *Oppression and Liberty* (1973) as 'a good example of the kind of thing I mean'. This is a very telling reference, for Weil, in addition to being a French intellectual-philosopher, was a Marxist activist. She spent the vacations and leave-of-absence from her teaching job performing full-time labour in factories, farms and mines as a means of expressing solidarity with, and promoting the emancipation of, working-class people.¹⁴ This is not the place to discuss Weil's most interesting reflections on Marx and Marxism, and the troubled times in which she lived. Rather, I want to draw attention to the fact that Winch explicitly identified the Marxian concepts of 'alienation' and 'oppression' as dimensions of social existence which might be illuminated in some way by reflecting on what we could learn from the study of a 'primitive society'. But, as I said, Winch himself was unable to elaborate a critical view of these dimensions of social existence. Some knowledge and understanding of Marx's descriptions of alienation and exploitation could have helped him in this endeavour.

Alienation and the 'evil of oppression'

Winch's critique of Evans-Pritchard is widely misunderstood as centring upon the objection that it is ethnocentric to translate 'alien' concepts and categories, such as those of the Azande, into familiar Western ones. But in fact Winch's objection is quite the opposite, namely that Evans-Pritchard *does not* attempt to conceptualise Zande thought and action through the mediation of Western practices and institutions. Rather, Evans-Pritchard asserts that both Zande and Western beliefs and practices can be assessed in terms of their 'accord [ance] with objective reality' (Winch, 1970:80). Against this view, Winch argues that if there is to be any understanding of an alien way of life, it *has* to be channelled through forms of thought and experience familiar to us. This process is facilitated by identifying practices and institutions in our society which bear some affinity to those in the society we wish to understand. We need to 'find ways of thinking in our own society that will help us to see the Zande institution in a clearer light' (*ibid.*: 103). To this end, Winch (*ibid.*: 104–5) suggests that more sense can be made of Zande witchcraft by seeing it through analogy with Christian prayer than by comparing its ability to reveal and control reality with that of science and technology, as Evans-Pritchard does. Through this analogy Winch suggests that Zande witchcraft is more perspicuously seen as taking the form of 'expressive', not 'instrumental', action.

I think that Winch's strategy is absolutely right, but given that Evans-Pritchard (1950:63) tells us that in Zande society 'witchcraft is ubiquitous' and 'plays its part in every activity of Zande life', Winch's selection of analogy is utterly inapposite. Christianity is now a minority observance, and in any case, not even the most devout or zealous of Christians bring prayer into every activity of their lives. Without wishing to deny that Zande witchcraft does indeed have an 'expressive' dimension, the drawback with Winch's analogy is that it directs attention away from the instrumental dimension which, so I will document in a moment, is intrinsic to the institution and its practices. If Winch had been able to view Marx as an anthropologist of Western society (Carver, 1998:23, n. 46), comparable in descriptive power to Evans-Pritchard, he might have selected what I consider to be a much more appropriate and illuminating analogy.

Adopting an anthropological stance towards his society, Marx observes that it is lived through the medium of commodity production and monetary exchange.¹⁵ And, like Evans-Pritchard with the Azande, Marx notices that members of Western society attribute apparently 'magical' and 'super-natural' powers and properties to the modes in which their everyday objects and activities are expressed: that is, to the money and commodity form. He describes this as a process of 'fetishism', which is the attribution of special, 'magical' powers to things and social-relational activities. Through careful description, and judicious 'reminder' of what we already know, this process can be understood much more clearly by seeing the things and activities in their mundane 'material' setting as thoroughly 'this-worldly' (Marx, 1989a:243, amended translation) states of affairs—hence Marx's penchant for simple descriptions of individuals exchanging and consuming coats, corn, whiskey, etc.

Marx's discussion of 'commodity fetishism' has occasioned much puzzlement and interpretative controversy (see David Andrews, Chapter 4 of this volume). Much of the obscurity can be dispelled, I think, by seeing Marx's account as anthropological description rather than the Hegelian metaphysics it is usually taken to be (see Pleasants, 2000b). In fact, I think what Marx was trying to do can be seen as quite similar to Wittgenstein's critique of certain philosophical ideas. Wittgenstein thought that philosophers reify ordinary everyday acts and experiences into special kinds of 'objects' and 'processes' bearing apparently 'magical' properties, when thinking about such matters as 'meaning', 'understanding', 'consciousness', etc.¹⁶ He sought to deflate these 'fetishised' ideas through careful description of the actual uses of words and concepts, and reminding the reader of the '*particular circumstances*' (1968:§154) in which they were acquired and subsequently used. Thus Wittgenstein uses a kind of descriptive anthropology to expose *philosophers'* fetishisation of ordinary experience, and Marx uses a similar kind of method to display the fetishism that actually constitutes the central institutions and practices of everyday life in modern capitalist society.

The use of money, and the production and exchange of commodities, is, like Zande witchcraft and magic, 'ubiquitous', and 'plays its part in every activity' of modern Western life. What does this analogy help us to understand, and what does it enable us to see? I think it illuminates in both directions: that is, it sheds light on both Zande and Western society, the one via the other, in 'dialectical' interplay.

First, with respect to Zande society, the analogy directs our attention away from the (for us) exotic metaphysical beliefs of Zande members and on to the mundane, 'material' context of social relations and the differential power and exploitation that issues from them. Looking in this direction, it will be seen that '*benge*', the primary oracular substance, was scarce and difficult to secure, and thereby effectively controlled by the rich and ruling elites. Winch's critics in the 'rationality debate' all focus on his refusal to judge Zande witchcraft illogical and irrational, but they fail to notice the social stratification of oracle ownership and witchcraft practice. It is highly significant that 'the incidence of witchcraft in a Zande community falls equally upon both sexes in the commoner class while nobles are entirely, and powerful commoners largely, immune from accusations' (Evans-Pritchard, 1950:33). And that 'the customary exclusion of women from any dealings with the poison oracle is the most evident symptom of their inferior social position' (*ibid.*: 285). Is it not extraordinary that 'critical' philosophers and social theorists have failed to notice these features of Zande witchcraft in Evans-Pritchard's study? I am not saying that Zande witchcraft is *really, essentially*, about social exploitation and domination, but that these are dimensions of Zande life that are missed out when the critic concentrates exclusively on the exotic metaphysical qualities of Zande belief and practice.¹⁷ Wittgenstein's (1978: vol. II, §6) advice to such critics might well be to 'take a wider look round'.

Second, having descended from the 'metaphysical heavens' of Zande witchcraft to the 'firm ground' of Zande socially stratified relations of power and exploitation,

we can make a similar movement with respect to our own beliefs and practices.¹⁸ Adopting an ‘anthropological’ stance, we might then see that members of Western society, like those of Zande society, hold beliefs, and engage in practices, which deflect attention away from the exploitative dimensions of the relations in which they stand to one another. My proposed analogy highlights some key similarities between Zande witchcraft and Western commodity production and exchange. In particular, both forms of activity involve a fetishism and reification of mundane objects and relations, and both forms of activity are structured by social relations of exploitation and unequal social power. Because these social relations are not seen for what they are, the fetishism produces an alienation which obscures from members some important moral dimensions to their social conditions of existence. People simply do not see their exploitative relations with one another because they (we) are born and socialised into them as our ‘form of life’, a form of life which constitutes ‘the inherited background against which [we] distinguish between true and false’ (Wittgenstein, 1979:§94). However, the reason that these aspects of economic life are not seen is not for want of Marxist explanatory theory, but rather ‘because of their simplicity and familiarity (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one’s eyes)’ (Wittgenstein, 1968: §129). Because of the utter familiarity of our modern way of life, and perhaps also because of its greater ‘sophistication’ and complexity, it is much harder for us to perceive the fetishism which obscures our own exploitative social relations than it is for us to see it in a ‘primitive’ society like the Azande. This is why I suggest that the analogy between Zande witchcraft and Western commodity production and exchange might aid critical understanding on both sides of the analogy, the one via the other.

Although I have endorsed Winch’s criticism of Evans-Pritchard’s ethnocentric characterisation of the ‘social content’ to Zande belief, I do not think this same criticism applies to my focus on the ‘fetishism’ of Zande witchcraft. It is not ethnocentric to identify fetishism in a primitive society when this is seen in relation to the fetishism of one’s own—such a view respects the common ‘rationality’, but perhaps shows that ‘rationality’ is not all that it is cracked up to be by philosophers and social theorists in the ‘rationality debate’.

The quest for critical standards

Even Winch’s most sympathetic critics have difficulty understanding, or accepting, what he has to say about the critical evaluation of institutions and practices. For example, Richard Bernstein (1983:106) readily concedes that ‘we do not have to assume that there are or must be universal critical standards that transcend all local cultures and are ahistorical’. However, he nonetheless complains that Winch ‘has not given us the slightest clue about *what* critical standards we are to employ...how we are to assess and evaluate new and alternative “possibilities of good and evil, in relation to which men may come to terms with life”’ (*ibid.*—emphasis changed from ‘critical’ to ‘what’).¹⁹ Thus in his attempt to go ‘beyond objectivism and relativism’,

Bernstein is prepared to give up the quest for 'universal critical standards that transcend all local cultures and are ahistorical', but not the search for some other form of 'critical standard'.²⁰ Like most other 'critical' theorists, he evidently regards 'critical standards' as something of a philosopher's stone for the social critic. This attitude, I contend, manifests a misunderstanding, or perhaps I should say an impractical conception, of the logic of social criticism and social change. According to my view of social criticism, which derives from both Marx and Wittgenstein, this quest for 'critical standards' is chimerical, merely a theoretical exercise, and one which is therefore unlikely to make any impact on the members of the society in question.²¹

I am not saying that one *cannot* do social criticism by evaluating a practice or institution in relation to (relatively?) objective 'critical standards' that transcend those practices and institutions in some way. Rather, I am raising Winch's question: what is the *point* of doing it this way? One may well convince oneself, and like-minded philosophers or theorists, of the validity of one's critique on this basis. But surely the point of radical social critique (i.e. that which challenges the foundations of current social life) is somehow to get the participants themselves to see and share one's critical view. Critical *theory* often seems to me to be more about convincing *oneself* (and like-minded people) than convincing *others*.

I suggest that any appeal to 'critical standards' should be directed to standards that are *internal* to the society under critical examination, grounded in its practices and institutions, its habits of thought and belief, and readily graspable by its members. I say this by way of a 'reminder' on what social criticism means and entails. The very point of social criticism—in contrast either to colonial imposition from without, or elite enforcement from above—is to persuade the people who actually constitute a way of life that there is something wrong with that way of life, something that they currently fail to see or acknowledge. My suggestion is that such people do not need a philosophical *theory* to enable them to distinguish right from wrong—morality is not difficult in *that* way. Moral and political criticism does not require that people learn new ideas or facts, but that they (we) look at their (our) 'actual relations', and acknowledge what is 'going on under our very eyes' (Marx and Engels, 1989:20). We don't now (virtually) unanimously hold that slavery is wrong only because we have learned some new moral *theory* or have become appraised of new *facts* which were unavailable to those who in earlier times thought it a natural condition for some categories of person. The wrongness of slavery is seen *directly*, without the mediation of any theory or critical standard(s). The task of the social critic is not a *theoretical* one; rather, the desideratum is to change the way people *see* their relations with their fellow creatures and their environment. And with that change of seeing comes change in *acting*.

In the case of the Azande, Evans-Pritchard (1950:27) points out that critical reflection is not beyond the reach of Zande members themselves: 'some Azande have indeed explained to me their doubts about the honesty of the princes who control the oracles, and a few have seen that the present-day system is fallacious'. Evans-Pritchard makes no suggestion that this 'insight' was generated through knowledge of 'critical standards' by which to evaluate the adequacy and

acceptability of their practices and institutions. The task of the Zande social critic is somehow to get their compatriots to see what they see (the dishonesty and manipulateness of the princes, and the exploitativeness of their social relations). It is worth reflecting on the fact that historical and anthropological evidence suggests that no society, no matter how ‘primitive’ or ‘totalitarian’, is entirely lacking in ‘internal’ critics and sceptics *vis-à-vis* normative ‘consensus’ over the legitimacy of its central institutions and practices (see Moody-Adams, 1997: chs 1 and 2). For example, there were internal critics of slavery in ancient Greece and Rome, and in the modern southern states of America; there have been internal ‘dissident’ critics of all so-called ‘totalitarian’ societies (Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, contemporary Islamic states); and there are currently internal critics of Western human exploitation of non-human animals and the natural environment. I suggest that it is this non-consensual feature of social life that provides the necessary (but not sufficient!) ‘grounding’—*real*, not *metaphysical* or *theoretical*—for radical social criticism.

With the exception of the last in the above list of examples, social critics have not been well led by social scientists, or philosophers, or social and political theorists. However, the modern ‘animal rights’ movement’ was, by unanimous agreement of friend and foe, instigated by the publication of the philosopher Peter Singer’s book *Animal Liberation* in 1975. The success of Singer and his book in stimulating huge changes of consciousness, bringing ‘animal issues’ squarely on to the political agenda, and stimulating social and political action, seems to contradict my earlier endorsement (in the third section of this chapter) of Wittgenstein’s assertion that *philosophy* leaves things as they are. However, I contend that Singer’s *Animal Liberation* exercised these effects not through the persuasiveness of his *philosophical theory* (utilitarian ethics), but in virtue of the power and perspicacity of his empirical description and use of ‘reminders’. In fact, his *moral theory* has been, and continues to be, criticised as deeply unsatisfactory, both by other ‘animal rights’ philosophers and by mainstream moral philosophers. Singer’s effectiveness comes from his detailed descriptions of animal nature, the conditions under which animals are kept and utilised for human ‘benefit’, the non-necessity of such ‘benefit’ and, most importantly, the analogies he draws between animal conditions and human exploitation of other humans (slavery, racism, genocide). Much of what Singer describes is not exactly unknown to most people, though most are happy not to know it in the vivid detail he provides. Nor is it only accessible through the acquisition of a philosophical theory; if it were, his book is hardly likely to have been so influential.²²

When Singer succeeds, it is by getting people to *see* what they actually do, or are implicated in doing, to their fellow creatures, and to reflect on how this sits with the ‘basic moral principles which we all accept’ (Singer, 1995:xi). In a word, then, *Animal Liberation* works not by teaching people ‘explanatory theory’ or equipping them with ‘critical standards’, but by getting them to look at and acknowledge what they do—or what is done for them—to animals, and reminding them of things they know and value about their own and different forms of life. In this way, when Singer succeeds, he has managed to ‘produce just that understanding which consists in “seeing connexions”’ (Wittgenstein,

1968: §122). There are many parts of Marx's work which also consist in 'perspicuous description' and 'reminder', though it is also couched in a much denser thicket of theory than Singer's. The point is not, anachronistically, to blame Marx for this, but to suggest that his fundamental 'way of seeing' might be much more effective if liberated from the philosophical and scientific theoretical edifice in which it is embedded.²³

Conclusion

The Marxist social critic has a different view of the moral propriety of relations between people to that of the majority. This is what Wittgenstein would call a 'grammatical remark' on the meaning of this kind of social criticism. But in my view, persuading others in the majority to share one's critical view is unlikely to be achieved through impartation of revelatory/explanatory theory. This traditional, 'scientific', conception of social criticism is expressed with particular forthrightness by Cohen (1978).²⁴ Cohen presents the Marxist critic as being in possession of special *knowledge* regarding the conditions of exploitation and alienation in which workers exist: 'if factory workers knew that they were not recompensed for all of their labour, they would resist working for capitalists' (*ibid.*: 334). What the exploited/alienated need, according to this conception of criticism, is *knowledge*: knowledge of the kind that requires explanatory theory. Then, when workers 'become apprised of the truths of Marxist science they do revolt. But they must *learn* those truths to become revolutionaries' (*ibid.*: 334–5—my emphasis).

In my view, criticism of the alienating and exploitative features of social relations has little to do with appeals to 'knowledge' and 'truth' as such. The problem is not one of trying to develop an explanatory/revelatory theory that penetrates beneath appearances to the underlying reality; but of getting people to see the reality with which they're perfectly familiar, *as* an exploitative and alienating way of life. People already know well enough the reality that is their social world (as Winch reminds us in *The Idea of a Social Science*). What is needed is description that promotes change in their way of seeing that reality, not explanation that 'reveals' its hidden essence. For the purposes of radical social criticism, 'nothing is hidden' (Wittgenstein, 1968:§435)—that is, not hidden in the way that the molecular, atomic and sub-atomic universe is hidden from scientifically unaided thought and perception. And what *is* hidden 'is of no interest to us' (*ibid.*: §126). If people are to see their own social conditions differently, which is what the Marxist social critic wants, it will have to be in terms familiar to them, drawing upon values and beliefs they already hold, and 'reminding' them of things they know but overlook out of familiarity and taken-for-grantedness. Rather than the image of the critical theorist discovering the difficult-to-grasp truth about social reality, a better model would be that of Socrates enabling a slave-boy to see that he (the boy) already possessed the knowledge required to understand the proof of Pythagoras's theorem.^{25, 26}

Notes

- 1 The following is a typology which I have constructed for an illustrative purpose. Of course, by the nature of typologies, it will obscure the extent to which members of one kind overlap with the others, and it imposes considerable simplification and distortion on its individual members.
- 2 For example, Wittgenstein's views on 'doing away with philosophy' in order to reconnect with reality are so remarkably similar to those expressed by Marx in *The German Ideology* and *Theses on Feuerbach*—both in form and content—that it is not unreasonable to hypothesise a more or less direct influence from the earlier to the later.
- 3 This attitude also seems to be behind what Gadamer (1977:70) calls the 'celebrated phenomenological slogan, "To the things themselves"'. Gadamer (*ibid.*: 71) says that 'phenomenological analysis sought to uncover the uncontrolled assumption involved in unsuitable, prejudiced, and arbitrary constructions and theories'. And he notes some affinities between phenomenology and Wittgenstein's philosophy (173–7). In conversation with Drury, Wittgenstein once announced that he saw his own philosophy as a kind of 'phenomenology' (in Rhees, 1981:131).
- 4 There is some similarity here with Marx's aphorism on *changing* the world, not (just) *interpreting* it. However, Wittgenstein believes that in order to change the world people must first change the way they look at it—'that man will be revolutionary who can first revolutionise himself' (Wittgenstein, 1980:45). Interestingly, G.A.Cohen (2000) has recently argued, similarly, that Marxists and socialists should look critically at *themselves* as well as the social reality of which they are critical. The title of Cohen's book is itself a beautiful example of a 'Wittgensteinian' reminder (to Marxists, socialists and left-liberals): *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* Cohen's use of the first-person mode of expression and second-person mode of questioning also serves as an important reminder to political philosophers on the nature of commitment to moral and political values (Pleasants, 2002).
- 5 'What has to be overcome is a difficulty having to do with the will, rather than with the intellect' (Wittgenstein, 1980:17). Cf. Gramsci's (1973:175, n. 75) plea for 'pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will'.
- 6 An 'internal relation', in this context, is not a relation between different *things*, it is the same thing looked at from different points of view, and it is the latter that are related.
- 7 Few commentators seem to have noticed that Winch actually leaves open the possibility of social study achieving a kind of knowledge (or understanding) that goes beyond the rules and conventions internal to a way of life: 'I do not wish to maintain that we must stop at the [participant's] unreflective kind of understanding' (Winch, 1990:89).
- 8 A prime example of the kind of social science that Winch sought to challenge would be the classical Marxist picture of deterministic effects on individuals by the 'relations of production' from 'below', and 'ideological consciousness' from 'above'.
- 9 Some philosophers, for example Crary (2000:145, n. 67), claim that there is a 'Kantian character' to Wittgenstein's thought.
- 10 See Pleasants (2000a) for a more sympathetic appreciation of the merits of *The Idea of a Social Science* and a defence of Winch against some of the more egregious misinterpretations and misrepresentations of it.
- 11 This is made much clearer in Winch's posthumously published article 'Can we understand ourselves?': 'There is no reason why...we should not be able to gain as full an understanding of the Zande poison oracle as we might gain from a comparable description of, let us say, concert going in the Western world' (1997:199).
- 12 For more on the desideratum of reflexivity see Gavin Kitching's essay in this book.
- 13 I cannot see much difference in metaphysical status between Zande witchcraft and such widely established Western notions as that of 'inalienable' human 'rights', etc. Alasdair MacIntyre, one of Winch's first critics, asserts in *After Virtue* that 'the truth is plain: there

are no such rights [as ‘natural or human rights’], and belief in them is one with belief in witches’ (1985:69). I agree with MacIntyre’s assertion of equality of the beliefs’ status, but not his easy dismissal. If one wants to criticise beliefs or practices in which human rights or witchcraft feature, mere existence claims are otiose (in Alienation and the “evil of oppression”, below, I suggest some more pertinent critical observations on Zande witchcraft).

- 14 There is an interesting parallel with Wittgenstein’s desire and earnest attempt to emigrate to the Soviet Union to work as a manual labourer (see Monk, 1990:340–54).
- 15 ‘Commodities and money’, Part 1 of *Capital* (Marx, 1938).
- 16 See Wittgenstein’s (1972:3–5) discussion of ‘the queer medium’, ‘occult sphere’ and ‘occult processes’ that philosophers are wont to postulate.
- 17 Bear in mind that Evans-Pritchard’s aim, unlike Winch’s critics, was not primarily *critical*. His aim was to understand and to learn, and this he did through living with the Azande, even to the extent of adopting their ‘magical’ practices in the running of his own household, which he reports was ‘as satisfactory a way of running my home as any other I know of’ (Evans-Pritchard, 1950:270). However, highly significant for my critical purpose is the fact that Evans-Pritchard was ‘possibly the richest person in... [Zande]land’, and was therefore accorded the ‘honorary rank of prince’, which placed him ‘near the top of the political hierarchy’ (McLeod, 1972:164). This social condition was the *sine qua non* of his being able to gain an ‘insider’s’ perspective on oracular practice. It also, perhaps, explains why Evans-Pritchard was more interested in the metaphysics of Zande belief than the exploitative and oppressive dimensions of their practices and institutions.
- 18 As Marx (1989b:263) puts it: ‘the criticism of heaven is transformed into the criticism of earth’.
- 19 The nested quote is from Winch (1970:106), where he says: ‘in the study of other cultures...[w]e are confronted not just with different techniques, but with new possibilities of good and evil.’
- 20 I am not sure whether he rejects only the possibility of ‘universal critical standards that transcend all local cultures and are ahistorical’, or ‘universal critical standards’ *as such*.
- 21 A similar viewpoint is expressed in an anecdote involving the redoubtable social critic Noam Chomsky, told by Mike Lynch (1993:304):

Chomsky presented a critical argument about the way the ‘mainstream’ US press covers international events and conflicts. In his talk he made a number of cross-national and historical comparisons, and afterward a sociologist commentator questioned whether his account followed ‘appropriate’ methodological canons for the selection of comparable cases. Chomsky claimed in his rejoinder that no special knowledge of sociology or of its methodology was necessary for his purposes.

- 22 Compare Singer’s book with Stephen Hawking’s (1988) *A Brief History of Time*, which is justly famous for being a massive best-seller that the vast majority of owners do not read because they cannot understand it.
- 23 The academic *form* of *Capital*, and most of Marx’s other major works, is quintessentially ‘bourgeois’, with references to cultural and intellectual authorities, and use of a complex technical vocabulary and sophisticated theoretical structure that inevitably renders it opaque to the majority of people. In this respect, *Capital*—and even *The Communist Manifesto*—is much closer to *A Brief History of Time* than to *Animal Liberation*.
- 24 Cohen’s more recent work implies a very different conception of social and political criticism, one which is much closer to the Wittgenstein-inspired view that I am trying to elaborate here (see note 4, above).

- 25 Wittgenstein's sister describes how his elementary school teaching method was to try to 'steer the boys toward the right solution by means of questions' (in Rhees, 1981:5).
- 26 I am grateful for the advice and comments of Adrian Haddock, Phil Hutchinson, Gavin Kitching and Mark Peacock.

References

- Anderson, P. (1992) *English Questions*, London: Verso.
- Apel, K. (1980) *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, London: Routledge.
- Benton, T. (1976) 'Winch, Wittgenstein and Marxism', *Radical Philosophy* 13, 1–6.
- Bernstein, R. (1976) *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1983) *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Carver, T. (1998) *The Postmodern Marx*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Cohen, G. (1978) *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- (2000) *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Crary, A. (2000) 'Wittgenstein's philosophy in relation to political thought', in A. Crary and R. Read (eds) *The New Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge.
- Easton, S. (1983) *Humanist Marxism and Wittgensteinian Social Philosophy*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. (1950) *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Feuer, L. (ed.) (1989) *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Philosophy and Politics*, New York: Doubleday.
- Gadamer, H. (1977) *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Garfinkel, H. (1984) *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Giddens, A. (1979) *Central Problems in Social Theory*, London: Macmillan.
- Gramsci, A. (1973) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, edited and translated by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith, London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Habermas, J. (1988) *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, Cambridge: Polity.
- (1991) *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, Cambridge: Polity.
- Hawking, S. (1988) *A Brief History of Time*, London: Bantam.
- Israel, J. (1979) *The Language of Dialectics and the Dialectics of Language*, Brighton: Harvester Press.
- Janik, A. and Toulmin, S. (1973) *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Kitching, G. (1988) *Karl Marx and the Philosophy of Praxis*, London: Routledge.
- (1994) *Marxism and Science: Analysis of an Obsession*, Philadelphia: Penn State Press.
- Lynch, M. (1993) *Scientific Practice and Ordinary Action*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MacIntyre, A. (1985) *After Virtue*, London: Duckworth.
- McLeod, M. (1972) 'Oracles and accusations among the Azande', in A. Singer and B. Street (eds) *Zande Themes*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 158–85.
- Malcolm, N. (1958) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Marcuse, H. (1964) *One Dimensional Man*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Marx, K. (1938) *Capital*, vol. 1, London: George Allen and Unwin.
- (1989a) *Theses on Feuerbach*, in L. Feuer (ed.) *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Philosophy and Politics*, New York: Doubleday.
- (1989b) *Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, in L. Feuer (ed.) *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Philosophy and Politics*, New York: Doubleday.
- Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1989) *The Communist Manifesto*, in L. Feuer (ed.) *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Philosophy and Politics*, New York: Doubleday.
- Monk, R. (1990) *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, London: Vintage.

- Moody-Adams, M. (1997) *Fieldwork in Familiar Places: Morality, Culture, and Philosophy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Pleasants, N. (1999) *Wittgenstein and the Idea of a Critical Social Theory: A Critique of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar*. London: Routledge.
- (2000a) ‘Winch, Wittgenstein, and the idea of a critical social theory’, *History of the Human Sciences* 13(1), 78–91.
- (2000b) ‘Winch and Wittgenstein on understanding ourselves critically: descriptive not metaphysical’, *Inquiry* 43(3), 289–318.
- (2002) ‘Rich egalitarianism, ordinary politics, and the demands of justice’, *Inquiry* 45 (1), 97–118.
- Rhees, R. (ed.) (1981) *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Rubinstein, D. (1981) *Marx and Wittgenstein: Social Praxis and Social Explanation*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Singer, P. (1995) *Animal Liberation*, London: Cape.
- Waismann, F. (1965) ‘Notes on talks with Wittgenstein’, *Philosophical Review* 74, 12–16.
- Weil, S. (1973) *Oppression and Liberty*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Winch, P (1970) ‘Understanding a primitive society’, in B.Wilson (ed.) *Rationality*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 78–111.
- (1972) *Ethics and Action*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- (1987) *Trying to Make Sense*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1990) *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, 2nd edition, London: Routledge.
- (1997) ‘Can we understand ourselves?’ *Philosophical Investigations* 20, 193–204.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1965) ‘Lecture on ethics’, *Philosophical Review* 74, 3–12.
- (1968) *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1972) *The Blue and Brown Books*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1978) *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, 3rd edition, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1979) *On Certainty*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1980) *Culture and Value*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Part V

Forerunners

10 Towards a Marxian use of Wittgenstein

Ferruccio Rossi-Landi

[Editors' note: this is an edited version of an article originally published by the late Ferruccio Rossi-Landi in an Italian journal, *Nuovi Argumenti*, in 1966 and reprinted as an essay in the first edition of his book *Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato (Language as Labour and Trade)* in 1968. The author's own English translation of the article, from which this edited version was produced, was originally published in J.Nyiri (ed.) *Austrian Philosophy: Studies and Texts* in 1981. We are grateful to the publishers of this latter work, Philosophia Verlag, for permission both to reproduce the English text here and to edit it for our own purposes. Some six pages of the original article, with their accompanying end notes, have been omitted, text references have been changed to the Harvard system and several of the remaining end notes have been shortened or simplified. Cuts in the main text are indicated thus [...].]

Do not seek for the *meaning* of a philosopher, seek for his use: the meaning of a philosopher is his use in the culture.

Epiphany of the *Untersuchungen*

On 1 May 1953, along with many hundred other people in Oxford, I awoke with a particular feeling of anticipation, ate my breakfast in a hurry and ran to Basil Blackwell's in Broad Street to be there when it opened. As had been announced, the first copies of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophische Untersuchungen* lay shining in the windows. They were bound in dark blue cloth, as befitted the austerity of their contents; but, almost as if to encourage our hopes, they were wrapped in pale green dust jackets bearing only the tide of the facing English translation, *Philosophical Investigations*.

In the afternoon of that same 1 May, we all went to hear the first lecture by the translator, Miss G.E.M. Anscombe, otherwise Mrs Peter Geach, one of the Master's favourite students. The assembly took place in an annex at the far end of the Somerville College courtyard. To reach it we had to follow a tortuous route, and it was impressive to see hundreds and hundreds of scholars and curiosity-seekers of every age and condition hurrying, almost running, along the path, scurrying around corners, even barging into each other at times, for fear of not finding a seat or, still worse, of missing the first

words. 'This can be properly described as the pursuit of the truth,' Peter Herbst remarked with his usual sharp wit as he trotted along at my side.

Miss Anscombe was thoroughly dissatisfied, so much so that she had published in *Mind* immediately a first list of corrections to translation errors, so serious as actually to 'prevent the reader from understanding' (Anscombe, 1953:521-2). And this despite the fact that Wittgenstein had died in 1951 and that Miss Anscombe had availed herself of the services of no less than seven consultants (named at the beginning of the volume), some of whom were experts not only in German in general, but in local Austrian usage, too. That afternoon she concentrated on two points: translation errors, which would have to be corrected little by little through God knows what process of collective rethinking by committees of experts; and (an aspect which at least partially explains the difficulties she had encountered) the extremely punctilious, individualising, never generalisable nature of every single observation in the book. In this latter point, Miss Anscombe saw one of the principal merits of the work. Even now I can almost hear her tone of voice as she said emphatically, 'What Wittgenstein says in one point should never be connected with what he says in another point,' or words to that effect. It is amusing to compare this exaggerated warning with the equally exaggerated assertion Hutten made in his short review of the *Untersuchungen* in the November issue of the rigid *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* that same year: Any consecutive and connected argument is avoided. Instead, we have something closer to *free association*, though, unlike the scientific use of this method, it remains on the superficial, intellectual level resembling its current use in literature' (Hutten, 1953:258).

For a reader who is neither German nor English, the comparison between the two texts was at that moment, as it remains to this day, somewhat disconcerting. One begins to doubt whether the sacred propositions are really stated in the same way in the two languages, and consequently whether they are, in effect, the same propositions. In principle, it is technically possible to state the same proposition in two different ways, i.e. with two different sentences; but since, in the case at hand, what we do not know is precisely whether it is the same proposition that is being set forth, the difference in sentences gives rise to a suspicion, which at times becomes a certainty, that it is not always a legitimate difference. Unless that philological mountain shrouded in a thick vegetation of respect, admiration and gratitude has become a literary mouse, the impression one gets is that the English language, or at least Miss Anscombe's (who certainly ought to know how to address her highly sensitive colleagues, however), just cannot do the job of rendering the vigour and grace of the original and, above all, cannot succeed in being intellectually faithful to it. For example, although he does not theorise upon it, Wittgenstein makes use in practice of a distinction between the *Gebrauch* and the *Verwendung* of language: the *use* of a term is something more constant than its *application*; there are *rules* for use and *criteria* for application. In English, the two terms are for the most part both rendered with *use*, and only here and there, for no justifiable reason, does *application* also appear. Or nothing

less than the mind is introduced, quite gratuitously, when the German *'so schweben mir nicht neben dem sprachlichen Ausdruck noch "Bedeutungen" vor'* is translated as 'there aren't "meanings" going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions' (1958: §329). Even more serious are certain structural defects, for example when *'Befehlen, und nach Befehlen handeln'*, which to our mind should obviously be 'to command and to act according to command', is robbed of its cogency through a gratuitous descriptive rendering as 'giving orders and obeying them' (1958: §23).

An idea of mine is that Wittgenstein, teaching with great personal intensity in English, succeeded in orally transmitting his thought in all its finesse and in convincing any listener whatever of the difficulty of the problems with which he was dealing; but, in writing, this thought is much less fascinating and rich; at any rate, it is considerably more understandable and exciting in the original (and perhaps even in an Italian translation, if it is an excellent one). But another idea of mine is that the English pay little heed to all this. Miss Anscombe's indecision and second thoughts apart, the reader should consider these two queer facts: the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* was completely retranslated in 1961 by David Pears and B.F. McGuinness, after Anglo-Saxon philosophical culture had for thirty-nine years nourished itself on a defective earlier translation jotted down by the otherwise worthy C.K. Ogden in 1922. And after the *Untersuchungen* and the *Bemerkungen über die Grundlagen der Mathematik* (dating back to the years 1937–44 and appearing in 1956), there would seem to have been no further interest in translation. In 1964 Basil Blackwell brought out a third unpublished work of Wittgenstein's, the *Philosophische Bemerkungen*, which goes back to 1929–30, in the original German only.

Here I feel that certain remarks by David Pole, author of a monograph on the later Wittgenstein (which in practice deals almost exclusively with the *Untersuchungen*) are revealing. Pole first recounts J.N. Findlay's opinion that Wittgenstein always remained deeply Germanic and that a Hegelian resonance is to be found in his mode of expression. (Findlay is an author always worth taking seriously since he became a linguistic analyst after having studied under Wittgenstein and had earlier been an intelligent reinterpreter of Hegel.) Then Pole adds that in Wittgenstein there is 'the feeling of strength and groping, of a mind working vastly with raw materials... Wittgenstein troubles us; his thought is disturbing'; whereas, when we pass on to that watered-down English version of Wittgenstein's ideas which constitutes the works of John Wisdom—we shall quote a typical passage of his in a moment—'we finally find ourselves at home again'. (Pole, 1958:103–4)

Even the German titles of the *Untersuchungen* and others of Wittgenstein's books were not commonly used—whether or not this effect was produced by means of dust jackets (a Frege translation where the translator's name appeared much more conspicuously than the author's was a landmark). And when Wittgenstein was quoted in German, it almost seemed that writers were blaming him for the fact that although he knew English and had taught with enormous success in this language for many years, he stubbornly persisted in writing in his mother tongue and thus left extensive manuscripts which now had to be painstakingly translated into understandable English. Why couldn't

he have written directly in English, thus avoiding so much extra work and so many misunderstandings? I am not being ironical here, but reporting actual attitudes. A friend of mine in that period expressed his passion and insisted on the rights of English culture over Wittgenstein by pronouncing *Unterkúúnghen*, or simply *Zúkúnghen*, and was generally rewarded with chuckles and little winks of approval.

In any case, the appearance of the *Untersuchungen* broke a silence that had lasted all of thirty-two years, that is, from the publication of the original edition of the *Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung* (but in this case it is perhaps well to use the neutrally Latin title suggested by G.E. Moore and known to everyone, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*). Critics agree in fact in ascribing little importance to the only two exceptions: first, the article 'Some remarks on logical form' written in 1929 and published in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, which Wittgenstein however did not read to the meeting for which it had been prepared—speaking instead, to the amazement of those present, on the infinite in mathematics; second, a German glossary for elementary schools published in Vienna in 1926 (although it seems to me that the way Wittgenstein went about compiling this glossary might be of some interest). This silence was all the more peculiar since those famous typewritten booklets known as the *Blue Book* and the *Brown Book* (finally published in Oxford in 1958 by Blackwell) had been circulating for years, and since disciples and colleagues who for years had attended Wittgenstein's classes in Cambridge and had discussions with him, had been taking notes which they could not avoid using to some extent in their works if they wished to publish anything. Such men as G.E. Moore, Moritz Schlick, Friedrich Waismann and many others spent hours and hours taking dictation. Moore had already acquired the knack of it as early as 1914 in Norway, and now, along with others, even these notes of his have been published (Wittgenstein, 1961a). By contrast, John Wisdom, considered by some as Wittgenstein's most direct follower (even inheriting his chair at Cambridge, after G.H. von Wright's brief interregnum), says that he took no notes, or at least none of any importance. In 1952, he published in *Mind* a meagre account of the classes he attended from 1934 to 1937. The 'initiate' nature of his relationship with Wittgenstein on the one hand, and with the public he was addressing on the other, stands out clearly in this abysmal statement: If I were asked to answer, in one sentence, the question "What was Wittgenstein's biggest contribution to philosophy?" I should answer "His asking of the question 'Can one play chess without the Queen?'" (Wisdom, 1952:259).

Gilbert Ryle had preferred not to name Wittgenstein in his major work, *The Concept of Mind*, published in 1949. Commemorating him immediately after his death, on the BBC Ryle explained that the difficulties of judging a contemporary who for thirty years had neglected to publicise his thought forced him to remain in the realm of 'impressions and interpretations, and not always first-hand' (Ryle, 1951:7).

These abnormal relations between Master and disciples had created a neurotic situation for many of the most vigorous British philosophers of the day. Too greatly influenced by what Wittgenstein was inculcating into them orally, they could not write with independence, so that, strictly speaking, when they wanted to publish, they were forced to choose between anticipating elements of Wittgenstein's thought or presenting them as their own. In general, they solved the dilemma with a tide note recognising a deep generic debt towards the Master. But in the biographical sketches published by Norman Malcolm and G.H. von Wright in 1958, we are told that Wittgenstein was usually disgusted by these efforts and felt himself constantly misunderstood and betrayed (Malcolm, 1958). Despite their brevity, these two works constitute the broadest and almost the only sources on the biography and intellectual formation of Wittgenstein. I shall be referring to them constantly. It is by keeping in mind both Wittgenstein's thought (especially in the *Untersuchungen*) and a study of his intellectual and cultural life that we can explode the myth built up around him and take the first steps towards a rediscovery of his real historical dimensions. I do not say that this procedure is valid in the same way for all thinkers; indeed for many of them it would be of little use, since their intellectual and cultural lives appear enormously less important than their published works and can at most throw a little light on certain aspects. But in Wittgenstein's case it is extremely useful, given the demystifying and at the same time mystifying nature of his teaching as it was received in one of the most peculiar circles of European culture between the two wars and immediately after the Second World War. It is no small accomplishment to have forced an entire generation of philosophers into silence or muted expression.

But now the text was there. Finally the sacred propositions could be examined and restated in the very same terms used by the Master; and, at the same time, a retrospective analysis of the influence he had exerted could begin. Such were, at least, the hopes and intentions of many scholars—hopes which were disappointed in at least two ways. In the first place, as we have said, the German text was almost never approached and all the critical work was carried out on the basis of the translation as it stood. In the second place, those who had learned the new doctrines from the mouth of the Master himself, or had at any rate absorbed something of them through the various branches of the academic world of English philosophy, read into the *Investigations* something more or something different than was read by those who approached them for the first time. The disciples always felt that the essentials were escaping the outside critics, who in turn held that the disciples were seeing more than there was to see, or at least were exaggerating. For years I have been convinced that the latter were influenced by sectarian or esoteric feelings and forms of intellectual snobbery and hair-splitting (precisely the defects that Wittgenstein most abhorred); but if we think of the differences between reading a short, epigrammatic and poorly translated text and following, sometimes for years on end, the teachings of such an original man, so passionately dedicated to his work, we must admit that the disciples did have a certain right of pre-emption.

A good example of such misunderstandings occurred over one of the *Untersuchungen's* central notions, the notion of the *use* of language. Those who encountered it for the first time after the publication of the book tended to see only a reference to the way in which, within a given language, this or that word is used customarily. And since the customary, institutional use, subject as it is to continual changes and relative to the various natural languages, obviously cannot serve as the foundation for logico-philosophical research, they felt they had immediately found the radical criticism that would bring down the whole card-house of research so painstakingly built up by Wittgenstein and his school [...] By contrast, those who had discussed this question with Wittgenstein himself or with his qualified disciples, and were acquainted with the literature that had already appeared on the subject within these circles, recognised in the notion of the use of language something that could be said to coincide only in part with the notion of institutional use within a given language. Also involved was what linguists call the synchronic consideration of the language, but carried to the most radical level of language in general, that is of the techniques we use to express ourselves and communicate according to our various needs and the varying circumstances. Wittgenstein's was a behaviouristic notion with logico-structural aims, not a philological notion with historical or sociologically descriptive aims. By this I do not mean that Wittgenstein or his disciples ever investigated the matter sufficiently; and I would be ready to endorse an indictment against the cultural isolation (from other disciplines, particularly the history of philosophy and linguistics, and from other philosophical cultures, particularly the German) in which they operated up until the 1950s and in which many of them still operate. But even in their vague and incomplete employment of the notion of use we can detect an anxiety which is methodological even if excessive and sterile: the fear of advancing some over-rigid theoretical structure, which, establishing itself as a premature generalisation within the immensely complicated field of language, would eventually hinder, rather than help, further research.

The 'first' and 'second' Wittgenstein

There are three or four Platos, five or six Hegels, and as many as six or seven Schellings. At least for the moment, with Wittgenstein things are not so complicated: the only distinction usually drawn is between a 'first' Wittgenstein, the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, and a 'second', that of the *Untersuchungen* and the other posthumous works. At most, reference is made to a period of transition, as yet almost unexplored, between 1929 (his return to Cambridge and to philosophical research) and 1933, when according to von Wright a 'radical change' (von Wright, in Malcolm, 1958) took place in Wittgenstein's thought.

For the purposes of this essay it will be necessary to recall, very briefly and without pretensions, what this change consisted of; and it is enough to do so by comparing certain central aspects of the *Tractatus* and the *Untersuchungen*, which represent the culmination of Wittgenstein's philosophy.¹

The 'first' Wittgenstein's principal teacher, Bertrand Russell, had been a student of the neoHegelian Bradley; while rejecting his metaphysical monism, he had inherited his hostility to the psychologism of the empiricists, who neglected the investigation of judgement and founded their research on ideas understood in a naturalistic sense, that is, on *fragments* of thought. From the beginning, the position which Wittgenstein encountered in Russell was neither fully idealistic nor fully empiricist. It was a sort of empiricism enriched with an idealistic logic of the judgement understood as a linguistic unit that carried along with it a complete unit of thought. The Humean heritage acted in the direction of attributing to philosophers the task of analysing thought in its constitutive elements, and it was thus that the notion of *atomism* was arrived at. But unlike Hume and later empiricists, philosophers now had to apply analysis to judgements, as was indicated by the addition of the adjective 'logical'. Russell also put forward as early as 1914 the idea that the problem was to arrive at 'logical (rather than material) atoms'; but they necessarily remained the atoms *of* a unit one started with and which was constituted by the judgement. Since not all propositions are judgements, propositions themselves came under discussion. In the long run, this was to result in attention being extended to *all* classes of propositions, but at the beginning it was concentrated on those propositions most important to science, those that state facts (statements). Philosophy's field of investigation, although distinct from that of linguistics, was found in language. It concerned the structure of what is said, the *way* in which what is said is *able* to have meaning. A set of closely related distinctions thus emerged that went deeper than any distinction between truth and falsehood: the distinctions between making and not making sense, between meaningfulness and meaninglessness.

Thus far, Russell had already arrived. The *Tractatus*, apart from the examination of tautology and probability which it includes and the general contributions it makes to the technique of formal logic, can be convincingly described from a historical standpoint as a generalisation of Russell's conclusions. Using rigorous formal tools, Wittgenstein here studies the conditions that every symbolism must satisfy in order to represent facts. He too starts from the proposition, and his main declared aim is to explain its nature and examine its constitution. A proposition is similar to a diagram in that it represents facts insofar as it contains a multiplicity of signs and insofar as this multiplicity is arranged in a certain way. The arrangement of the signs must reflect the elements and structures of the world by means of a one-to-one correspondence: a statement has the power to assert a state of things insofar as it has the same structure as what it is representing. However, the difference between making and not making sense cannot in turn be represented; if we attempted to do so, we would be attempting to compare what makes sense with what does not, and this in itself would amount to talking nonsense. In other words, for the 'first' Wittgenstein, what cannot be stated is precisely the structure common to the statement and to the facts it represents which makes representation itself possible. This structure can only be 'shown'. Thus between saying or stating (*aussagen*) and showing (*zeigen*) there is a radical difference, which Wittgenstein developed into the well-known doctrine of the

ineffable, giving the last part of the *Tractatus* a mystical quality of its own. The philosopher-logician can only show, not state, what gives or denies sense to language. Philosophy cannot be a science, nor can it advance theories; it can only aim at showing the logical structure of what is said.

The *Tractatus* contains this statement of the practical, rather than theoretical, nature of philosophy, which, to my mind, however much it may need correction and amplification, must nevertheless be accepted in principle. The reason for this is that after the dissolution of the Hegelian system, to deny the practical nature of philosophy would mean a step backwards to some pre-Kantian conception. Yet the ontological equipment upon which the *Tractatus* itself is based can be said to be nothing else than pre-Kantian. Reality, made up of irreducible facts, stands motionless before thought, which is the Aristotelian mirror of it; 'the fact that the elements of a picture [*Bild*] are related to one another in a determinate way represents that things are related to one another in the same way' (Wittgenstein, 1961b:2.15). These statements of Wittgenstein make no reference to any notion of development. The historical-social dimension is completely absent. The world of the *Tractatus* is a sort of immobile logical paradise, of which thought reflects the structures, so to speak once and for all, and without knowing why.²

The first thing that strikes us when we move from the *Tractatus* to the *Untersuchungen* is that the flow of life (though not of history) has already broken in at the level of linguistic expression. All formalistic jargon is now discarded:

It is interesting to compare the multiplicity of the tools [*Werkzeuge*] in language and of the ways they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure [*Bau*] of language. (Including the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.)
(1958:§23)

This rejection becomes a programme. All schemata are abandoned—beginning with the very contrast between showing and stating. Analysis is now directed solely towards single linguistic 'situations': that is, single meaningful elements of language, about which some philosophical difficulty has arisen. And from these elements, the analysis moves out through language in every possible direction, regardless of how language may seem to be arranged at first sight. 'Language is a labyrinth of paths' (1958:§203) along which the analyst seeks out linguistic uses that possess some similarity, not because they are reducible to some metaphysical 'common property', but rather because they are related to each other in the most varied ways and, through these relationships, constitute 'families' of sorts (1958:§§65–67 ff). The functions of a given expression are thus delineated by contrasting it with others that differ from it in various ways. It is the context that gives meaning its importance (1958:§583). Everything must be seen in context and we must guard ourselves against general statements which by their nature extend beyond the various contexts and obscure, rather than clarify, understanding. Philosophy is an activity that must be learned through concrete

examples, from which one is able to work back from the special, deviant use of these words by philosophers to their ordinary, everyday use (1958:§116). This does not mean moving from the difficult to the easy, but if anything, the reverse. For the philosophical uses one must beware of turn out to be arbitrary abstractions from the wealth of speech; and, although one certainly does not learn to heed all the relations that words have among themselves when learning to talk, it is precisely to these infinitely complex relations that one must turn in order to solve the philosophic problem that disturbs us.

Philosophical problems are as deep and important as language (1958:§111). For this reason they develop when 'language goes on holiday' (*Wenn die Sprache feiert*), when it is 'idling' (*leerläuft*), rather than 'working' (1958:§§38, 132). We let ourselves be fooled by formal, external similarities and so neglect internal, functional differences; we interpret a certain part of our linguistic system by making false analogies with some other part (1958:§§90, 91, 109, 132, 304); we nourish our thinking with a single kind of example so that an overly uniform diet is the 'main cause of philosophical disease' (1958:§593). The real discovery would be that which 'makes me capable of *stopping doing philosophy* when I want to' (1958: §133; my italics).

We must look at sentences as instruments and at their sense as the use of such instruments (1958:§421). A language is made up of innumerable parts, comparable to tools, each of which works in its own way and in its own context (1958: §§11, 23; Part II: 224). The meaning of a word is its use in the language (1958: §43); language as a whole is an instrument guided by our interests (1958:§§569, 570); 'to mean something is like going up to someone' (1958:§457); speaking or writing a language is one human activity in the midst of others, and interacts with them (1958:§§7, 9, 23, 25, etc.). Language acquires meaning in its context (1958:§583), the public context in which we learn to speak. 'To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life' (1958:§19).

Where the instrumental approach is difficult, it is useful to construct 'linguistic games (or models)' (*Sprachspiele*), either simple ones or ones of progressive complexity (1958:§§8 ff.). These serve as research instruments, i.e. as objects of comparison (*Vergleichsobjekte*). They are models which throw light on the facts of language through the similarities and differences encountered (1958:§130; notice, however, that Wittgenstein uses *Sprachspiel* for any particular use of language, whether invented or 'natural', including the relationships between linguistic use and extra-linguistic action—1958:§7). That means one must not only gather linguistic material, but arrange it in suitable forms that help show the structure of the problem; thus it is insufficient to find cases of real linguistic use, and the need to invent others arises (cf, in general, 1958:§§109–33).

Once we have freed ourselves in this way from the tendency to lump together various types of words or sentences (1958:§§11, 122, 435, 661), we can proceed along a path that starts from a disguised non-sense and arrives at a patent nonsense (1958:§464). The difficulty is thus laid open and we shall have rid ourselves of the perplexity concerning it.

Wittgenstein sees philosophical difficulty as a personal perplexity, a 'mental cramp' suffered by a single individual, which can be cured by means of a sort of logotherapy (1958: §§123, 255, 309 *passim*). But the personal or environmental *reasons* behind the formation of this perplexity do not interest him, and the difficulty is analysed by and for itself as it appears relatively objectivised in language. The procedure differs from psychoanalytic procedure precisely because the difficulty is depersonalised and seen within interpersonal communicative structures (1958: §§109–129). This is perhaps a residue of Frege's logicism brought over to the *Untersuchungen* through the *Tractatus*. It is thus quite difficult to establish the degree to which the second Wittgenstein's approach is or is not 'psychologistic'. It is, rather, a typically structuralist procedure, by means of which (as Barthes says) a *simulacrum* of the object is constructed and in the course of this reconstruction the rules by which the object itself operates are shown (Barthes, 1964: 213–20). Excluding substances, Wittgenstein concerns himself with functions; he cuts out and coordinates pieces of language, seeking paradigms against which he can measure other cases which arise within the indefinite variety of speech. Rather than assigning senses to the objects he is investigating, 'he seeks to discover how sense is possible, at what price and according to what procedures' (*ibid.*: 218).

If the meaning of a word or expression or sentence lies in its use, there must be *rules* governing this use (1958: §§199, 242). These must be *common* rules which correspond to accepted criteria, that is to social ways of behaviour (1958: §§200–2). Here we have the key to Wittgenstein's rejection of the doctrine that it is some particular and private experience of the speaker (or listener) which gives meaning to an expression (1958: §§243 ff., 398 ff). This doctrine derives from the ontological dualism that emerges when the language of private experience is interpreted in the same way as the language of public objects. When, in fact, for certain words 'we cannot specify any *one* bodily action...we say that a *spiritual* [*geistige*] activity corresponds to these words' (1958: §36). (Notice that here private experience or thought are not denied, only a certain mistaken way of interpreting them: 1958: §§304–8, 654–5.)

On the other hand, the *reduction* of private experience to mere observable behaviour is gross behaviourism which arises not from a critique of ontological dualism, but from a certain surreptitious way of keeping this dualism alive. The gross behaviourist is a dualist who simply *refuses* to talk about 'internal' objects because he considers them non-existent or because he is unable to reduce them to the language of 'external' objects. Initially he was faced with the two terms of the dualism, then he chose only one of the two, the one which seemed the most trustworthy. But it is precisely by not concerning himself with the other term that he reconfirms the situation (cf. 1958: §308). We must instead *respect the rules* that govern the language of private experience: the linguistic games are, in fact, manifold, and they cannot be derived from one another. We shall then find that in no case can this language be exclusively private. There are no languages used by only one (single) person, since speaking a language means participating in a social activity governed by rules, which a private language could not have (1958:

§§153, 202, 243 ff.). A private thought, which is *subsequently* or *concomitantly* expressed in language, does not exist: 'When I think in language, there aren't "meanings" going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language is itself the vehicle of thought' (1958:§329). 'Thinking...is what distinguishes speech with thought from talking without thinking' (1958:§330), and it is on social rules that the distinction between the first and the second is based. Naturally it is possible to think by acting, without speaking; but from this it does not follow that whatever in that case constitutes the thought to this action is 'some process which has to accompany the words if they are not to be spoken without thought' (*ibid.*), in fact, 'an "inner process" stands in need of outward criteria' (1958:§580).

Certain other elements of the *Untersuchungen* will emerge in the course of the essay. Even from such a summary exposition we can perhaps see how Wittgenstein moved from the ontological realism and the logicism of the *Tractatus* to a decided materialism which on the one hand rejects thought as a process independent of speech, communication and action, and on the other takes into account the real human circumstances in which meanings are formed. With due caution one can say that he had begun to carry out on himself an operation that on a much smaller scale is reminiscent of the operation carried out by Feuerbach, Marx and Engels on Hegel—thereafter developing in a very detailed way certain ideas that in Feuerbach, Marx and Engels are only mentioned in passing. From this perspective, I would say that Wittgenstein is more Feuerbachian than Marxian: he descended from the heavens of the immobile structures described in the *Tractatus* to the earth of ever-changing meaningful behaviour, and sought the origin of metaphysical alienation within the strictly earthly field of human speech. But, as will be clearer at the end of this essay, he did not ask himself *why* speech itself comes to be deformed, *why* the perplexities and misunderstandings that he is linguistically denouncing exist. Wittgenstein's materialism is still prevalently empiricist and biologicistic; but nevertheless it already examines men as grouped in social communities. We shall see that unexpected possible interpretations of his work open up here. It is not by chance that the ontologist Bergmann, protagonist of one of the most amusing philosophical involutions of the last twenty years (a former member of the Vienna Circle, who now considers himself the restorer of pre-Kantian metaphysics), in 1961 proclaimed the *Tractatus* 'glorious' and the *Untersuchungen* 'miserable' because of their 'absurd virtual materialism' (Bergmann, 1964:225–41).

The historiographical vacuum around Wittgenstein

What were the influences that led Wittgenstein to formulate a philosophy so different from the one set forth in the *Tractatus*, and so much more acceptable and exciting? Here in continental Europe this question sounds quite legitimate; and certainly no one here is inclined to believe that *everything* took place within the head of a single person, however brilliant he may have been and however given to long periods of solitude. Wittgenstein, who is certainly not inclined to exaggerate his debts, himself mentions two influences in the

Vorwort (dated January 1945) to the *Philosophische Unterstichungen*. The passage is worth re-reading in its entirety:

For since beginning to occupy myself with philosophy again, sixteen years ago, I have been forced to recognise grave mistakes in what I wrote in that first book [*Tractatus*]. I was helped to realise these mistakes to a degree which I myself am hardly able to estimate—by the criticism which my ideas encountered from Frank Ramsey, with whom I discussed them in innumerable conversations during the last two years of his life. Even more than to this—always certain and forcible—criticism I am indebted to that which a teacher of this university, Mr P.Sraffa, for many years unceasingly practised on my thoughts. I am indebted to this stimulus for the most consequential ideas of this book.

(1958:x)

One might think that such precise and explicit indications would have immediately encouraged others to research into the intellectual formation of the ‘second’ Wittgenstein, so as to place his new ideas in a historical framework, render them more comprehensible, and thereby delimit their range. Unfortunately Ramsey died in January 1930, one month before his twenty-seventh birthday. All of his work that is left to us consists of some ten very acute essays on mathematical logic, two on economic mathematics (much admired by J.M.Keynes) and his reviews of three very significant books: *The Meaning of Meaning* by Ogden and Richards, *Principia Mathematica* by Russell and Whitehead, and Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* (this review was written in 1923 before discussing the work with the author). Of Ramsey, von Wright limits himself to saying that, with Sraffa, he was of great importance for his criticism of Wittgenstein’s earlier conceptions. Pole mentions Ramsey for having ‘told Wittgenstein that Logic is a normative science’ (Pole, 1958:38 and 56n), but ignores Sraffa. Both von Wright and Malcolm in their brief biographies (upon which I constantly draw) seem to attach more importance to the Italian economist’s influence, perhaps understandably since Ramsey’s interests as a mathematician and formal logician were predominantly technical (although he did, in one case, go so far as to accuse Wittgenstein of scholasticism). Von Wright writes:

It was above all Sraffa’s acute and forceful criticism that compelled Wittgenstein to abandon his earlier views and set out upon new roads. He said that his discussions with Sraffa made him feel like a tree from which all branches had been cut. That this tree could become green again was due to its own vitality.

(von Wright, in Malcolm, 1958:15 f.)

The central idea of the *Tractatus*, that a proposition is a picture or image, had come to Wittgenstein, as von Wright recounts, in a trench one day during the

First World War while he was looking at a magazine diagram, which represented the possible sequence of events in an automobile accident. The drawing served as a proposition: that is, as a description of a state of things. It acquired such a function through the correspondence between the parts of the image and things in reality. By reversing the analogy one could then say that a proposition served as an image or picture by virtue of an analogous correspondence between its parts and the world: the way in which the parts of the proposition were combined—its structure—would represent a possible combination of elements in reality, a possible state of things. After recounting the same episode in his own terms, Malcolm goes on to say that this theory was ‘suddenly’ destroyed one day when Wittgenstein and Sraffa were talking on a train.

When Wittgenstein was insisting that a proposition and that which it describes must have the same ‘logical form’, the same ‘logical multiplicity’, Sraffa made a gesture, familiar to Neapolitans as meaning something like disgust or contempt, of brushing the underneath of his chin with an outward sweep of the finger-tips of one hand. And he asked: ‘What is the logical form of that?’ Sraffa’s example produced in Wittgenstein the feeling that there was an absurdity in the insistence that a proposition and what it describes must have the same ‘form’. This broke the hold on him of the conception that a proposition must literally be a ‘picture’ of the reality it describes.

(Malcolm, 1958:7–8)

For fear that he had perhaps related the historical development and, in particular, the transition from the conceptual world of the *Tractatus* to that of the *Untersuchungen* too subjectively, Malcolm adds in a footnote:

Professor G.H.von Wright informs me that Wittgenstein related this incident to him somewhat differently: the question at issue, according to Wittgenstein, was whether every proposition must have a ‘grammar’, and Sraffa asked Wittgenstein what the ‘grammar’ of that gesture was. In describing the incident to von Wright, Wittgenstein did not mention the phrases ‘logical form’ or ‘logical multiplicity’.

(Malcolm, 1958:69n)³

It seems on the other hand that the idea of language-games was suggested by the game of soccer. On one fine day, while walking alongside a playing field where a game was in progress, Wittgenstein was struck for the first time by the thought ‘that we play *games* with *words*’. (Just to show how such things go: Malcolm is here reporting an anecdote told him by the physicist Freeman Dryson, who had heard it from Wittgenstein (*ibid.*: 65).)

It would be incorrect to pass off these episodes as of no importance. After all, they show us a thinker who conceives new ideas through the observation

of daily life, because he grasps what is common to various types of behaviour normally assigned to different 'realms'. And this constitutes a useful corrective to the mentality of those who cannot consider an idea unless it comes to them from the printed page. At times, however, one gets the impression that Wittgenstein picturesquely related to his friends and disciples whatever happened to come to his mind, not for any dishonest motive, but as a joke, or to obtain a certain effect. Basically, he invented word games with them too, and they, in their veneration of the master, lapped it all up [...].

Nevertheless, Wittgenstein's entrance into the Cambridge milieu and through Cambridge into the whole philosophical culture of the English-speaking world was by no means casual or irrelevant. Originally he came as Russell's student, and despite his aversion for the English he found in England an atmosphere suited to the free development of his interests and ideas. At the time, Cambridge (like Oxford) was fully a university of an elite, divorced from want but at the same time imbued with a local tradition of stoicism and thus ready to confront trivial problems with abnegation. His unusual way of teaching, without organised lectures, but rather with questions and answers interspersed by long musing silences, and also his bizarre behaviour, fitted in well with the individualistic idiosyncrasies left over from the great nineteenth-century liberal age and still stirring within the fabric of social respect imposed by a rich and well-stratified society, no longer the centre of an empire, but still the centre of a Commonwealth. The very theoretical individualism that sets a limitation on his theory of language (about which more later) corresponded to the customs of the Cambridge and Oxford colleges, where anyone could in theory come forward and speak as an individual, but where a person was in practice discredited as an individual if what he said did not conform to the values of the group. In fact the prevailing ideology asserted that each group was necessarily an assembly of free individuals and thus came into being only *after* the individuals had already formed a position of their own. But this same ideology served to screen the fact that the individuals were judged as such, and therefore 'admitted', only when they *already belonged* to that group. No other university in the world, with the obvious exception of Oxford, would have permitted one of its members to let twenty years pass without publishing anything. The English variety of academic specialisation, with its careful separation of philosophy from history and from the social sciences, also permitted Wittgenstein to retain, or made it easier for him to retain, his peculiar detachment from the historical-social dimension of problems and from all reference to the masters of the past. (Kant, notoriously parsimonious with his quotations, names many more.) This attitude, while tolerable in a man of his talent and originality, was later to become repulsive when exhibited by hundreds of young lads capable of disposing of a man like Kant by writing a piece on his use of the genitive article *der* instead of setting themselves to work on the ideas of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Finally, G.E. Moore, who had been teaching at Cambridge for decades, had already himself established a school of linguistic analysis there.

In the light of the historiographical silence after Wittgenstein's death, one must also admit that these same characteristics of the English social and academic milieu have prevented or at least delayed a more modern and socially interesting use of Wittgenstein's ideas. As far as I know, no one has studied these from a historical point of view, and what is more, no one has ever even connected them with broader problems or attempted to apply them outside the circle of interests into which Wittgenstein personally placed them. Somewhat crudely, one could even say that they were and have remained the ideas that a logician, albeit a logician of great penetration, might have formulated after moving beyond his own field. I certainly do not want to insinuate that people like Gilbert Ryle, John Wisdom and many others have not done original work and put forward ideas not contained in Wittgenstein's oral or written teachings. But they have undoubtedly continued to work 'outside' history, they have never taken real social contexts into account, and they have never worked the ideas they have been using back into the great intellectual mainstreams from which they originally emerged. That is the main point: to reduce the 'second' Wittgenstein's contribution to its real historical dimension and thereby to put it to constructive use, it is not enough to reconstruct *his own* intellectual development and his personal relations with the milieu in which he happened to be. One must also trace back, within the fabric of European culture, the first effective formulations of the points of view, doctrines and techniques that later became his, and trace them *independently* of the influence they actually exerted on him *as an individual*. His disciples have done the former only by occasional passing references, without going into depth. (One fine day, Ramsey told Wittgenstein, 'You know what? Logic is a normative science!') They seem to have no idea that the latter is even possible. [...] They probably overestimate, rather in the tradition of Locke, the importance of the conscious psyche's role compared with that of the unconscious and the position of the individual as the centre of action. The truth is rather that even in a case where an author knows nothing of some formulation prior to his own, this formulation—if it has been effective—has given rise to further research, been amplified by entering into contact with other formulations, and has received criticism. All this provides material which helps place what our author has said within a framework and examine it, beginning with the *absence* of certain developments that have instead accompanied very similar ideas in other authors. Even though this is all the more true when there has been a direct influence, it can never—as so many Anglo-Saxon philosophers seem to imagine—be merely a matter of sterile and foolish claims of priority. [...]

[...] [Ignoring of all this has meant that] the second stage of Wittgenstein's life activity has continually been thrown back upon the first, and this has diminished the public estimation of the theoretical innovations of the *Untersuchungen* as compared with the *Tractatus*. It has exacerbated the defects of both his students and all those in general who espouse his name, favouring in its superficial, idiomatic aspects the comfortably non-committal cult of what is called everyday language.

Finally, it has led many scholars of various tendencies to become disgusted with him. It has, for example, allowed certain advocates of ‘a transcendental Logic as an expression of *Reason*’ to raise absurd criticisms of his work from a point of view (any one of the points of view that stem from ‘bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language’—1958:§109) [which] he had himself so effectively shown to be ridiculous. Moreover, it has prevented Marxists from seeing how his criticism of philosophy as linguistic pathology can very well find a place in a general criticism of ideologies. This complex of consequences has obviously been supported both by the Anglo-Saxon taste for the particular and meticulous in an atmosphere of historiographical vacuum and cultural separatism and by the backwardness and superficiality of academic theoretical philosophy in various European countries, not to mention certain narrowly dogmatic tendencies which, as we unfortunately well know, have long since come to plague even Marxists.

By making what is commonly called ‘Marxist use of neocapitalist tools’ we must try to approach Wittgenstein from a different direction, acknowledging openly both his basic ideas and limitations, and thus reinstating a meaning that certainly comes closer to what he intended by the nucleus of his thought than do the jugglings of idiomatic minutiae and the fussy workings and reworkings of the same old arguments which still typify most official ‘Wittgensteinian’ writings and lectures.

We must start, I feel, by asking ourselves what was the ‘stimulus’ that Wittgenstein and his biographers considered the most important and fruitful of all he received: the stimulus of Piero Sraffa. For Sraffa, as well as a man of genius, is an economist, and incidentally a Marxian at that.

A few hypotheses on Sraffa’s influence

To illustrate Sraffa’s modernity and the nature of his work, I turn to two specialists. Claudio Napoleoni’s *Pensiero economico del novecento* (1963) concludes with a discussion of Sraffa’s book *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities*. He presents it as ‘the first attempt explicitly and consciously aimed at elaborating an economic analysis that assumes the radical insufficiency of the modern approach’ (i.e. the still dominant approach which rejects the so-called classical economics of Smith, Ricardo and Marx, and progresses from Jevons, Walras and Wicksell to John Maynard Keynes and the present-day theorists of neocapitalism) and he assesses it as an ‘explicit return to the classical tradition—in its Ricardian-Marxian aspects’, but with the categories of profit, wages and consumption substantially different from those predominant in the last century. Sraffa conducts his analysis outside the theory of labour-value, thus allowing himself to overcome the *formal* difficulties of classical theory; he does not start out from any given social configuration, only from the ‘world of commodities’ and the ‘technology connected with it’, but he develops a *theory of surplus* which, Napoleoni maintains, ‘cannot but lead to a return, in economics as well, to the whole question of exploitation, which was the basic question in the classical tradition’. In fact,

to deal with...the problem...of the relationship between consumption and production it is necessary to reconsider the question of the human condition that corresponds to an organisation of exploitation, that is to say the condition of *alienation*, of which Marx was the first to see the relevance for a knowledge of modern economic society

(Napoleoni, 1963:194, 198, 201)

Vincenzo Vitello in his *Pensiero economico moderno* also ends with a consideration of Sraffa and similarly contrasts his approach with that of the 'modern' theories. In the latter 'we start from the initial factors of production and arrive at final consumption goods through a movement that flows in this direction only' (Walras's model is typical of this); the 'production of commodities by means of commodities' is instead 'the representation of a circular process of social production, in which the same commodities that appear as products are also present as means of production used in their own production'. Although Sraffa himself does not develop a theory of labour-value, he still offers a return to that concept of *surplus* value which had been completely lost in the theory of marginal productivity (Vitello, 1963:124).

When I talked to Sraffa in November 1960 he was rather evasive on the subject that had prompted my visit. He tended to minimise his own influence on the intellectual formation of the 'second' Wittgenstein, whose acknowledgements he attributed to kindness and the memory of pleasant walks together along the Cam. In the end he admitted there might be something in the idea and mentioned the possibility of writing about it himself I do not know if he ever did so.

Keeping the differences between the *Tractatus* and the *Untersuchungen* straight in our minds and remembering that the main propositions of Sraffa's theory had been formulated as early as 1930, one can venture to say that the influence of a neo-Ricardian and neo-Marxian economist on a logician tinged with metaphysical absolutism and open to mystical evasions took (or may have taken) the following forms.

- 1 A return to context, to the relationships between the various parts that make up a given totality, to circular, rather than linear thinking. Specifically, a return to the real circumstances in which things—including the particular 'things' that constitute language—gain their meaning. Outside a real context, things have no meaning, or lend themselves to being assimilated and debased within preconceived schemata to which they do not belong. This was the case of the *Tractatus*, where each proposition mirrored a fact by means of a structure common to both, and where it was impossible to talk about this structure in any meaningful way Today, I tend to see an intimate affinity between this doctrine and saying that every commodity has a value in its own right and in an irreducible way, or explaining profit as an inherent property of capital. In the *Untersuchungen* the *internal* structure of a sentence is instead revealed by comparing the sentence with other sentences: that is, by

- means of a structure external to the given sentence, composed of the relationships between at least two sentences. And when Wittgenstein shows that the meaning of a single word consists of the use we make of it within a linguistic game, he is making an analogous progression from the internal to the external. The Marxian analysis of the commodity and the Wittgensteinian analysis of the word have at least this in common: both reject the possibility of a value inherent in the object, independent of its use-in-a-given-context.
- 2 A tracing of the contextual and real situations in which words take on meaning (more precisely: in which they *become* words) further back to the communal existence of men, who are the *actors-out* of meaning. Not merely to a biological, but to a public communal life, compared to which the private experiences of the subjects are revealed to be secondary. Just as the subjective theory of economic value rests on a psychological atomism verging on a form of solipsism, so too does a subjective theory of meaning, and that, after all, is what emerges from the *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein, 1961b: 5.6 ff.).⁴ Commodities 'do not go to market by themselves', and neither do words. Commodities and words have this in common, that values are conferred upon them by men in association; a private language, like a private market, is a contradiction in terms. But precisely for this reason there can be private ownership of both goods and messages.
 - 3 On the other hand, the commodity or the word can come back upon the scene as the bearer of the values conferred upon it; thus 'it mirrors for men the social character of their own labour, mirrors it as an objective character attaching to the labour products themselves, mirrors it as a social natural property of these things', as Marx says in one of his well-known passages on the fetishism of commodities (Marx, 1965:71–83). Under Sraffa's demystifying influence Wittgenstein may have realised that these same propositions are also valid for words, sentences and messages.
 - 4 Exemplification of the research models characteristic of classical economic thought. These models are arrived at through abstraction, by discarding secondary characteristics and not by gathering together common properties. This is a method of abstraction that *determines* its own object as a totality, rather than cutting out certain parts from the whole to which they belong. Now this is exactly Wittgenstein's line of work. Not only does he reject any model obtained through generalisation of common properties, he constructs his 'linguistic games' as independent totalities determined by discarding what is irrelevant or secondary. In this way he avoids the danger, inherent in the generalisation of common properties by 'progressive refinement of the analogy' (the expression is Maurice Dobb's), of having to take into account factors no longer essential to an understanding of the specific problem being examined, and thereby of losing in depth what has been gained in breadth.⁵ From a point of view different from his own, we can perhaps criticise Wittgenstein for limiting himself to very small models (just as we can criticise his successors for not systematically working back to the basic ideas that underlie the

construction of these same models). But the targets of Wittgenstein's polemics were those I have mentioned; and language has yet to find its Ricardo and its Marx (perhaps even its Adam Smith).

Apart from what we might call the differences in scale, there is a noticeable similarity in the procedures Sraffa and Wittgenstein follow in beginning their works and in approaching their problems. The *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities* is built on a successive series of models. In the first place, we have a model of a closed productive process, in which the commodities themselves function as both means of production and products, and the quantity of each commodity produced corresponds to the quantity used as means of production. Next a schema is advanced of an economic process in which a surplus occurs; the production and complex of the means of production continue to be the commodities themselves, but the technology now permits the *quantity* of each commodity produced to be equal to or *greater than* the quantity used as means of production. And so on. In fact, Sraffa comments at the beginning of his treatise:

Let us consider a primitive society that produces the bare necessities of subsistence. Commodities are produced by separate industries or are exchanged one for the other at the market held after the harvest. Let us suppose first of all that only two commodities are produced, grain and iron. Both are used, in part to maintain those who work and the rest as means of production—the grain as seed and the iron in the form of tools.
(Sraffa, 1960:1)

Sraffa then moves on to his second model; and only subsequently comes to separate labour from the other means of production, thus setting wages off from other prices.

In the very first pages of the *Untersuchungen*, immediately after presenting and criticising St Augustine's linguistic theory as a good example of doctrinaire simplification, Wittgenstein writes:

Let us imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right. The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building-stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words 'block', 'pillar', 'slab' and 'beam'. A calls them out:—B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. Conceive this as a *complete primitive language* [1958:§2; italics are mine]... It disperses the fog to study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds [*Arten*] of application in which one can command a clear view of the aim and functioning of the words.

(1958:§5)

And a little further on:

Let us now look at an expansion of language (2). Besides the four words 'block', 'pillar', etc., let it contain a series of words used as the shopkeeper in (1) used the numerals [in (1) Wittgenstein proposed an example of application of the language which consisted in sending someone to do the shopping, giving him a piece of paper bearing the signs 'five red apples' and then described the shopkeeper's behaviour on seeing the paper: this behaviour could not be explained by Augustine's theory]; further, let there be two words, which might as well be 'there' and 'this' (because this roughly indicates their purpose), that are used in connection with a pointing gesture; and finally a number of colour samples. A gives an order like: 'd-slab-there'. At the same time he shows the assistant a colour sample, and when he says 'there', he points to a place on the building site. (1958:§8)

I do not intend to pursue these analogies any further, although I shall say more about other relationships between Wittgenstein and Marxist thought in the final part of this essay.

A Marxian use of the second Wittgenstein

With the exception of his technical contributions to symbolic logic (here not discussed) and his methodological message on the practical character of philosophising, the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* is useful from the point of view of the philosophy of praxis only to the extent that he is to be thoroughly criticised and rejected as a thinker who, however arduous and profound, is none the less 'false'. By contrast, I feel the 'second' Wittgenstein provides a lesson that is still of great interest.

It would do well first to stress the possible influence of Marxism, even in the form of direct influence from certain classical texts. But even if it could be shown that there was no such influence, or not a conscious one, one would still need, as I suggested earlier, to take into account the evident similarities, and also the various different developments very similar ideas have undergone elsewhere.

Even the idea of a private language was vigorously attacked by Marx and Engels in the *Deutsche Ideologie*: it is enough to remember their comment on the Hegelian triad of consciousness–language–thought in the two paragraphs devoted to history and the formation of consciousness at the beginning of the book, in the well-known passage:

Language is as old as consciousness; language is practical consciousness, as it exists for other men, and for that reason is really beginning to exist for me personally as well; for language, like consciousness, arises only from the need, the necessity, of intercourse [*Verkehr*] with other men.

(Marx and Engels, 1968:42)

In this extraordinary work there are many other pages that, I presume, Wittgenstein would have read with enthusiasm [...] I refer, for example, to the pages on philosophical *phrases* which ‘become’ real questions, and to those on the operation of taking ‘the independent expression in thoughts of the existing world—as the basis of the existing world’, or to that on the bourgeois use of ‘property’ in the mercantile and in the individual sense, i.e. ‘both for commercial relations and for features and mutual relations of individuals as such’ (*ibid.*: 42, 53, 61).

But even more, I refer to the chapters entitled ‘The Revelation of John the Divine, or “The logic of the new wisdom”’ and ‘Apologetical commentary’. The first contains a critique of what the authors call *apposition* and *synonymy*. Apposition lies in equating various linguistic uses with the trick of setting up intermediate terms which are then abandoned—‘a highly recommendable method of contraband juggling of thoughts’. Synonymy lies in considering that ‘if two words are etymologically linked or only similar in sound’ then they are ‘responsible for each other’, or in using a word that has different meanings ‘according to need first in one sense and then in the other’. This technique serves, among other things,

to transform empirical into speculative relations, by using in its speculative meaning a word that occurs both in practical life and in philosophical speculation, uttering a few phrases about this speculative meaning and then making out that he has thereby criticised the actual relations which this word is also used to denote.

(*ibid.*: 304)

From the other chapter mentioned I shall limit myself to calling attention to two passages:

For philosophers, one of the most difficult tasks is to descend from the world of thought to the actual world. Language is the immediate actuality of thought. Just as philosophers have given thought an independent existence, so they had to make language into an independent realm. This is the secret of philosophical language, in which thoughts in the form of words have their own content. The problem of descending from the world of thoughts to the actual world is turned into the problem of descending from (the) language to life... The philosophers would only have to dissolve their language into the ordinary language, from which it is abstracted, to recognise it as the distorted language of the actual world, and to realise that neither thoughts nor language in themselves form a realm of their own, that they are only manifestations of actual life.

(*ibid.*: 503 and 503–4)

The reader may look at the criticism of the concept of 'self and of the logical trick used in progressing from 'not my wealth' to 'my non-wealth', with all the metaphysical consequences which may be derived from it, in the chapter on the 'new theology', as well as the critique of the philosophical search for a *word* having the 'magic virtue' of reconnecting language and thought to real life, in the other chapter.

These and many other passages by Marx and/or Engels come as a great surprise to those who discover them *after* having studied Wittgenstein and, in general, the modern currents of linguistic analysis as represented by some of their most advanced exponents. In the *Philosophische Untersuchungen* there are ideas that recall ideas from the *Deutsche Ideologie* even in the way they are expressed. In certain places one almost has the impression that Wittgenstein transplanted on to another intellectual planet the very attitude of Marx and Engels to the speculative philosophical tradition with its logical tricks, its terminological embezzlements and its detachment from the 'practical' use of language.

Naturally, this relationship to Marxism is not the only traceable one. To point out certain of the others may be helpful in understanding the transformations that Marxist ideas underwent in Wittgenstein's thinking, so that by later retracing, so to speak, the same road in the reverse, we would eventually find ourselves with Wittgensteinian ideas re-transformed into Marxist ideas. Here I must limit myself to recalling in passing that we owe to Wilhelm Dilthey a definition of meaning as 'relationships of the parts to a whole *within* life', beginning with the 'simplest case in which meaning appears', which is the understanding of a proposition (Dilthey, 1927:232–6). Many passages throughout Dilthey's treatment of the 'categories of life' have a Wittgensteinian flavour, which is only another way of saying that many passages in Wittgenstein's texts have a Diltheyan flavour. 'An expression has meaning only within the flow of life': this aphorism of Wittgenstein's, Malcolm tells us, is 'particularly noteworthy, as that which sums up much of his philosophy' (Malcolm, 1958:93).⁷

This is the place to recall another remarkable convergence. According to the school of comparative mythology founded by Max Müller (who was professor at Oxford from 1868 to 1875 and published directly in English towards the end of the century), one must resort to linguistic comparison to grasp myths as spontaneous expressions of popular fantasy personifying its own reactions to natural phenomena. What happens is that the *adjectives* applied to such phenomena break away from their original meanings and are conceived as names of personal divinities. The surprising result is that mythology comes to be seen as a *sickness of language*. Of Wittgenstein, we can say that, in the same circles, he spread a doctrine of philosophy as the sickness of language: this was possible because speculative philosophy had been rejected: that is, in a certain sense, philosophy had been reduced to mythology. But we must underline the fact that the step with which, from the Marxist point of view, German classical philosophy concludes, the step from description to action, was lost in the course of this reduction; and in this 'loss' lay a new type of conservative ideology.

More time should certainly be spent on Wittgenstein's possible relations with linguistics and with certain philosophers before him who were interested

in language. We have already mentioned that he was well acquainted with Lichtenberg; for Herder and Humboldt we have no indications. Gershon Weiler has instead pointed to a definite relationship between Wittgenstein and Fritz Mauthner, (Weiler, 1958:80–7) who in his *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* (1901–2, reprinted several times) and in various other works devoted to language saw in the critique of language a fundamental liberating and therapeutic function for philosophy and opposed the use of an ideal language, urging instead the study of linguistic variety. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein expressly distinguished his philosophy as critique of language from Mauthner's (Wittgenstein, 1961b: 4.0031), but after the *Tractatus* he moved in the direction, and to a certain extent returned to the position, of Mauthner. But aside from Mauthner and other philosophers occupied with language, there were many other developments in linguistics between the late nineteenth century and the 1930s or even 1940s that bear looking at from the standpoint of the 'second' Wittgenstein and in exchange offer important elements for looking at him.⁸ Those, for example, who appreciate the resolving power of the doctrine of meaning as use, but feel it insufficient, will find it useful to compare this doctrine with what is called 'analytic' doctrine, which tries to resolve meaning into its constituent elements, a doctrine still highly valued by most linguists. And it is impossible not to sense a certain family resemblance (of the kind the Master espoused) between Wittgenstein's contextualism and, for example, what Ferdinand de Saussure had to say on linguistic value, on language as a system, and on the use of models of the sort offered by the game of chess. The same can be said for the Russian formalists' studies on the plurifunctionality of language and for the research on 'semantic fields' begun by Leo Weisgerber, Jost Trier and others around 1930, developed after the war by, among others, Ernst Leisi (Rossi-Landi, 1972:273, n. 35).

Returning to Marxism, it is time to give a rather more explicit form to the limits of a theoretical delimitation of Wittgenstein's thought contained in the preceding pages and finally to see exactly where he made his most perspicacious contribution. I shall advance four negative points—four parts of a critical 'whole' which I will separate simply for ease of exposition.

First point Wittgenstein possesses the 'public' without possessing the 'social'. His linguistic games take place between two or more persons. He correctly criticises the myth that they can occur 'within' a single person: language must be public, that is, intersubjectively controllable; it requires 'external rules' which are applied even when 'one talks to oneself'. This *taking place in public* is not, however, seen as *existing socially*. Wittgenstein's position is similar to the position of someone who, in studying the commodity, would limit himself to describing various types of barter, while tacitly admitting that the same types of barter can always be repeated within other groups of two or more persons. We know that all these persons exist; but he takes them as already formed individuals and studies what happens when they *begin* talking to one another. Even when he describes the ways in which we learn to talk as children (the

famous idea of the nursery as the irreplaceable language school, which the Wittgensteinians have embraced with enthusiasm), the children he shows us are the offspring of adults who are already completely developed as individuals and who transmit to them linguistic techniques already in their possession. In short, the idea Wittgenstein never seems to have grasped, or at least not grasped as fundamental, is that individuals have socially formed themselves as individuals precisely because, among other things, *they have begun* to talk to one another. As Marx writes in the *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* of 1857–8 (but brought to public attention only around 1950, and therefore post-Wittgenstein), the individual is clearly

related to a language as his own only as the natural member of a human community. Language as the product of an individual is an absurdity [*ist ein Unding*]. But so also is property—Language itself is just as much the product of a community, as in another aspect it is the existence of a community—it is, as it were, the communal being speaking for itself [*das selbstredende Dasein desselben*].

(Marx, 1953:390)⁹

Second point The notion of linguistic use concerns something that has already been produced and therefore exists; given, for example, a certain word, we use it, and this is its meaning. Even the child who learns a new word and uses it for the first time is exercising this behaviour of his on something that has preceded him (and that will therefore compel him to ‘see a piece of the world’ in a certain way). But how was this word originally produced? Not answering this question resembles not asking how the knife was produced, for example; and equating the meaning of a word with its use is similar to explaining the use of the knife (this is its meaning) without considering either the cutlers (poor things) or the real social process that led from tearing things apart with our bare hands to cutting. In short, to use another formula, I would say Wittgenstein lacked the notion of labour-value: that is, of the value of a given object—in this case a linguistic object—as the product of a given piece of linguistic labour. From the linguistic object, he moves only forwards, never backwards. So he considers the instruments we use to communicate as given and therefore ‘natural’; they are a sort of wealth we find freely available. His is a physiocratic position applied to language (later given a mercantilistic turn by Gilbert Ryle in a series of essays on linguistic use) (Ryle, 1931–2; 1937–8; 1953; 1961; 1962). It is interesting to note in passing that in Sraffa’s *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities* a theory of labour-value is likewise not developed.

Third point Wittgenstein’s insistence on philosophy as sickness and on the defects of language, his insistence that ‘going on holiday’ and ‘idling out of gear’ generate ‘mental cramps’ and ‘perplexities’, presents an aspect that would be surprising if it did not fit in with his failure to proceed from the public to the social and from use to labour. The question he never asks himself is *why* language goes on holiday

and idles out of gear or what the historical-social origin of these cramps and perplexities is. Wittgenstein constantly denounces various aspects of philosophical alienation from the standpoint of language and takes several essential steps towards delineating what I do not hesitate to call *linguistic alienation*. But he does not work back from the phenomena he has examined and denounced to their causes, and he completely ignores the general doctrine of alienation. He lacks a theory of society and history on which to base his research. (This point has nothing in common with the archaic nineteenth-century reaction of those who in criticising Wittgenstein in their own way become alarmed at the pathological character of language which he denounces and 'claim' the existence of a 'specifically philosophical linguistic game'; both for Wittgenstein and for this author, the idea of such a game is by now only quaint. That the pathological character of language may also be *tragic*, is another matter; but the remedy for it is certainly not a 'specifically philosophical linguistic game'.)

Fourth point As a result of all this, Wittgenstein's philosophy, which is critical of tradition to the point of becoming sterile in the rejection of all theoretical constructions that might recall this or that aspect of tradition, remains in part divorced from reality. Despite the exasperatingly fragmentary style, the modest pace and the everyday language, it still reflects the separation of the academic from the rest of culture, of philosophy from other intellectual pursuits, of the learned Cambridge and Oxford society from the rest of the world. The atmosphere in which Wittgenstein's minute arguments sound at home is still that of a group of specialists indifferent to real problems. It is only in an idiom spoken predominantly by persons who have read certain abstruse books and belong to a particular little in-group that language goes on holiday and idles *in the typical ways examined by Wittgenstein*. He continually says 'we say that...', 'we tend to...', 'we do not realise that...', etc. Why no one ever embarrassed him by asking who 'we' referred to can only be explained in terms of all those separatisms whose tacit acceptance made possible the pretence that 'we' stood for an 'all men' which was really missing altogether! The English feeling that *their* language is the natural one (and Wittgenstein, after all, taught and conversed in it), and the concomitant lack of awareness of linguistic relativity undoubtedly contributed too.

To conclude, it is not difficult at this point to highlight what in Wittgenstein is highly positive from a Marxian point of view. Wittgenstein's position is that of a non-mechanistic materialist who continually refers back to man as the actor in all meaning and communication processes. In the study of these processes he constructs quasi-formal models: that is, models at a low level of formalisation, sufficiently concrete to describe what happens and sufficiently abstract to avoid getting bogged down in empiricism. These models, together with the whole idea of an analysis that I would not hesitate to call substantially 'structural', constitute a corrective against the excesses of a certain historicistic panlogism, whose consistent application would lead to rejecting all models as inadequate in the face of the variety of what actually takes place. We thus have

in Wittgenstein a non-metaphysical re-evaluation of the ‘constant’—of that which changes at a rate so much slower than the rest that it stands as a recognisable structure even over long periods of time. I would go so far as to relate this positive aspect, at least in part, to the mediation between idealism and empiricism on which, as mentioned above, the young Russell based his work. The analyses contained in the *Untersuchungen* are in fact unthinkable both from the standpoint of classical (or ‘neo-classical’) empiricism and from that of classical (or ‘neo-classical’) idealism.

However, Wittgenstein’s most important contribution remains his critique of linguistic alienation in general and of linguistic-philosophical alienation in particular. The serious reservations advanced above in view of his limitations must not blind us to the fact that, though he never used the word and perhaps never thought of the matter in its general form, he did begin a critique of ‘alienated’ language, accumulating an immense quantity of very accurate work on certain focal points at which alienation is formed and manifests itself *linguistically*. When dealing with those who fall victim to hasty generalisations, we can never insist enough on the level of semantic elaboration and rigour reached by Wittgenstein in examining such manifestations in a great number of slightly different and for this reason not easily identifiable cases. A person who has understood Wittgenstein can no longer be fooled by big words, by logical tricks and the pseudo-scientific constructions of philosophers, nor by the difficulties of common speech itself when it jams and shows its own defects and essential limitations.

Wittgenstein furnishes brilliant and irreplaceable instruments for a critique of the phenomenology of linguistic alienation. Once one has identified his limitations, the limitations of his concept of ‘public’ that falls short of the ‘social’, his ‘use that is not reconnected to labour’ and his ‘separatism that keeps language detached from history’, then his doctrine of philosophy as activity can be accepted and amplified precisely by the philosophy of praxis; and this activity will then become no longer or not merely individual, but directly social. The perplexities and mental cramps that Wittgenstein attacked continue, in fact, to emerge all over the planet and certainly not only in the heads of certain colleagues. They are a social fact of immense importance, not an individual distortion; they are rooted in history, in our institutions, and in concrete interests, not merely in the unspecified ‘temptations’ or ‘inclinations’ of individual speakers.

Thus, when we look deeper than current historiographical divisions usually permit, there is a sense in which Karl Marx and Ludwig Wittgenstein may even appear complementary or, in certain aspects, actually at one. Marx gives the indispensable theoretical framework, Wittgenstein particular elaborations of it as applied to language. If it is of fundamental importance not to stop at the fact that language ‘goes on holiday’ but to carry on and ask *why*, then anyone who wants to get language back to work should find it equally important to know *how* it does so.

Notes

- 1 It is obvious that for a discussion expressly devoted to this evolution it would be necessary to examine his other posthumous works as well, including those still unpublished and the various notes taken at lectures.
- 2 More or less complete and correct expositions of the *Tractatus* can now be found in any good manual of contemporary philosophy. A 'classic', since it dates back to 1936 and is therefore not influenced by the second Wittgenstein, is Weinberg (1936).
- 3 In April 1965, I had occasion to speak with Malcolm about Sraffa's possible influence on Wittgenstein; *he knows nothing about it and is not interested*. He limits himself to recalling the episode of the gesture in the train.
- 4 Among the many writings devoted to the linguistic solipsism of Wittgenstein as it appears in the *Tractatus* are Hintikka (1958:88–91) and Keyt (1963:3–15).
- 5 In Chapter V of Dobb (1937) on the modern trend of economic science, there are enlightening pages on the construction and use of models. Dobb too was a fellow of Trinity College as far back as the 1930s. See also the section on 'The uses of abstraction' in Sweezy (1940).
- 6 Or *did* he read them? The first complete edition of the *Deutsche Ideologie* came out in Berlin in 1932, when Wittgenstein was about to undergo the 'radical change' described by von Wright; it seems highly improbable that the Marxists at Cambridge and at Trinity College did not discuss it at all; in this context, it is worth remembering that Wittgenstein planned during that period to move to the Soviet Union, which he had visited with great interest; but, the inexhaustible von Wright tells us, the idea was abandoned 'due partly at least to the harshening of conditions in Russia in the middle 30s'.
- 7 'Ein Ausdruck hat nur im Strome des Lebens Bedeutung.' Malcolm says he has not found the aphorism in any of Wittgenstein's writings known to him, but that Wittgenstein claimed to have written it somewhere. [...] Almost identical aphorisms are frequent in the *Untersuchungen*, for that matter.
- 8 In recent years, some interest in linguistics has been shown by the philosophers; the linguistics examined has, for the most part, been of the formalistic variety of a Zellig Harris or the generative variety of a Noam Chomsky. See for example the pieces by Rulon Wells and William P. Alston (1962:697–708 and 709–20).
- 9 And shortly before, in the English edition: An isolated individual could no more have property in land and soil than he could speak. He could, of course, live off its substance, as do the animals' (Marx, 1973:485).

References

- Alston, W. (1962) 'Philosophical analysis and structural linguistics', *Journal of Philosophy* LIX, 709–20.
- Anscombe, G. (1953) 'Note on the English version of Wittgenstein's *Philosophische Untersuchungen*', *Mind* LXII, 521–2.
- Barthes, R. (1964) *Essais critiques*, Paris: Editions du Seuil.
- Bergmann, G. (1964) *Logic and Reality*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Dilthey, W. (1927) *Gesammelte Schriften, VII. Band*, Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner.
- Dobb, M. (1937) *Political Economy and Capitalism: Some Essays in Economic Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hintikka, J. (1958) 'On Wittgenstein's Solipsism' *Mind* LXVII, 88–91.
- Hutten, E. (1953) 'Semantics', *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* IV(15), 229–35.
- Keyt, D. (1963) 'Wittgenstein's notion of the object', *The Philosophical Quarterly* XII, 3–15.

- Malcolm, N. (1958) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Marx, K. (1953) *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, Berlin: Dietz Verlag.
- (1965) *Capital*, vol. I, Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- (1973) *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1968) *The German Ideology*, Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Napoleoni, C. (1963) *Il pensiero economico del novecento*, Turin: Einaudi.
- Pole, D. (1958) *The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, London: Athlone Press.
- Rossi-Landi, F. (1972) *Sprache als Arbeit und als Markt*, 2nd edition, Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag.
- Ryle, G. (1931–2) ‘Systematically misleading expressions’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* XXX, 139–71.
- (1937–8) ‘Categories’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* XXXVIII, 189–206.
- (1951) ‘Ludwig Wittgenstein’, *Analysis* XII, 1–9.
- (1953) ‘Ordinary language’, *The Philosophical Review* LXII, 167–86.
- (1961) ‘Use, usage and meaning’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* supplementary volume XXXV, 223–30.
- (1962) ‘The theory of meaning’, in M.Black (ed.) *The Importance of Language*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Sraffa, P. (1960) *The Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sweezy, P. (1940) *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Vitello, V. (1963) *Il pensiero economico moderno*, Rome: Editori Riuniti.
- Weiler, G. (1958) ‘On Fritz Mauthner’s critique of language’ *Mind* LXVII, 80–7.
- Weinberg, J. (1936) *An Examination of Logical Positivism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Wells, R. (1962) ‘What has linguistics done for philosophy?’ *Journal of Philosophy* LIX, 697–708.
- Wisdom, J. (1952) ‘Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1934–1937’ *Mind* LXI, 258–60.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1958) *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1961a) *Notebooks 1914–16*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1961b) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Wright, G.H.von (1958) ‘Ludwig Wittgenstein, a biographical sketch’, in N.Malcolm (ed.) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, London: Oxford University Press.

11 Remarks on Marxism and the philosophy of language

Joachim Israel

[Editors' note: this chapter is a somewhat shortened version of an original draft submitted to us by Joachim Israel in February 2001. The chapter was composed when Joachim was already suffering considerable pain from colon cancer, a disease from which he finally died in May 2001 without being able to revisit what he explicitly described to us as a first draft. Although an original list of chapter contents indicates that Joachim did manage to deal in outline with all the topics he had planned, it is almost certain that he would have wished to considerably develop both his analysis of Gyorgy Markus's work and his overall conclusions to the chapter had he been well enough to do so. In addition, the aphoristic and staccato form of many of the observations making up the chapter are, we think, testimony to the considerable physical and mental barriers which Joachim was having to surmount in writing it at all. His courage in even attempting the task is entirely of a piece with the enthusiasm and commitment he showed towards our 'Marx and Wittgenstein' project from the first. It was a unanimous decision of all the contributors that this volume should be dedicated to the memory of a warm and open man and a fine scholar—a scholar who worked, till the day of his death, in the non-dogmatic, humanistic, Hegelian Marxist tradition which forms, very fittingly, the primary subject of his chapter.]

Introduction

In the first part of this chapter I will discuss the so-called 'philosophy of language' and its relation to Marxism. As will become clear, however, I entertain serious doubts concerning the rationale of talking about a genuine or specific *Marxist* philosophy of language.

In the second part of the chapter I present and critically examine the views of four philosophers who analysed the relationship between the philosophy of language and Marxist thought and produced major contributions. They are V.N. Volosinov and Mikhail Bakhtin (1929), Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1973 and 1974) and Gyorgy Markus (1986). I try to demonstrate that some of the views of Volosinov and Bakhtin anticipate ideas often identified with the later philosophy of Wittgenstein although they were formulated entirely without reference to the latter. By contrast, both Rossi-Landi and Markus deal explicitly with Wittgenstein's ideas,

although only Markus does so in a way which, in my opinion, can lead to a mutually enriching convergence (and perhaps transcendence) of the Wittgensteinian and Marxist traditions.

I do not claim that these thinkers represent any clear orthodoxy on the relationship between Marxism and the philosophy of language, whether individually or together. Instead, their varying attitudes testify to the complexity of the relationship between the philosophy of language and Marxist thought and to some of the problems the whole issue raises. In addition their works have varying historical and cultural backgrounds. In fact their contributions provide a spectrum of ideas about the development of the philosophy of language in general and its relation to non-Leninist (Hegelian) Marxist thought in particular.

Philosophy of language: basic epistemological assumptions

Historically viewed, philosophy of language has two epistemological roots. The first of these is anti-subjectivist philosophy, rejecting the notion of the isolated individual constituting or constructing the world of objects. This line of thought in modern Western philosophy is represented by the *cogito* of Cartesian rationalism, by Kant's notion of transcendental consciousness and Hegel's idea of natural consciousness. The second root, however, is the empiricist critique of all forms of transcendentalism, a critique which prioritised the sense experience of the concrete individual (rather than some transcendental 'consciousness') as the source of all knowledge.

The philosophy of language, therefore, in reaction to these two dominant and warring trends which preceded it, seeks to preserve the anti-individualist thrust of transcendental philosophy, while acknowledging the force of the empiricist critique. It seeks to do so by focusing not on subjectivity but on intersubjectivity, understood as intercourse and communication between concrete historical subjects or classes of subjects, holding certain positions in the social structure of society. In this perspective, 'consciousness' (in transcendentalism) and 'sense experience' (in empiricism) are both replaced as the grounds for epistemological analysis and philosophical reflection by *language* and, especially in Wittgenstein's work, by *everyday language*. One consequence is that 'language became central for the methodological self-understanding of philosophy' (Markus, 1986:2)

Some problems due to the 'linguistic turn'

The 'linguistic turn'—that is, the emphasis on language as the basis for epistemological reasoning—has also invaded the natural sciences. The metaphorical use of 'language' instead of 'mechanisms' or 'organisms' seems now to be well established. In molecular biology, for example, when speaking about DNA, expressions such as 'scripts', 'translation errors', 'the syntactical structure of genes and genomes', are used, to mention only a few examples.

My conjecture is that applying language as analogy represents a change of deeper-lying ontological positions.

The linguistic turn, however, is not only rooted in epistemological considerations. Language has also 'become the starting point and orienting model whose employment makes it possible to recapture and re-embrace in a meaningful way many of the metaphysical, anthropological, and social concerns of traditional philosophy' (Markus, 1986:3). Thus in addition to epistemological analysis, ontological and methodological problems and their solution have also been affected by the linguistic turn. The rest of this chapter is concerned to demonstrate this centrality by examining four thinkers in the Marxist tradition who have explored the implications of the linguistic turn not only for the epistemology of Marxism but also for the conceptions of the world, and methods for investigating and changing that world, which have dominated in more traditional varieties of Marxism.

Theorists of Marxism and language: a pre-Wittgenstein approach— V.N.Volosinov and Mikhail Bakhtin

In the 1920s the Soviet/Russian philosopher V.N.Volosinov published two books, *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique* and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. A lively though retrospective debate has arisen over the authorship of Volosinov's two works (neither of which made any great impact at the time they were published). In 1973, however, it was claimed that both books were in fact written by Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin, Volosinov and a third philosopher, P.N.Medvedev, belonged to a group of thinkers who worked together closely in the 1920s. In 1929 Bakhtin was arrested and sent for six years' exile to Kazakhstan.

What is beyond doubt is that all three men, Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1938), Pavel Nikolaevich Medvedev (1891–1938) and Valentin Nicolaevich Volosinov (1884/5–1936) lived actual historical lives, met and discussed ideas as members of like-minded intellectual circles at Nevel, then Vitebsk and finally Leningrad during the post-revolutionary years in Russia from around 1918 to 1928.

(Morris, 1994:2)

In 1973, on Bakhtin's seventy-fifth birthday, a public conference was held in Moscow in order to honour him and his work, especially in the field of literature. When the papers of this conference were published

the claim was made by a distinguished Soviet linguist, V.V.Ivanov, that all the significant writings signed by Volosinov and Medvedev had been written in large part by Bakhtin. Their putative authors had been only responsible for 'some minor interpolations'.

(Todorov, 1984:6)

These assertions, however, have been a matter of dispute in the West as well as in Russia, not least because certain crucial facts concerning the lives and deaths of Medvedev and Volosinov, let alone their precise roles and contributions as authors, are still in doubt. According to the translator of the English version of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, for example, Volosinov fell victim to the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, and his work was consigned to oblivion (Titunik, 1973:5), while Morris, in her edition of Bakhtin's selected writings, claims explicitly that Medvedev was arrested and shot in 1938, but that Volosinov died of natural causes in 1936 (Morris 1994:3).

However, whatever may be the truth of these authorial questions,¹ my main concern here is with a presentation and evaluation of the ideas of Volosinov/Bakhtin, especially those expressed in his second book, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, published in Russian in 1929. In that work Volosinov directed his critique against two 'false trends in the philosophy of language'. He termed them 'individualistic subjectivism' and 'abstractive objectivism'. The first emphasises the creative function of language, understood as being located in the individual psyche. Hence in this conception the study of language is to be focused on individual psychology. The critique of 'abstractive objectivism', however, to which Volosinov gives most space and attention in the book, is especially directed against Ferdinand de Saussure and his linguistic structuralism, which he sees as a closed system operating according to its own self-contained laws. Volosinov's critique is above all directed against the notion of language conceived as a self-contained system. In particular, Saussure's entirely synchronic 'structuralist' explanations of language 'do not correspond to any real moment in the historical process of becoming' (quoted in Morris, 1994:32).

The two most fundamental aspects of language are, according to Volosinov, the possibility of using it creatively and the evaluative nature of meaning. In discourse the context of utterances therefore becomes the most essential linguistic feature. The notion that the meaning of an utterance depends on the context in which it is uttered anticipates Wittgenstein.

Volosinov maintains that a discourse can only be studied meaningfully as a communicative event, as a meaning-creating interaction between actors, finding themselves in a social situation. 'Any true understanding is dialogic in nature,' he writes, and adds that meaning therefore 'is the effect of interaction between speaker and listener' (Volosinov, 1973:35). Language, therefore, is a shared practical activity—a 'form of life' in Wittgenstein's terminology.

'One of Marxism's fundamental and most urgent tasks is to construct a genuinely objective psychology, which means a psychology based on sociological, not physiological and biological, principles' (*ibid.*: 25). This assertion is clearly directed against I.Pavlov's and V.Bechterev's experimentally founded theory of 'conditioned reflexes' as a generally valid scheme for the explanation of human behaviour. At this time (the 1920s) the latter was not only dominant in the Soviet Union, but also understood as a genuine materialistic standpoint both there and abroad. Volosinov criticised it

as an example of reified science, at that time a courageous and dangerous standpoint since it ran contrary to the official line of the party.

Volosinov maintains, on the contrary, that human action is not an object for natural scientific analysis, but an 'object for ideological understanding and sociological interpretation' (*ibid.*). The individual psyche, 'by its very existential nature', is localised between the organism and the outside world. This encounter is not, however, of a physical kind: 'The organism and the outside world meet here in the sign.' Action as a psychological experience is in fact the 'semiotic expression of the contact between the organism and the outside environment' (*ibid.*: 26). A sign is the result of this contact. Hence action or interaction, though Volosinov does not use these terms, can only be understood and interpreted as utterances. But the domain of signs is also the domain of ideology. Everything ideological possesses semiotic value, and everything semiotic has an ideological function.

Volosinov's usage of the terms 'sign' and 'ideology' is decisive for his theoretical stance. Ideological features possess meaning: 'Without signs there is no ideology' (*ibid.*: 9), but 'only that which has acquired social value can enter the world of ideology, take shape and establish itself there' (*ibid.*: 22).

Since meaning expressed by signs comes into existence in the communicative interplay between subjects, the study of social intercourse is basic to ideological analysis. Volosinov concludes that the very foundation of a Marxist theory of ideology is closely related to the problems with which the philosophy of language must deal.

The philosophy of language is the philosophy of the sign. Among signs the verbal sign is the most important. A verbal sign is expressed in the speech act. Its specificity consists in it being the medium of communication.

Physical bodies, tools of production, consumer goods—everything can be transformed into ideological signs. Bread and wine, for example, become religious symbols in the Christian sacrament of communion: 'It is their semiotic character that places all ideological phenomena under the same general definition' (*ibid.*: 11).

To counteract traditional idealistic psychology, Volosinov develops the following methodological rule concerning the relation between psychology and ideology: 'The study of ideology does not depend on psychology to any extent and need not be grounded on it.' On the contrary, 'objective psychology must be grounded in the study of ideology' (*ibid.*: 13).

Since the word is the ideological phenomenon *par excellence*, the study of ideology is based on the analysis of language and the philosophy of language must be understood as 'the philosophy of the ideological sign'. Volosinov adds that this basic notion 'must be developed and elaborated by Marxism itself' (*ibid.*: 15). As a concession to the Soviet orthodoxy, he sometimes speaks of the 'material sign'.

Since Volosinov emphasises the role of ideology he must take a stand on the relationship between base and superstructure. To propose that it is causal is far too general and therefore ambiguous. If causality means mechanical causality as it is still understood and defined by 'the positivistic representatives of

natural scientific thought' (*ibid.*: 17), it is out of the question for Marxist thinking. Marxism must understand the specific nature of the semiotic-ideological material, and the problem is how actual existence—the basis—determines signs, but also how signs determine existence. For the relationship is one of mutual influence. Volosinov's position here can be interpreted as an attack on orthodox dialectical materialism. Verbal interaction forms the 'transitional link between the sociopolitical order and ideology' (*ibid.*: 19).

Volosinov ends up formulating three methodological rules:

- 1 Ideology may not be divorced from the material reality of signs.
- 2 The sign may not be divorced from the concrete forms of social intercourse.
- 3 The forms of communication may not be divorced from the material basis.

My conclusion is that Volosinov anticipates many of the ideas which are traditionally categorised under the heading of 'the linguistic turn'. But more important to me is the fact that Volosinov dared—at that time and in that place, and not at a safe distance of space or time—to fundamentally criticise some central tenets of the then 'state-orthodox' 'dialectical materialism'. From a Marxist point of view, Volosinov upholds that tradition which sees Marxism essentially as critical theory, of the praxis-oriented type.

Bakhtin on polyphony and discourse

Since Volosinov's work has been related to Bakhtin's it is justified to present some notes on him within this context.

In Bakhtin's later work the notion of language as social interaction, as meaning-producing dialogue, is pre-eminent, and may be taken as evidence for the assertion that, at the very least, his ideas deeply influenced Volosinov's work on language.

I will attempt to summarise his well-founded and elaborated philosophical meta-linguistic position in a number of points.

- 1 Language has to be understood as voices, i.e. as practical, daily communication.
- 2 The world is essentially a collective activity, performed not by atomised individuals but by social subjects, who share a basic social 'syntax', which does not consist of abstract categories.
- 3 Discourse 'is language in its concrete living totality' and not, as in linguistics, an abstraction from the 'concrete life of the word'.
- 4 Language is conceived as a 'world view' and as 'ideologically saturated'. As a consequence we achieve 'mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life' (Bakhtin, in Morris, 1994:74).
- 5 It is in this way that his version of methodological holism is expressed.

- 6 When we acquire language it is already permeated with many voices which we take over without being aware of it. The consequence of this proposition is a rejection of the notion of a private language.
- 7 We finally achieve our own voice, i.e. our individuality, which is nonetheless neither private nor autonomous.
- 8 Dialogue characterises human communication.
- 9 Communication is polyphonous, which means that various people's utterances or voices have or ought to have equal importance, presupposing equality as a moral norm.
- 10 The idea of polyphony is one of the most important in Bakhtin's work and permeates his analysis of Dostoevsky's writing.
- 11 The essence of polyphony is a plurality of voices, with equal rights, remaining independent of each other and functioning each within its own world.
- 12 Independent voices can be combined into a unity 'of a higher order'.
- 13 Each utterance is individual, but within 'relatively stable types'. These types are relatively stable in terms both of their thematic content and their relationship to particular spheres of communication, the latter embodying specific world views. Bakhtin calls these types 'speech genres', a notion reminding us of Wittgenstein's 'forms of life'.
- 14 Human existence presents two opposing and dialectically related tendencies: a 'centrifugal' tendency, dispersing us outward into seeming linguistic chaos and a 'centripetal' tendency which helps us to overcome fluidity and to create coherence.
- 15 An ideal type of polyphony is, according to Bakhtin, expressed in Dostoevsky's novels. Their characters are never objects, but respected as subjects in their own right. They can never be fully defined or exhaustively described. They cannot be 'finalised', because unpredictable acts occur all the time.
- 16 'A man never coincides with himself. One cannot apply to him the formula $A=A$.' Man's personality becomes apparent in the dialogue, during which he reveals himself freely and reciprocally.

Bakhtin's philosophical, as well as his moral stance, is most powerfully formulated in his erudite analysis of Dostoevsky's polyphonic poetics. Dostoevsky, according to Bakhtin, does not create voiceless slaves, but 'a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices...with equal rights' (quoted in Todorov, 1984:104). Dostoevsky's work is characterised by its 'multi-levelness' and 'contradictoriness', existing not in the spirit, but in the 'objective social world', in which there were no stages 'but opposing camps, and the contradictory relationships among them were not the rising or descending course of an individual personality, but the *conditions of society*' (Bakhtin, in Morris, 1994:90). He adds that social reality is present as an objective fact of the epoch.

Probably Bakhtin's most interesting contribution to the philosophy of language is his analysis of discourse, which for him is 'language in its concrete living totality and not language as the specific object of linguistics' (*ibid.*: 103). Discourse is characterised by dialogical relationships, 'language lives only in the dialogic interaction of those who make use of it' (*ibid.*: 76). Among various forms of discourse the 'double-voiced' enables the word to become an expression of authentic life. By 'doubled-voiced' discourse, Bakhtin refers to the process whereby others' words assume a new meaning in our interpretation. They become subject to our understanding and hence double-voiced: 'Our practical everyday speech is full of other people's words' (*ibid.*: 106). We merge our own voice with the voices of others and forget who they are: 'Others, which we take as authoritative, we use to reinforce our own words; with still others, finally, we populate our own aspirations, alien or hostile to them' (*ibid.*: 107).

Bakhtin summarises his analysis of various forms of the polyphonic dialogue in Dostoevsky as follows:

Everywhere there is an intersection, consonance, or interruption of rejoinders in the open dialogue by rejoinders in the heroes' internal dialogue. Everywhere a specific sum total of ideas, thoughts, and words is passed through several unmerged voices, sounding differently in each...the object is precisely the passing of a theme through many and various voices, its rigorous and, so to speak, irrevocable multi-voicedness and vari-voicedness.

(*ibid.*: 98)

Wittgenstein as a modern Feuerbach: Ferruccio Rossi-Landi

In the Introduction to his book *Sprache als Arbeit und Markt*, Rossi-Landi tells the story of 1 May 1953 in Oxford when the *Philosophical Investigations* was first published and introduced in a public lecture given by Elizabeth Anscombe (1972:10). According to his account, Anscombe began her lecture by making two points. First she confessed that there were still 'many errors' in the translation and apologised profusely for this. Second, she underlined the individualised short remarks of which the text was mainly composed, and declared (according to Rossi-Landi) that 'what Wittgenstein says in one point should never be connected with what he says in another point' (*ibid.*: 11). Rossi-Landi's own discussion of the relationship between Marx and Wittgenstein begins by suggesting, first, that Anscombe's obsession with the minutiae of translation is itself very un-Wittgensteinian in spirit. And second, he suggests that *Philosophical Investigations* would be of hardly any worth at all if what Anscombe had said of it were literally true.

Rossi-Landi's own point of departure is 'linguistic production' as one of the basic factors of societal life (*ibid.*: 10). He asserts that the production of tools and other artefacts is homologous to the production of linguistic artefacts. Furthermore, he says, one can interpret utterances and information as commodities and commodities as information, a thesis which today, about thirty years later, seems plausible if not prophetic. Utterances and

commodities receive their value due to human action or praxis. This thesis is extensively developed in *Sprache als Arbeit und Markt*.

Rossi-Landi quotes Marx's well-known remarks on language in *The German Ideology*, in which he says that language

is practical consciousness, which exists also for other men and hence exists for me personally as well. Language like consciousness only arises from the need and necessity of relationships with other men...Consciousness is thus from the very beginning a social product and will remain so.

(Marx and Engels, 1970:51)

Rossi-Landi stresses Marx's understanding of the intersubjective character of language. It can also, he maintains, be used as an argument against the possibility of a private language. Furthermore, he adds the observation that the intersubjectivity of language is not a sufficient condition to place it into a societal frame. Intersubjectivity can be perfectly well accommodated within the framework of methodological individualism. As a necessary condition for analysing intersubjectivity within a societal frame a version of methodological holism is required.

However, before we can discuss this aspect of Rossi-Landi's 'Marxist' critique of Wittgenstein, it is necessary, I think, to clarify something about the latter's thought. Wittgenstein is not at all concerned with the methodological problem of individualism versus holism as it has been endlessly debated in social science, and judging from at least some of his remarks, might have thought the whole issue to be based, once again, on a failure of social theorists to fully comprehend their own use of language:

We use the word 'composite' (and therefore the word 'simple') in an enormous number of different and differently related ways... To the *philosophical* question: 'Is the visual image of this tree composite and what are its composite parts?' the correct answer is: 'That depends on what you understand by "composite".' (And that is of course not an answer but a rejection of the question.)

(Wittgenstein, 1958:§47)

Nonetheless, in discussing the possibility of a 'Marxist philosophy of language', I propose that the distinguishing line between Wittgenstein and Marxist philosophy of language *is* of a methodological kind. A Marxist philosophy of language has necessarily to take its point of departure in a version of methodological holism. This, however, is not a sufficient condition. Habermas's theory of communicative action, for example, is based on methodological holism, but he is equally certainly not Marxist.

Rossi-Landi applies his central thesis about language and production in order to formulate five critical points regarding Wittgenstein and his standpoint in *Philosophical Investigations*.

- 1 Language-games have to be controlled intersubjectively, but Wittgenstein does not place social interaction within a sufficiently well-specified societal framework.
- 2 The use of language is an act of production, something coming into existence, but Wittgenstein has no concept of the value of an object produced through labour.
- 3 Wittgenstein properly attacks the reificatory tendencies inherent in dominant positivist and empiricist conceptions of the world and of language, but he does not grasp the historical and social origins of linguistic alienation.
- 4 For these reasons Wittgenstein's philosophy is detached from social reality. Indeed, according to Rossi-Landi, Wittgenstein's views do not advance beyond those of Feuerbach on alienation, views which Marx had found inadequate a century earlier.

I am not going to discuss any of Rossi-Landi's critical assertions about Wittgenstein as such. Rather, I will save my criticism for the analysis of Rossi-Landi's own theoretical position, as laid out in *Sprache als Arbeit und Markt*, which I summarise in a few but far from exhaustive points below. These are:

- 1 The use of language is analogous to work and any wealth is the result of work.
- 2 Rossi-Landi explicitly refuses to speak of language as action—of, for example, speech acts—because for him utterances are products forming a concrete social reality, whereas the goal of action is often its own fulfilment.
- 3 Hegel emphasises in his master-slave parable that man becomes human first through his work, and if language is work, man becomes human by means of using language.
- 4 If language was not produced it would be something natural and we could not distinguish it from the sounds used by animals.
- 5 Rossi-Landi tries to conceptualise language through analogy with money as a universal means of exchange. In this conception, '*langue*', in Saussure's sense, corresponds to Marx's constant capital, and Saussure's '*parole*' to variable capital.
- 6 The totality of information is a process of exchange and a speech community has the characteristics of a market.
- 7 Every word or expression has individual use value. Their exchange value, on the other hand, is the foundation and determination for social relations.

There can be no doubt that my short presentation fails to do complete justice to Rossi-Landi's theoretical position, but it is elaborated enough to form a basis for critique.

My critique comprises several points. First of all, it is not sufficient for a Marxist philosophy of language (whatever this may mean) to be mainly based on an extended and forced analogy with Marxist economic theory. In Rossi-Landi's case the analogy is supplemented by recourse to Saussure's structuralist terminology, which, if anything, makes things worse, since it prevents his theorising from even reaching Volosinov's level. Although he tries to introduce some dialectical reasoning, he cannot escape Volosinov's accusation of being an 'abstractive objectivist'.

Second, Rossi-Landi does not sufficiently problematise the concept of language, which in my opinion must relate two notions reciprocally. First, we have an institutionalised structure consisting of grammatical, syntactic, semantic and logical rules. We are born into this pre-existing societal structure composed of our mother-tongue. Second, language consists of concrete actions carried out by a competent language user. In order to speak correctly s/he must act in accordance with the rules of the institutionalised structure. *But* these very rules have to be expressed—and can only be expressed—by means of concrete speech acts. From a logical point of view, therefore, language as concrete action—as an ongoing process—is basic to its institutionalised structure.

Third, Rossi-Landi does not analyse the concept of work. In her book *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt distinguishes work from production and action. 'Work' in the sense of labour is an activity, securing the survival of the species, which in Marx's terms is man's metabolism with nature. 'Production' is the process by which objects are manufactured, objects which are needed in a given epoch of human history and which (therefore) are appropriated by human beings. 'Action', finally, creates the social, political and societal conditions for historical continuity as well as for change. The term 'action', as used by Arendt, corresponds to Aristotle's 'praxis'. In my opinion, and using Arendt's distinction, language use is far more like praxis than it is like labour or production. Human action of a whole variety of types (not just political and ethical action, as in Aristotle's view) determines our relation to the world and other persons. The notion of communicative action as developed by Habermas, the goal of which is concord by means of mutual understanding, follows the Aristotelian tradition and supplements it.

Fourth, when speaking about language as work, Rossi-Landi presupposes the truth of the labour theory of value and accuses Wittgenstein of not having taken it into consideration. At the same time, however, he says of Piero Sraffa's book *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities* that his analysis solves problems in classical economic theory by going outside the labour theory of value. On the face of it there appears to be some tension between these two sets of assertions.

Fifth, Rossi-Landi maintains that language must be considered as something natural if it is not thought of as produced, and such a view, he says, would make it impossible to differentiate human speech from animal expressions. In my opinion, however, the significant difference between human speech and the expressions of animals is the fact that human speech is context-bound. We can use the same expression in different situations and different expressions in the same situation. Animals certainly cannot do this.

My conclusion is that Rossi-Landi's work today can add little to the analysis of a Marxist philosophy of language.

A post-Wittgenstein approach: Gyorgy Markus

Gyorgy Markus belongs to a group of Marxist thinkers, also including Agnes Heller among others, who were members of the last cohort of students taught by Gyorgy Lukacs at the University of Budapest. Markus is now a member of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Sydney in Australia.

In his book *Language and Production* (Markus, 1986) he follows the tradition established by Marx to formulate a critical theory for the conditions of his time. His eminent work is partly devoted to a critical analysis of three directions in modern philosophy of language—namely, positivism, structuralism and hermeneutics. In addition, it is an attempt to present a critique of Habermas's endeavour to instrumentalise Marxism.

Markus's main contribution, however, is his theoretical analysis and revival of a central theme in Marx's work: the thesis of man's self-creation through the process of objectification (*Vergesellschaftung*). Man's productive activity, his praxis, but also his products, ideas and theories, are part of the process of *Vergegenständlichung* (objectification) in which the basic characteristics of these uniquely human activities are expressed. In fact, this process of the self-constitution of man can, according to Markus, serve as a universal paradigm. The ideas about objectification are developed in the second part of his book. The notion is applied to an explication of the practical expressions of human life. He interprets in depth the diversity and multiplicity of historical forms of social life, produced through human social activities and their social appropriation as influenced by the results of these activities.

This critique is directed against three influential philosophical positions. These are, first, 'linguistic positivism' as found in the work of Karl Popper, and in particular in Popper's central notion of 'objective knowledge', a form of knowledge supposed to exist in a 'third world' of human objects which are neither material nor mental. Paul Feyerabend (1981:191) called this idea 'nothing but a chimera, a shadow cast upon our material world by views which no one in his right mind would now defend'. Markus, however, accomplishes a serious analysis and critique of Popper designed to establish that Feyerabend's acid characterisation is indeed true.

The second target of Markus's critique is structuralism as found in the influential work of Levi-Strauss. And the third target is hermeneutics, where Markus's critique is mainly directed to the work of Gadamer. In the course of constructing his sophisticated arguments, Markus draws continually on Wittgenstein's ideas, to discuss in depth some of the most important directions in modern philosophy of language.

Language and communication have, according to Markus, become a universal paradigm for virtually all forms of modern intellectual debate. Language today is treated as the point of departure as well as the model for

solving epistemological, metaphysical and anthropological problems and other preoccupations of traditional philosophy. According to Markus:

The significance of Wittgenstein's later work... is to be found above all in the fact that through an analysis of language use he mercilessly destroyed the psychologicistic theory of meaning together with (its complementary opposite) the platonic conception of meaning, which has played an important role for the neo-Kantian concept *Kulturwissenschaften*.

(Markus, 1986:15–16)

Furthermore, Wittgenstein's rejection of the notion of a private language, Markus argues, implies not only a critique of subjective knowledge, but also forms a point of departure for a specific interpretation of social reality. The concept of language usage presupposes the concept of rule, which in turn transforms descriptions into norms and norms into descriptions, hence superseding a traditional distinction in philosophy.

The lack of absolute criteria is not an empirical fact but a consequence of the 'grammar' of the concept of 'criterion'. Since it is completely senseless to seek such criteria, it is also senseless to assert their non-existence. The rules and 'paradigmata' of a language-game are not only non-criticisable; they cannot be made completely consciously explicit in a purely theoretical way either. Every linguistic articulation of the rules smashes against the limits of language itself.

(Markus, 1986:18)

To speak about language-games as a form of life is a part of an eminently practical process ('mastering a technique'), guaranteeing, through direct participation, the appropriation of social reality, a reality which changes, creates new needs and different ways of appropriation. Therefore (quoting Wittgenstein [1958:§23]), language 'is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games... come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten' [Markus 1986:18].

Markus also argues that 'the paradoxical conception of philosophy in the *Tractatus*—the saying of the unsayable—in a changed form returns in the *Investigations* too: this time philosophy becomes a pure and incessant activity which, however, ought to "leave everything as it is"'. Rationality becomes the self-prophylaxis of reason, a curb on its own senseless arrogance. He quotes Wittgenstein's *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics*,

The philosopher is the man who has to cure himself of many sicknesses of the understanding before he can arrive at the notion of the sound human understanding. If in the midst of life we are in death, so in sanity we are surrounded by madness.

(Markus, 1986:18)

The second and main part of Markus's book is dedicated to the Marxian paradigm of the self-production of man, the process of objectification and the appropriation of its products. It is a profound and original account of Marxian materialism, which emerges from a clear differentiation between work and production. By clarifying this point Markus is also able to critically analyse the sharp distinction between production and communication which serves as Habermas's point of departure for his critique of Marxism.

Markus's book is without doubt one of the most competent and creative analyses of the philosophy of language from a Marxist point of view and, which is as important, a deep inquiry into the Marxian paradigm of the self-creation of man in which language plays a central role. Markus also formulates a practical-social type of rationality, understood as free and self-determined social praxis and opposed to any type of instrumental rationality. His version of rationality is designed to facilitate human emancipation. By setting up this goal Markus tries to resuscitate Marxian humanism. This is an important goal after the abuse of Marxism through bureaucratic-oppressive powers as well as today's damaging attacks on human values through uninhibited global capitalism.

Note

1 Morris says, however, that

What is generally agreed is that the evidence offered for Bakhtin's sole authorship is...largely circumstantial and anecdotal. Bakhtin, Medvedev and Volosinov all suffered in different ways, and Medvedev in the ultimate way, during the worst years of Stalinism. It would seem horrifying to repeat the terrible practices of those years by denying rightful authorship and identity to any of them.

(Morris 1994:3-4)

Todorov (1984:10) expresses much the same sentiments, and it is certainly difficult for an outsider to disagree with these views, at least pending the presentation of much firmer evidence.

References

- Arendt, H. (1958) *The Human Condition*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Feyerabend, P. (1981) 'Popper's objective knowledge', in *Problems of Empiricism: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 189-215.
- Markus, G. (1986) *Language and Production: A Critique of the Paradigms*, Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1970) *The German Ideology*, London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Morris, P. (ed.) (1994) *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Volosinov*, New York, Edward Arnold.
- Rossi-Landi, F. (1972) *Sprache als Arbeit und als Markt*, 2nd edition, Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag.

- Titunik, I. (1973) 'Translator's introduction', in V.N.Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Todorov, T. (1984) *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Volosinov, V.N. (1973) *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- (1976) *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1958) *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Part VI

**Knowledge, morality
and politics**

12 Marxism and reflexivity

Gavin Kitching

The chief defect of all previous materialism (including Feuerbach's) is that the object, actuality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object*, or of *contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence in opposition to materialism the active side was developed by idealism—but only abstractly since idealism naturally does not know actual, sensuous activity as such.
(Marx, 1970:28)

there is nothing more stupid than the chatter about cause and effect in history books; nothing is more wrong-headed, more half-baked.—But what hope can anyone have of putting a stop to it just by *saying* it?

(Wittgenstein, 1980:62e)

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with a rather old issue in Marxism and in studies of Marxist thought—the question of whether, and the degree to which, it is proper to regard Marxism as a science, and in particular as some species of ‘social science’ in the modern sense. As Alvin Gouldner (1980:32–63) observed a long time ago, this debate began with the very first critical discussions of Marx's own *oeuvre*, in the late nineteenth century, and has continued, virtually without interruption, to this day. And, as Gouldner also observed, the debate undoubtedly has its roots in the profoundly ambiguous nature of Marx's own intellectual legacy. That is to say, the debate is *not* one that can be resolved definitively by reference to ‘what Marx really said’, because what he said, both about the science of his time and his own relation to it, and (more particularly) about his own philosophical formation and so-called ‘dialectical’ method, can be interpreted to give succour to both ‘scientistic’ and ‘anti-scientistic’ approaches to Marx and Marxism. Gouldner himself identifies what he calls *The Two Marxisms* as ‘Marxism as science’ versus ‘Marxism as critique’ but this is only one possible choice of nomenclature. Irrespective of precise labels, however, the great intellectual division within Marxism, from the late nineteenth century onward, has been between those who see Marxism as having at least a close affinity to natural and social science, and those who see it as some kind of Hegelian-influenced ‘critical theory’.

So in one sense this chapter retraces some very old and well-trodden terrain. But I also hope, and think, that it rather sharply reilluminates these old issues and debates by the use of some analytical tools derived from the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. In brief summary, I hope to show, by a close Wittgensteinian analysis of a well-known recent text on the so-called ‘analytical Marxism’, that, indeed, the Marxism of Marx (at least) has little in common with the ‘social science’ into which the analytical Marxists would like to turn it. My paper also re-avers that the most fundamental of those differences *are* indeed derived from the Hegelian influence on Marx’s thought. But it also argues that the most important influences of Hegel upon Marx are often mis-stated, or poorly and vaguely stated, especially, it must be said, in much Hegelian-inspired ‘critical theory’.

The text on which I have chosen to focus my discussion is *Reconstructing Marxism* by Erik Olin Wright, Andrew Levine and Elliott Sober (1992) which will be referred to hereafter as ‘Wright *et al.*’ Since most of what follows in this paper will be sustainedly critical of that text, I would like to state explicitly in this introduction that I have chosen to focus upon it *not* because I think it a bad book, but precisely because I consider it an enormously rigorous and sophisticated attempt to reconstruct Marxism using some of the insights of modern analytic philosophy, rational choice theory and realist philosophy of science. As will emerge, I nonetheless consider that this attempt is an almost total failure. Or perhaps more exactly, I think that if Marxism *were* to be reconstructed in the way Wright *et al.* propose, it would not be a Marxism worth having from any point of view—explanatory, ethical or political.

In Wittgenstein’s terms, then, I consider *Reconstructing Marxism* ‘deeply’ (and more or less totally) mistaken. But that also means that I think it mistaken in a worthwhile way—in a way which fully merits the deepest intellectual engagement—and not in some stupid or obvious way.¹ I should also say that I share with Wright *et al.* an impatience with the cloudiness and obscurantism of much of the literature in the Hegelian or continental tradition of Marxism. I am also very sympathetic to their view that certain rigorous forms of linguistic or analytical philosophy can do much to illuminate the fundamental strengths and weaknesses of Marxism as an intellectual tradition. As will emerge, however, I am at variance with Wright *et al.* over what part of that tradition can be of most use here. For taking their bearings, above all, from the work of G.A.Cohen, Wright *et al.* are heirs (like Cohen himself) to a tradition of analytic philosophy that is far closer to logical positivism than to its Wittgensteinian variant. However, I consider Wittgenstein’s version of linguistic or analytic philosophy² to be just as rigorous as anything that the logical positivists had to offer and far more anthropologically and sociologically profound. One aim of the rest of this paper is to try and justify this last claim.

Causes

We take it for granted that it is legitimate to attempt to construct causal explanations of particular phenomena by identifying the underlying mechanisms that generate them. We thus adopt a 'realist' view of scientific explanation. In our view, these mechanisms exist independently of our theories of them. As realists, we reject the stance, emblematic of 'post-modernist' discourse theory, that science is simply one linguistic practice among others, in which the validity of claims is settled entirely within its own discursive practices. We assume, in other words, that causes are real and that science aims at their discovery.

(Wright *et al.*, 1992:131–2)

This quotation seems to me to exemplify a certain kind of extreme anxiety, not uncommon in thinkers of a strongly positivist or realist bent. For Wright *et al.* there are just two alternatives which exhaust the universe of epistemological possibilities. Either one has to hold that 'causes are real and science aims at their discovery', or one has to adopt some 'post-modernist' position to the effect that 'science is simply one linguistic practice among others, in which the validity of claims is settled entirely within its own discursive practices'.

Well, I certainly hold that 'science is...one linguistic practice among others' (forget the diminishing 'simply'), but I certainly do not hold that 'the validity of claims' (which I take to mean scientific truth claims) 'is settled entirely within its [i.e. science's] own discursive practices'. Indeed, again, I am not even sure I could say in any non-ridiculous way, what that last phrase even might mean. For I certainly do not believe (does anyone believe?) that scientists 'simply' hold such propositions to be true as they agree to be true 'discursively'—and whether we take 'discursive' here to mean 'what a bunch of scientists sitting around a conference table verbally and unanimously agree is true' or 'what a bunch of scientists unanimously assert in some professional journal or journals to be true'. That is, I take it as an important fact about the world that non-discursive practices (and most especially experimental practices) are deeply and crucially involved in both the making and testing of natural science truth claims. Moreover, though the relation between such experimental practices and the theoretical and methodological discourses in which their results are stated and assessed is a matter of complex philosophical debate (Kitching, 1994:21–47; Pleasants, 1996), only a small minority of theorists has ever held that natural scientific experimental practices are 'simply' (i.e. are reducible without remainder to) discursive practices.

So, in short, I don't know what Wright *et al.* are saying here. But equally I do not know what they are saying when they assert that 'causes are real and... science aims at their discovery'. Or rather, and more precisely, I am not sure what is being implicitly denied (or denied by implication) in the assertion that 'causes are real'. For what am I saying if I say that causes are not real? Am I saying something like "cause" is a word that people use in a vast variety of contexts and that is all it is? Well, certainly 'cause' is a word, and a word that people use, but using it, here, does

not mean (or certainly does not typically mean) ‘reading out an academic paper in which the word “cause” figures frequently’ or ‘giving a lecture about the concept of cause’. Rather, it much more typically means ‘used in the context of—say—trying to reduce the incidence of traffic accidents, or lung cancer’, or, alternatively ‘used in the context of—say—trying to increase human longevity, or the accuracy of space probes aimed at the planet Pluto’.

So, typically and (as we must say) importantly, ‘cause’ is a word which is used in innumerable different contexts of human action in the world. Therefore, if I say “‘cause’ is a word...and that is all it is’ and I literally mean that that is *all* it is, then it would seem to be entailed that I am denying the reality of human beings,³ and/or of the many kinds of action in which such beings engage, and/or of traffic accidents and/or of lung cancer, and/or of space probes, and/or of the planet Pluto and (indeed) and/or of the world in which, and on which, human beings act! And certainly I do not wish to deny the reality of any of these things. And neither (so far as I am aware) does anybody else—I mean not seriously!

In fact, it seems to me that one only gets oneself into the situation of imagining that one must choose between an account of causes which is ‘simply discursive’ and a ‘realist’ account (which insists that causes are ‘real...under-lying causal mechanisms’ which ‘exist independently’ of our theories of them) by, as it were, ignoring or overlooking the fact that people use causal terminology as part of *acting*, on each other and on the world. Moreover, one must somehow also be ignoring the fact that those actions have real consequences both for each other and for the non-human world. In other words, then, as theorists at least, Wright *et al.* seem to live in a world, or in an ontological realm, composed exclusively of ‘the world’ (physical and social), contemplated as a ‘real’ thing, and ‘language’, contemplated as a much less ‘real’ thing (but also—and oddly—as the principal means of such contemplation). And in this world, acting human beings, human subjects (who make up the social world and act upon the physical world, and who, above all, actively *use* language) are simply missing.⁴

But even that formulation is not right. For it is not that acting human subjects are absent from the ontology of Wright *et al.*, as that they are ‘disappeared’ by (ironically enough) the discourse which Wright *et al.* actively use, actively construct. That is to say, within that discourse, active human subjects are incorporated, as objects, into a ‘causally’ determined entity (called ‘the social world’) on the one hand and into ‘language’ (as a kind of super, transcendental contemplative subject) on the other. And no doubt Wright *et al.* think that no real harm comes to human beings if they are incorporated into these abstractions (at least for their ‘causal’, ‘analytical’, ‘social science’ purposes). But in fact a very great deal of harm is done to active human subjects as a result of this incorporation. Or rather, and to be precise, a very great deal of harm is done to Wright *et al.*’s understanding of the activity of human actors as a result of this abstractive incorporation. Moreover, it is a harm the proper diagnosis of which serves to more or less completely

demolish their understanding—of causality, of explanation, and most certainly of Marx and Marxism.

However, that all this is so must be demonstrated—must be shown—not said. So let me begin such a demonstration.

Wright *et al.* as writers

Consider the following quotations:

Whether it is appropriate to treat sex or race as dichotomous variables depends on how these causes operate in the real world. If biological sex is causally efficacious for earnings only because of its link to masculinity/femininity or if race is causally efficacious by virtue of its linkage to gradations of skin colour, it would misrepresent the causal powers of these variables to treat them as if they were dichotomous. This is not an issue that can be decided a priori, but only after the evaluation of the relevant evidence

(Wright *et al.*, 1992:144)

Nevertheless, there is a powerful intuitive sense on the part of political radicals that the Marxist claim...is correct: that the limits imposed by the nature of property relations in a society more powerfully explain the policies of the state than the mechanisms that select particular policies within those limits. What explains this intuition, we believe, is imprecision in specifying explananda. What Marxists want to account for are not quite state policies as such, but certain excluded state policies—namely radical, pro-working-class policies. The claim, then, is that the central mechanisms that explain why the state does not systematically empower and mobilise the working class are causes that shape the agenda of politics—the limits—not causes, that select options within the given political agenda.

(*ibid.*: 149–50)

In this model [Malinowski's study of fishing rituals among the Trobriand Islanders—G.K.]...fear functionally explains rituals: as fear rises there is pressure for the social production of rituals. As rituals increase in response to this pressure (through an unspecified search and selection mechanism), fear is reduced. An equilibrium occurs when the level of ritual effectively neutralises the levels of fear necessary to produce more ritual. So long as the exogenous fear-producing mechanism (the level of danger associated with deep-sea fishing) remains the same, the level of ritual will therefore continue. A variety of feedback mechanisms could regulate such a functional system involving different mixes of conscious searches for solutions to fear, trial and error, and social analogies to natural selection. Whatever mechanisms regulate the system, rituals persist because of their functional relation to fear.

(*ibid.*: 155–6)

The first point I want to make about all these quotations is that there are two broad ways in which one can read them. One can—and first—read them as sets of causal propositions about the world. And if one does read them that way (which is certainly the way Wright *et al.* want them read) then the central question indeed becomes whether what they assert about causality—or complex patterns of causality—is true or not. That is, is it true (or not) that ‘biological sex is causally efficacious for earnings only because of its link to masculinity/femininity’? Is it true (or not) that ‘the limits imposed by the nature of property relations in a society more powerfully explains the policies of the state than the mechanisms that select particular policies within those limits’? Is it (or—more probably—was it)⁵ true (or not) in the Trobriand Islands that ‘as fear rises there is pressure for the social production of rituals’ and ‘as rituals increase in response to this pressure (through an unspecified search and selection mechanism), fear is reduced’? And presumably finding out whether these causal generalisations are, or were, true, involves some kind of empirical or factual investigation of the world, albeit one (as Wright *et al.* continually stress) informed by a continuous theoretical and conceptual awareness.

However, and second, it is equally possible to read these quotations as, indeed, ways of talking and writing about the world, and in particular about human action in the world and its consequences. Now, if one does read these paragraphs in that way, one is rapidly led, I think, to two observations. These are:

- 1 This way of writing is not the only way one could write about these matters.
- 2 On the face of it, this way of writing seems, in certain respects, very peculiar.

Let me take point (2) first, because it is, in fact, the best lead in to point (1). It seems to me, for example, that one could perfectly properly deny that an entity called ‘biological sex’ was, or is, the kind of entity that is capable of being ‘causally efficacious’ *at all*, whether for ‘earnings’ or for anything else. I would be perfectly happy, however, to claim, or to have it claimed by somebody else, that men tend to earn more than women for doing precisely the same kind of work in many/most human societies in the world. I would be perfectly happy to claim that, or to have it claimed, because it is true. But I would also be happy for the matter to be put (written) in that way, because (a) written in that way it is clearer and more readily understood than the ‘biological sex...’ way of putting it, and (b) because it does not involve putting an abstraction into a sentence as a curious kind of actor/subject, when one could perfectly easily replace it with a sentence in which human subjects appear as the actors that (in fact—in the world) they are.

Or again, as a matter of English prose, I am not at all sure that it makes any kind of sense to write a sentence in which something called ‘the limits imposed by the nature of property relations in a society’ ‘explains’ anything, whether ‘powerfully’ or otherwise. It seems to me, rather, that it is people who explain

things. And while they may do this using concepts like 'the limits imposed by the nature of property relations', it is certainly very curious to create in writing a world in which, as it were, concepts are actors (in this case explanatory actors) which seem, moreover, to be able to act without any human subjects to put them into action. And it is, if anything, even more bewildering to be confronted (just a few words later in the same sentence) with a world in which something called 'mechanisms' that 'select' something (that's okay, I know quite a few selection mechanisms) also 'explain' things (albeit less 'powerfully'). I can explain a mechanism (and so, clearly, can Wright *et al.* and many other people), but I have never known a mechanism that explained anything (not even itself).⁶

Or again, I suppose I see what Wright *et al.* are getting at when they paraphrase Malinowski on deep sea fishing rituals in the Trobriand Islands in the words 'as fear rises there is pressure for the social production of rituals' and 'As rituals increase in response to this pressure (through an unspecified search and selection mechanism), fear is reduced'. But in order to avoid facetious questions here ('with what kind of gauge do you measure the pressure for rituals?' 'is the mechanism for the selection of rituals mechanical or electronic?') and (again) simply to make things simpler and clearer, would it not have been far better to write something like—As the fishermen and their families become increasingly afraid of the hazards of deep-sea fishing so they search ever more intensively for forms of ritual protection from such hazards. Conversely, as they become less afraid, so their need for such rituals diminishes.' Once again, this form of words has the additional merit of putting human subjects in their ontologically unique role as actors, and it dispenses with the clearly metaphorical and redundant postulation of a causal mechanism where none is descriptively (or indeed explanatorily) required.⁷

In fact, and in short, when these passages are read not as scientific propositions (whose truth value we are invited to assess by inspecting the world) but as pieces of English prose, what strikes one about them is that they are highly metaphorical. That is to say, this way of writing about human subjects and the consequences of their acting involves treating them as (= writing about them as though they were) *objects*, pushed and pulled around in a mechanical world of 'causal forces' of greater or lesser 'universality', 'frequency' and 'potency'—a world whose empirically observable features are a result or outcome of the complex interactions of those underlying causal forces. But if these metaphors are treated *as* metaphors (by the reader) virtually all of them can be deconstructed. Or if you don't like that word, all of them can simply be replaced by other words. Moreover, in using these other words, we (a) do not postulate the existence of causal forces in the social world. In addition (b) we reinstate human subjects as subjects. And (c) we do so without at all denying—while indeed reasserting—the extra-discursive reality of the phenomena in the real world that causal talk and writing is meant to explain.

So that then raises the question: do Wright *et al.* recognise their metaphors *as* metaphors, or (more generally) do they recognise their writing as their writing? That is to say, do they see themselves as creative authors/writers here? Or do they rather see themselves as simply passive 'observers' and

'recorders', as it were, of the world of 'real' 'causal forces' that 'exists' 'out there'? To put that all more simply, what role do they see themselves playing as subjects in the *act* of writing their book? For it is noticeable that, in strict parallel or homology with the subjectless social world they describe in their book, they themselves, as subjects/actors/authors, are notably absent from the text. They do not appear, and certainly they do not appear doing anything.⁸

I believe, and shall argue in the rest of this chapter, that this close fit or homology between the subjectless, actorless, social world conjured up by the prose of Wright *et al.*, and their own absence as creative subjects and actors (authors) in the text in which that world is conjured, is of enormous significance and explanatory importance. One of its most significant results, I think, is that not only do Wright *et al.* never pose certain questions about their own activity, they also never pose certain—absolutely crucial—questions about Karl Marx's activity, and in particular his activity in creating what they call 'Marxism'. ('Marxism' figures prominently and continually in their text—and often as a subject—but Karl himself appears hardly at all.)

Explanation in *Reconstructing Marxism*

How to begin to explore these issues? Perhaps via a further exploration of the second of the quotations above. There we read that 'What Marxists want to account for are not quite state policies as such, but certain excluded state policies—namely radical, pro-working-class policies'. And this sentence closely follows one in which it is asserted that a certain 'Marxist claim' 'is correct', viz. the claim 'that the limits imposed by the nature of property relations in a society more powerfully *explain* the policies of the state than the mechanisms that select particular policies within those limits'.

I wish to draw special attention to the words 'account for' and 'explain' above because they are, I think, at the centre (one might say the conceptual centre) of Wright *et al.*'s entire effort. That is, what they call 'Marxism' is presented, quite explicitly and repeatedly, as a means of *explaining* the world. Indeed, it is defended by them (often with considerable intellectual sophistication) as still a better way of *explaining* the world than any competing sociological or historical paradigm. In particular, Wright *et al.* spend a great deal of time and effort attempting to show that a suitably modified (modified by them) version of the evolutionary/causal 'theory of history' originally developed by Cohen, can provide a better causal explanation of long-term historical evolution of human societies than any competing account. (Even though, in its modified form, such an evolutionary theory is in no way linear and indeed leaves open a number of future evolutionary trajectories for contemporary capitalist societies; Wright *et al.*, 1992:13–46.)

What Wright *et al.* have to say about these matters is certainly not uninteresting. But their entire effort—and indeed Cohen's (1979) entire effort—nonetheless consists of a sustained begging of the question 'did Marx see Marxism as primarily a 'mechanism' (as they might well say) for *explaining* anything?' That is to say, is the

primary point of Marx's mature work (*Capital*, etc.), in his eyes, to explain how capitalism develops (and in particular how through that development it 'evolves' into or towards socialism/communism)? Or, on the contrary, is its primary point in Marx's eyes to *advocate* the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, and, as part of that advocacy, to persuade anybody who would listen (and in particular the working class) that such an overthrow was both possible and desirable? This is an important—a crucially important—question. Because while advocacy and persuasion, as human practices, may well involve explanation (of past events, of present events), as—how shall I put it?—a subordinate means to persuasive ends, they precisely do not involve embracing explanation, or 'explanatory power', as a primary end or goal—desirable in itself—in the way that Wright *et al.* (and Cohen) do.

Indeed, it is quite clear that recasting Marxism as entirely, or even primarily, a mode of explanation of the world involves incorporating Marxism entirely into the academic world of 'social science' in which its worth is to be assessed entirely by reference to the norms of 'scientificity' (ultimately derived from natural scientific practices) operative in that world. And in fact Wright *et al.* make no bones that this is precisely what they wish to do. They say explicitly:

One result of freely deploying the intellectual resources of mainstream philosophy and social science is that analytical Marxism tends to blur received understandings of what distinguishes Marxism from 'bourgeois' theory. In consequence the analytical current can serve as a *means for exiting from* as well as a *means for reconstructing* Marxist theory. The strong antipathy to mainstream methodological principles characteristic of much traditional Marxism acted as a cognitive barrier to intellectual co-optation and dilution of radical commitment. Once that barrier is removed, it is much easier gradually to slide away from the core substantive preoccupations and arguments in the Marxist tradition. The Marxism in analytical Marxism is thus more precarious than it was in earlier currents of Marxist thought.

And they add:

We believe that the risks entailed by this precariousness must be taken if Marxism is to remain a relevant and powerful part of radical intellectual and political culture. In the end, however, the only justification for this orientation is the results it provides. Like other research programs, analytical Marxism cannot be justified a priori. We hope that the essays that follow will provide at least a partial vindication of this stance.

(Wright *et al.*, 1992:7, italics in original)

Thus analytical Marxism could, we are told (and it is emphasised), turn out to be a 'means for exiting from' one's Marxist commitment as much as a 'means for reconstructing' that commitment. But why? Quite clearly because it may, on investigation, turn out to be *explanatorily weak*, to have little or diminishing

‘explanatory power’ in regard to the past, the present or the future. Like other failed, or failing, ‘research programmes’ in the sciences its explanatory ‘results’ simply may not justify its continued existence.

Now I too favour a non-dogmatic approach to Marxism that carries the risk of having to ‘exit’ from it, that carries the risk of finding it severely defective or otiose in the modern world. But my approach is via asking (a) why Marx held socialism and communism to be both desirable and possible states of affairs, (b) whether the arguments he advanced for such beliefs still have any validity, and (c) if they do not (wholly or partially) whether alternative persuasive arguments might be found or constructable. In short, my approach centralises Marx as a philosopher and as a political activist rather than as a scientific ‘explainer’ of anything.

Thus Marx (and Marxism) are, for me, at risk, if I can no longer believe in the philosophy, or if I think the goals to which his political activism was directed are no longer tenable and/or desirable ones. And in making my judgements on these questions I have of course to be concerned with whether Marx’s descriptions and explanations of capitalism as a mode of production and as a form of society still carry any persuasive/condemnatory weight (which is certainly in part a question about their continued factual accuracy). But it should be equally clear, I think, that I could find almost all of what Marx has to say about the capitalism of his day (including, for example, his theories of surplus value and exploitation) to be seriously defective and/or rendered redundant by subsequent changes in capitalism, and still be persuaded, on philosophical grounds, that socialism was a desirable state of affairs worth striving for and encouraging others to strive for.⁹ In short, my Marxism is a lot more philosophically and politically vulnerable than the Marxism of Wright *et al.*, but it is a lot less ‘explanatorily’ or ‘scientifically’ vulnerable. And, if I may say so, I think that Marx himself would have thought that that is precisely how things should be with him.

Summing this all up, then—somewhat polemically—I would want to say that Marxism is simply not a research programme of any kind. I think it rather dangerous to say, in any short form, what Marxism ‘is’ (principally because, historically at least, it has been so many different things). But if I have to make a short general linguistic gesture to dramatise my essential difference from the scientific approach of Wright *et al.*, I suppose I would have to say that Marxism ‘is’—or at least *my* Marxism ‘is’—an ethically informed political perspective on the world, but one in which both ethical commitments and political possibilities are themselves understood historically—as having both historical origins and historical conditions of realisation.

It is likely, at this point, that, despite my protestations above, Wright *et al.* might simply classify my Marxism as just another variant of those many ‘dogmatic’, ‘obscurantist’, ‘rigidly ideological’ Marxisms from which they, and other analytical Marxists, wish to rescue a truly scientific Marxism. But this is, or at least I hope, certainly not so. Indeed, as I stated earlier, I would be as critical of the ‘obscurantism’ of some varieties of Hegelian and structural Marxism as Wright *et al.* are. And my criticisms of these Marxisms too have

their root in the broad tradition of ‘analytical’ and ‘linguistic’ philosophy from which at least some varieties of analytical Marxism take their bearings. But my understanding of Marx and Marxism takes its root from the Wittgensteinian, and in particular the later Wittgensteinian, branch of that tradition, a branch which, in my view, offers a far richer—and ultimately very Marxian—understanding of language as a human and social practice.

Explaining

To show that the claim above is true, and to engage further with Wright *et al.* on their own favoured terrain, I wish at this point to examine the concepts of ‘explanation’ and ‘explanatory power’ which are so central to their attempted scientific reconstruction of Marxism. If we examine explanation (or as Wittgenstein would, and significantly, prefer, ‘explaining’) as a human social practice, it generally has three dimensions. That is, human beings are usually (always?) engaged in explaining *something*, for *some reason*, to *somebody* (or bodies).

When this simple anthropological observation is made, and *Reconstructing Marxism* is read in its light, what immediately, and very forcefully, strikes one is that it is concerned entirely, or almost entirely, only with the first of these three dimensions. The obsession of this book is with *what* ‘Marxism’ is trying to explain and whether ‘it’ succeeds in explaining *what* it is trying to explain (most notably changes in forces and relations of production, but also—for example—the relationship between individual action and social constraints and between the development of capitalism and the struggle for socialism). But the questions (1) why is ‘Marxism’ (why are Marxists?) trying to do this ‘explaining’ at all, and (2) to whom are they doing this ‘explaining’, are almost never addressed in their text at all.

As I have already intimated, I have rather deep reservations about how Wright *et al.* go about ‘reconstructing’ the ‘what’ explanations in Marxism. But since I have already mentioned those, I need not repeat myself here. Rather, I want to emphasise here how any attempt to answer the neglected ‘why’ question in particular not only problematises—and deeply problematises—this attempted ‘scientific’ reconstruction of Marxism, but also instantly exposes the very defective or partial understanding of explanation as a human practice on which it depends.

So, *why* did Marx write *Capital* (say) and for whom did he write it? I think at least one (not admittedly the only one, but certainly one) historically accurate answer to that question is ‘to explain to workers (and anybody else who would listen) why capitalism needed to be overthrown and that it could, in fact, be overthrown’. Now think about that sentence and generalise it. If you (one, anybody) are going to explain to somebody else why some social state of affairs should be radically changed, is that *kind* of explaining likely to require one to make reference to patterns of causality, abstruse questions about the logical and conceptual relations between forces and relations of production, or equally abstruse questions about the social embeddedness of individual

action?¹⁰ Well, perhaps—a bit. And even that bit only *en passant* or by implication. But far more centrally and explicitly, it is going to require such actions as:

- 1 revelation, or powerful restatement, of the essential injustice of a current state of affairs;
- 2 strong intellectual and rhetorical condemnation of those who defend or justify, or even seem to defend or justify, that state of affairs;
- 3 the drawing of attention—repeatedly and strongly—to any aspects of that state of affairs which suggests that it cannot last, or may be vulnerable if attacked in the proper fashion; and
- 4 the making of strong appeals to those who are held to suffer most from the unjust state of affairs to act to change it.

These latter appeals may be direct and inflammatory ('Workers of the world unite, You have nothing to lose...' etc., 'The death knell of capitalism sounds, the expropriators are expropriated...' etc.) or more subtle and indirect. One may, for example, describe the situation of the oppressed in a manner which suggests both their increasing strength *vis-à-vis* their oppressors and their growing preparedness for the struggle.

I think that the above is a perfectly accurate thumbnail sketch (there are, of course, many others one could draw) of the content of Marx's *Capital*, and indeed of his life's *oeuvre* (certainly from the mid 1840s on). His entire *oeuvre* can be seen as—can be described as (I shall come to describing as a practice shortly)—an attempt to do a perfectly humanly recognisable and (quite) commonplace kind of explaining (in this case to the workers and any 'class renegades' prepared to join their cause). But it is certainly not the kind of explaining upon which Wright *et al.* focus our attention exclusively, or almost exclusively, in their book.

But there is more to it than that. When matters are put as I have put them above, it becomes clear, I think, that insofar as Marx did the kind of explaining (well or badly) that Wright *et al.* focus on, he did it entirely as a strictly subordinate means to doing the (to him, to me) far more important kind of explaining that I have outlined above. If I might put the matter polemically, Marx would, I think, have thought it a mildly interesting (just mildly interesting) intellectual question whether he made some logical mistakes in the famous propositions of the 1859 Preface (Marx, 1970:181–2) on which Cohen, as well as Wright *et al.*, lavishes such attention. But he would have thought it an intensely interesting ethical and political question why (say) capitalism has, on the whole, proved more economically stable than he suggested it was or could be, or why the material welfare of (at least some) workers in the world has been improved far more than he seemed to suggest was possible in *Capital*. Having posed these questions to himself, it is impossible to know what ethical and political conclusions an exhumed and reinvigorated Marx would have drawn from the answers. (Would he, for example, have become the most cautiously reformist of social democrats?) But one can bet one's bottom dollar that these are the questions (and answers) he

would have cared about, as he would not have cared about the nuances of (say) current 'Marxist' debates concerning the transition from feudalism to capitalism!

Describing

And now to the practice of description (or describing). Wright *et al.* talk endlessly about explaining and explanation, but the human practice of describing things hardly gets a mention in their book. It is difficult to know what to make of this silence. One could infer from it a view (not uncommonly held) that while explaining things is a theoretically and philosophically complex (and therefore problematic) practice, describing is a straightforward and unproblematic kind of going on. One could infer this, but it might be unfair to do so. (Silence is, after all, just silence. It may, for example, mean that Wright *et al.* wished, in this book, to focus predominantly on explanation and leave the complexities of description to a later work.)

But however that may be, it is important for me to say that describing things *is* at least as philosophically complex an activity as is explaining things,¹¹ although its complexities are, generally, less often remarked upon or analysed.¹² It is also an activity which, in many of its forms, is difficult to distinguish from, or disentangle from, explanation itself.

'As we entered the cathedral we were awestruck by the towering grace of its Gothic arches.' Is that a description of entering the cathedral and of what we saw when we entered, or an explanation of why we were awed?

'Just a glance at the boy told me he was seriously malnourished.' Is that a description of the way the boy looked or an explanation of why he looked that way?

'The crude brushstrokes of the painted walls, the riot of clashing furnishings and colours, and indeed the ladder and paint still standing in the corner, were all testimony to the haste with which the room had been prepared for our arrival.' Is that a description of a room or an explanation of why it was a mess?

In the light of those considerations let us now look back to those four elements in the ethics and politics of *Capital* which I outlined above. Looking at them again one might ask such questions as

- 1 How does one 'powerfully restate the essential injustice of a current state of affairs'?
- 2 How does one make a 'strong intellectual and rhetorical condemnation of those who defend or justify, or even seem to defend or justify, that state of affairs'?
- 3 How does one draw attention '—repeatedly and strongly—to any aspects of that state of affairs which suggests that it cannot last, or may be vulnerable if attacked in the proper fashion'? and
- 4 How does one make 'strong appeals to those who are held to suffer most from the unjust state of affairs to act to change it'?

In the fourth case, in fact, I already ‘gave the game away’ by mentioning, when I first introduced it, that one can make such appeals in a subtle and indirect way by ‘*describing* the situation of the oppressed in a manner which suggests both their increasing strength *vis-à-vis* their oppressors and their growing preparedness for the struggle’. But in fact much the same answer applies in the first three cases as well. One can, for example, undertake the first task by setting out a theory of surplus value. But one can also do it (and Marx did) by describing factory conditions in a prose dripping with sarcasm and vitriol. One can undertake the second task by juxtaposing such descriptions, and the repulsion they clearly invoke in the describer (Marx), to the activities of another set of ideologues who would, Marx (1965:176) claims, *describe* the same conditions as ‘a veritable Eden of the rights of man’. And one can undertake the third task by describing some of the workings of capitalism in a prose marked by words such as ‘crisis’, ‘contradiction’, ‘impoverishment’ and ‘breakdown’. Such prose explains the workings of capitalism, certainly, but it also (and indeed simultaneously) describes what it explains in ways that must hearten—and that are clearly intended to hearten—all capitalism’s victims and opponents.

Marx as scientist

At this point it is possible that Wright *et al.* might wish to raise an objection. They might indeed recognise and acknowledge that the remarks above are, as it were, anthropologically accurate. They might acknowledge that ordinary practices of explaining are more various than the forms of explanation on which they focus. They might also acknowledge that ordinary practices of describing and explaining (and indeed persuading) are often deeply intertwined in the ways I have suggested. But they might say that these observations do not hold with regard to practices of *scientific* explaining. And it is with Marxism as a set, or putative set, of *scientific* explanations that they are concerned.

Now it would be very tempting, in reply to such an objection, simply to say, ‘Yes, and that just shows that Marx was not a scientist, and had no wish to be a scientist, in the sense in which you understand that term.’ And to add (provocatively) ‘Thank God!’ But such a reply, though tempting, would almost certainly distract attention from the really important conclusion I wish to draw from the observations above, and which abut, in an even more philosophically deep fashion, on the attempt to reconstruct Marx (and Marxism) as a form of modern social science.

That conclusion is as follows. When, as a (usually) young adult, someone begins to study physics or biology or chemistry or geology, these kinds of anthropologically normal forms of explaining and describing¹³ are, very largely, an impediment to or (at best) irrelevant to the forms of scientific describing and explaining such young people must master if they are to become competent physicists or chemists or geologists. In fact, socialisation into these disciplines is, at least in part, a deliberate, planned socialisation out of (at least for professional purposes) the kinds of commonplace practices of describing and explaining discussed above. And this does no harm to the

practice of these disciplines—indeed, it does a great deal of good. Because this earlier ‘pre-professional’ linguistic socialisation is, as I have said, at best an irrelevance, at worst a positive hindrance, to mastering the new technical and scientific forms of explanation (and indeed description) now required. One might say that, whatever else they are, these anthropologically normal forms of describing and explaining are not assets, nor even any kind of useful raw materials, for the new scientific competencies to be acquired.

But, despite a mass of social scientific prejudice (and teaching practice) which assumes the contrary, the above is simply *not* the case for would-be practitioners of sociology, or history or political theory or even (so I believe) of economics. In these areas of study the ability to describe and explain ‘from a moral point of view’ oneself, and the ability, as a historian or sociologist, to understand human beings of the past and present who also described/describe and explained/explain (themselves, others, the world) from a moral (and political and aesthetic) point of view (and in ways in which description and explanation are often inextricably intertwined)—these are essential abilities, essential assets, which it is a disaster, a professional disaster, even to try and socialise students out of, or to suggest are somehow not ‘scientifically’ up to snuff.

But why—precisely why—is it a disaster? It is a disaster because it involves denying or gainsaying (explicitly or implicitly) a deep philosophical truth which we acquire with our pre-professional linguistic socialisation, and to whose truth we attest literally every time we open our mouths. That truth is that describing and explaining (like thinking and dancing and playing and copying and criticising and drawing and, and, and...) are purpose-dependent *activities*. They are, that is to say, actions in which we engage for a whole variety of purposes which we pursue in life. And that being the case, it is always relevant to ask, of a human being, not just what s/he has described but what for; not just what s/he has explained but what for. And the answers we give to many of these ‘what for’ questions are to do with the values we hold, the judgements we make on the basis of those values, and indeed (ultimately) with the kind of people we are.

In an earlier work of mine on Marx I speculated that he had arrived at many, if not all, of his moral judgements of the kind of society he (later) came to call ‘capitalism’ before—quite a while before—he made any systematic study of it at all. And that was, I suggested, not just a perfectly normal (that is, humanly commonplace) fact about Marx the passionately intelligent young man, it was an extremely fortunate fact about Marx as a mature scholar. Because those early moral judgements gave form and force to all his subsequent studying and writing—a form and force which they would never have had if he had just been doing something very peculiar (very existentially peculiar, if not—unfortunately—professionally peculiar these days) like ‘studying capitalism’ or ‘investigating capitalism’ (Kitching, 1988:166–79).

Of course, Marx did engage in activities which we can call investigating or studying capitalism, and that study did, in important ways, impact on his moral and political views about capitalism, leading to their further development and change.¹⁴ (If it had not done so it would not have been scholarly study worth the

name.) But the fact remains that Marx brought to his later study the earlier—academically untutored but enormously intelligent—exercise of his eyes, ears and judgement. (I'm sure, for example, that he saw, and thought about, and felt about, beggars long before he acquired any 'theories of poverty'!) And these experiences were an absolutely essential and irreplaceable *asset*, an absolutely essential and irreplaceable existential *raw material*, for his later scholarly activities. And that, of course, has 'always' been true, before and since Marx, and remains true of every passionate and intelligent young man and woman who enters the study of social science today. And it is, I would submit, what makes study of the social sciences and humanities essentially, ontologically, different—as practices, as activities—from the practices of natural science.

To say to a budding physicist, 'You know how to explain to me why your paper is late, but that does not mean you know anything about scientifically explaining the behaviour of atoms,' is both (a) true and (b) a significant beginning in instructing her as a physicist. To say to a young sociologist, 'You know how to explain to me why your essay is late, but that does not mean you know anything about scientifically explaining divorce rates,' is both (a) false and (b) a significant beginning in destroying her as a sociologist.¹⁵

Justifying

A central theme of this paper to this point is that describing and explaining (like writing and thinking and walking and talking and skating and criticising and smoking and, and, and...) are *practices*, or purposive *activities*, in which human beings engage. And one of the true anthropological observations about all such activities is that all of them can—in certain specific circumstances—elicit requests for justification by other human beings. Of course, such requests can take many different forms and (therefore) require many different types of justification. Obviously 'Why are you bothering to explain *that?*' or 'Why are you describing that like *that?*' are questions requiring different forms of justification from questions like 'Why haven't you given up smoking?' or 'What are you doing walking around here? It's hardly very pleasant!' But what I wish to emphasise about the first two requests for justification is that normally it is not a valid or acceptable reply to 'Why are you bothering to explain *that?*' to say, 'Because the explanation is true.' And it is not normally a valid or acceptable reply to 'Why are you describing that like *that?*' to say, 'Because the description is accurate,' or 'Because the description is true.'¹⁶ For in both these cases the requester is uninterested in, or wanting to go beyond, issues concerning the truth of the explanation, or the truth or factual accuracy of the description. Rather, in the first case the explainer is being challenged to provide an account of the *significance* or *importance* either of the explanation or of what is being explained. And in the second case the describer is being asked not about the truth, but about the *point* or *purpose* of describing 'that like *that*'.

Now it is absolutely essential to observe that requests/challenges about the importance or significance of explanations, and requests/challenges about the point

or purpose of descriptions, are requests/challenges made by people to people to justify what *they* (the challenged) are *doing*. Of course, to a degree, or up to a point, it is possible to do this by pointing to features of the world beyond oneself or one's own activity 'I think it is really important to explain why birth rates are falling, because if they continue to fall this could have negative economic effects on us all.' Or 'I said her refusal to act was shameful, because it was the first time he'd ever asked anything really important of her and she'd always claimed to be his friend.'

But ultimately (if pushed and pushed for ever more justifications), we have to start talking about ourselves—about our values, even about our identities. 'Well, I am so concerned about declining material standards of living because I happen to think that if such standards drop below a certain level it is hard for people to live a civilised life.' 'Well, by a civilised life I suppose I mean a life that allows the best possible opportunity for people to realise their potential.' 'Well, I think it is important for people to realise their potential because...[because what?—fill in your own answer, dear reader].' Ultimately perhaps one will be driven to 'Well, I just believe that,' or 'I just am like that.' Or again, 'Well, I think that it is part of being a true friend to be willing, at least sometimes, to do something for one's friend that one would rather not do, or which puts one out.' This may have to be followed by 'Well, if you are not willing to do that I just don't think you can call yourself someone's friend.' And that justification in turn may have to be followed by 'Well, that's just what I understand friendship to be,' or (ultimately and again) 'Well, I'm just like that' (Wittgenstein, 1972:§§217 and 485).

In other words, then, and not to labour the point, justifications of actions (including intellectual actions like explaining and describing) are always justifications which point two ways, as it were—to the world, or features of the world, and to the values and identity of the explainer/describer. And the harder and more insistent the push for justification, the more the arrow of responsibility turns away from features of the world and settles ever more irremovably (and uncomfortably?) on what the explainer/describer *as a person* is doing in the world and why.

Taking responsibility

But the point is, one is not likely to see or understand any of this so long as one is working with a model of explaining and (most especially) of describing, which leads one to think of these practices simply as some kind of contemplative *picturing* or *copying* or *mirroring* of the world (Rorty, 1980:131–212). And that is true even if, like Wright *et al.*, you think that for explanations to be true you have to add another ingredient (say, a greater degree of abstraction or logical formality) not required in 'mere' describing. For as the quotation on page 233 above makes clear, as realists rather than positivists¹⁷ Wright *et al.* think that abstraction, and logical reasoning with abstractions is a scientifically essential practice to which old-style positivists gave inadequate attention. But nonetheless, for them abstraction is itself just another way (perhaps a slightly more intellectually or cognitively active way) of mirroring

or picturing something in the world called ‘real causal mechanisms’. But if I am right, a notion of ‘grasping’ or ‘understanding’ the world whose most active ingredient is doing a bit of abstracting is not nearly active enough. It does not get anywhere close enough to recognising the full extent of the responsibility we humans must take (and indeed routinely challenge each other to take) for what we do here—for explaining ‘that and *not* that’, for explaining ‘that like *that*’, for describing ‘that and *not* that’ and for describing ‘that like *that*’.¹⁸

To really take responsibility, one must first recognise the full extent of one’s role as an agent. But Wright *et al.*’s recognition of their own moral agency is radically deficient. For they clearly think that, in their role as social scientists at least, they need only take the kind of restricted responsibility for their beloved explanations that (say) a cartographer takes for getting a map representationally correct, rather than the kind of heavier responsibility that a pilot takes for getting a passenger plane safely to its destination *using* a map. The latter act is far more divorced, as it were, from ‘control’ by reality (in this case the geomorphology of the earth) and far more volitionally active for that reason. It is therefore also far more humanly significant and far more morally onerous. Moreover, and though it may not seem so at first sight, the onerous but exhilarating act of piloting an aircraft is a far more illuminating analogy for social describing and explaining than is the much safer (if technically demanding) act of drawing accurate maps.

Conclusions: Marx and Hegel (and Wittgenstein)

I say all this, and I began this paper with a quotation from Marx’s second *Thesis on Feuerbach*, because I think that Wright *et al.*, like many Marxist intellectuals formed in the Anglo-Saxon rather than continental European intellectual tradition, are both right and wrong about Hegel and in particular about Marx’s debt to Hegel. They are right in thinking that if Hegelian Marxism means ‘Marxicising’ the grandiosities of Hegel’s dialectic, or finding a materialist teleology of history to replace (or ‘stand on its head’) Hegel’s ‘idealist’ teleology (Marx, 1965:20), then such a Marxism is not likely to lead us to any understandings, either of Marx or of the world, that are much worth having (Wright *et al.*, 1992:5–7, 103–4, 113–15). But they are wrong to think that any of this *is* what Marx importantly learned from Hegel. For what Marx learned from Hegel (and clearly believed that Feuerbach did *not* learn) was an activist epistemology based on an understanding that the use of language plays a far more active role in human accounts of the world than the ‘contemplative’ ‘picturing’ or ‘reflecting’ role ascribed to it either by Feuerbach or by (for example) the generally positivistically inclined thinkers of classical political economy whose work Marx encountered when he moved to Britain in 1848.

In a word (a word from the tide of this chapter that has not yet appeared in its text) what Marx learned from Hegel was the epistemological and moral importance of *reflexivity* in intellectual life. That is, Marx learned from Hegel that, as an intellectual (just as as a human being), it is important not just to know *what* you

are doing (how to reason logically, collect and analyse data systematically and carefully, construct arguments rigorously) but to be clear both that *you* are doing it and about *why* you are doing it. And among the implications of this kind of reflexivity is that if you are doing what you are doing for a reason or reasons, then your readers must see both you and your reasons 'present' in your text (whether explicitly or implicitly). They must do so, in order to learn who you are and whether they agree or disagree with the reasons you give for what you do. And, of course, these latter two types of judgement are often closely intertwined. That is, judgements of a person's reasons for actions, especially if those actions are contentious or controversial, often also require judgements of *them*. (Are they, for example, honest, well-intentioned and serious people trying to be as objective as they possibly can be?)

As I have said elsewhere in my writing on Marx, I am not sure that Marx, as a young philosopher, fully thought through all the implications of his attempt to follow Hegel's activist 'reflexive' epistemology and view of language while adhering to (what Wright *et al.* would no doubt want to describe as) a firmly 'realist' view of the world. In particular I think that some of Marx's later writing on method is somewhat subverted by the positivism (and thus epistemological passivity) of the classical political economy with which he was grappling (Kitching, 1994:111–29). But I also think that one can find, in the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, a far more rigorous thinking through of precisely that same (extremely difficult) synthesis which Marx merely sketched, or pointed to in a general way, as a young philosopher. And Wittgenstein's thinking through of this synthesis attains its rigour precisely by close attention to examples of many and varied human linguistic *and* non-linguistic practices. For such examples nearly always *show*, and so clearly and richly, what it is often so difficult to *say* in a sufficiently persuasive or powerful way in bland philosophical generalities—viz. that any humanly adequate epistemology must have regard to what people do and why they do it *and* to their ultimate dependence, for both the effectiveness and rationality of what they do, on the real world in which they live.¹⁹

This chapter has proceeded, I hope in the spirit of Wittgenstein, by also examining a number of different examples of human practices (especially the intellectual practices of explaining, describing, persuading, judging and justifying) and trying to state, as carefully and exactly as I can, what I think they show us. Therefore, if by use of the specificity, detail and unexpected 'explanatory power' of those examples I have succeeded in persuading Wright *et al.*, or anyone else, that there may be much of value to be got, for social describers and explainers, and for political activists and radicals, out of a recast and reconstructed 'Hegelian Marxism'—something both remarkably uncloudy and unobscurantist and remarkably intellectually rigorous—it is not Hegel, nor yet Marx, that readers must thank for that, but Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Notes

1

The problems arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of language have the quality of *depth*. They are deep disquietudes; their roots are as deep in us as the forms of our language and their significance is as great as the importance of our language.

(Wittgenstein, 1972:§111)

See also the comments on Wittgenstein's fondness for describing thinkers as 'deep' or 'shallow' by M.O'C. Drury in Rhees (1984:80).

- 2 I describe Wittgenstein's philosophy here as a variant of 'linguistic' or 'analytic' philosophy simply because that is the way it is conventionally categorised and the way, I suspect, that Wright *et al.* would understand or categorise it. However, in other contexts I have expressed the view that to see Wittgenstein as a 'linguistic' philosopher, in particular, is to risk misunderstanding him profoundly (Kitching, 1988:151–85).
- 3 Actually even that formulation is incoherent since it involves postulating that there could be a world of words without people—without speakers, hearers, writers, readers—of those words. But that is just the point really. A philosophical or theoretical formulation which looks sensible enough—or at least not unsensible—when expressed in generalities can emerge as incoherent in its implications as soon as one tries (as here) to make those implications explicit. What is being discovered here is that the assertion to which Wright *et al.* juxtapose their own view—viz. that 'science is simply one linguistic practice among others, in which the validity of claims is settled entirely within its own discursive practices'—has no clear or coherent meaning, although it looks, at first sight, as if it has. But if one's statement, or understanding, of an opposing position is incoherent, this may, in turn, have implications for the coherence of the position you propose in opposition to it. And this turns out to be the case here, as I shall show.
- 4 In fact the problem arises, at bottom, from treating the word 'cause' as if it were the name of something—or more precisely of some *thing*—even if an 'abstract' or 'highly general' sort of thing. As Wittgenstein (1958:1) says:

The questions 'What is length?', 'What is meaning?', 'What is the number one?' etc. [and 'What is cause?'—G.K.] produce in us a mental cramp. We feel that we can't point to anything in reply to them and yet ought to point to something. (We are up against one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: we try to find a substance for a substantive.)

And, as he goes on to suggest, a good mental exercise to get rid of this 'cramp' consists of saying (in reply to the question 'What is cause?' or 'What does the word "cause" mean?'), 'In and of itself, or in the abstract, cause is *nothing*,' or 'In and of itself, *or* in the abstract, the word "cause" *means nothing*,' or 'There is nothing (no thing) in the world to which the word "cause" corresponds,' or 'There is nothing (no thing) in the world that the word "cause" names.' (Although, all this being said, the word 'cause' and its many derivatives can be *used* in all sorts of more specific contexts to mean a great deal.)

- 5 The double suppression of history involved, first in ethnographic accounts constructed using the dubious 'anthropological present' and then in endless presentense citations of such classic ethnographies by social theorists, has had enormously damaging consequences both for social theory and for the proper understandings of the peoples and cultures being discussed. How much difference

would it make to endless social theoretical debates about Azande magic, for example, if it were more widely recognised that, as a result of colonial and post-colonial educational developments, there now exist plenty of Azande people who think that Azande witchcraft beliefs are either pernicious or silly!

- 6 I actually think this formulation is not the one that Wright *et al.* intend. I think that what they intend to say is that this mechanism (and social mechanisms generally) cause things and that they (Wright *et al.*) then explain both what mechanisms cause and how they cause. And this is certainly better from my point of view. But it only moves the issue one step back. For the question now becomes not whether there are (as good or better) linguistic ways of explaining human and social things (states of affairs) that do not involve postulating mechanisms, but whether there are such ways that do not involve postulating causes (and effects). And here I would like to make an empirical claim of a certain sort. I would like to claim that it is a fact that there is nothing in the social world that one can explain causally (using the word 'cause' and its derivatives), that one cannot explain, at least as well, without using such words. And if this is true, the conclusion I could draw from it is that causes are not real, where this means no fact in social reality is altered, and no fact fails to be explained, if social causes are not postulated. 'Causes are not real', then, would simply mean, to me, 'causes are linguistically otiose or redundant (as well as—and this is not insignificant—inelegant) in explanations of the social world'. None of this, however, should be taken to mean that human beings do not act for reasons, or that (just for that reason) their actions may not be, at least in limited ways, rationally predictable, nor that their actions do not have consequences—both intended and unintended—for other human beings and for the natural world, nor that such consequences cannot be explained in rational ways. Nor should it be inferred from the above remarks that I think causal explanations are otiose, redundant (or inelegant) in the natural sciences.
- 7 It could, of course, be argued—and Wright *et al.* would I am sure argue—that in rewriting the description of the motivation for protective rituals without using the word 'cause' (let alone 'causal mechanism'), I have made a merely linguistic change, since a causal mechanism is still present in the reality. That is, the fishermen become increasingly afraid, and this 'causes' them to search for ritual protection (and vice versa). However, I would assert that our use of language is here signalling something of philosophical import. The reason why one can restate these kinds of cases—concerning human motivations—much more simply and elegantly without causal terminology is that it is an ontological mistake to treat human motives and reasons for action (whether conscious or unconscious) as analogous to causes operative in nature. The philosophical arguments here are complex (Winch 1958:75–94 is a classical discussion of them). But, for me at least, the most compelling are those that stress the far greater indeterminacy and unpredictability of motives and reasons as compared with causes. In fact, in natural science *and* in ordinary uses of language, the notion of something being caused is closely bound up with the idea of its being reliably predictable. And in ordinary language the converse is also true—i.e. 'motive' and 'reason' vocabulary is preferred in any situation where the predictability of action and/or outcome is limited or uncertain. That is to say, where what action or actions a motive or reason produces, and/or what outcome or outcomes that action or actions results in, varies markedly—from context to context, or case to case, or from one human individual to another. (For example, did all of Malinowski's fishermen feel the same intensity of need for ritual protection?) Here is just one of many cases where social scientists could learn wisdom from their ordinary uses of language.
- 8 One reason for this, of course, is that, in a sense, Wright *et al.*—as individuals, as individual authors—are *not* doing anything active in using or deploying these metaphors. For these metaphors are not, in that sense, their metaphors—metaphors that they have invented or thought up for the purposes of writing their book—at all. On the contrary, they are just a set of scientific metaphors routinely

employed in the areas of sociology, rational choice economic and social theory and evolutionary biology in which Wright, Levine and Sober have been trained. And this training or socialisation precisely takes the form of a deep naturalisation of such metaphors, so that they are neither perceived nor deployed *as* metaphors at all, but are perceived and deployed as the technical or scientific names of 'real things'. In fact, any scientific or academic training, if it works, is as much of a socialisation out of certain ways of thinking and seeing as it is a means of socialisation into other ways. Indeed, achieving the former objective is often an essential means of achieving the latter. Moreover, if the academic socialisation works well, it even makes the former achievement 'invisible', and especially to those outstanding students who have learned well.

- 9 And this is precisely the case which I argue in Kitching (1988:90–119).
- 10 Wright *et al.*'s sixth chapter is devoted to a discussion of methodological individualism and its possible relevance to Marxism. As one would imagine, the work of Jon Elster figures prominently in this chapter. In the terminology of that chapter I would have to describe myself as a 'non-atomistic methodological individualist' but with one crucial difference. Unlike Elster and Wright *et al.*, but like Wittgenstein, I hold that our psychological vocabulary (including our vocabulary of motives and reasons) is not descriptive of 'internal' mental states at all. On this see Wright *et al.* (1992:110 and n. 17, 117). For Wittgenstein's views on this matter, see, among many possible examples, Wittgenstein (1972:§§571–92).
- 11 By contrast, one of Wittgenstein's more well-known remarks is 'We must do away with all explanation and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose from the philosophical problems' (1972:§109). However, as the second sentence in this remark shows, and as Wittgenstein makes plain later in the *Investigations*, such a remark should not lead one to infer that, for him, describing and explaining were always clearly distinguishable practices, and still less that human describing simply takes the form of 'registering the facts' or 'observing states of affairs' or anything similar.
- 12 Although Stanley Cavell (1979:247–73), in particular, has a great deal to say about the matter.
- 13 Describing 'from a moral point of view' is how William Connolly (1983:10–35) would characterise some of the cases I have discussed above.
- 14 Gyorgy Markus (1986:126–45) is extraordinarily good on this, and most especially on the complex pattern of discontinuity amid continuity that characterises the development of Marx's thought over his lifetime.
- 15 It would be true to say, of course, that knowing how to explain late essays is not *the same* as knowing how to explain divorce rates—even if it helps. This would mean that there are some technical tools that will help with the latter task but are not required for the former. But that is quite another—and much more restricted—matter. Consider, for example, how much a set of statistical correlations between high divorce rates and high indices of family economic stress would mean to a cognitive creature which (say) had never seen its parents (or anybody else's parents, or anybody at all) rowing over money.
- 16 Again, Cavell (1979:191–231) is brilliant on this.
- 17 That 'realist' and 'empiricist' interpreters of Marx, whatever other epistemological differences they may have, share a profound distrust of—indeed embarrassment about—the persuasive or politically mobilising point of his whole intellectual practice, is well illustrated by the exchange between Richard Hudelson (1982) and James Farr (1983) over Marx's alleged 'empiricism', and in particular by Hudelson's (1983) second contribution to that exchange. In both cases the most fundamental problem is the same. Their embarrassment concerning the strongly political nature of Marx's thought, and their anxious desire to separate what they see as the valuable 'scientific' aspects of his thought

from that political dimension, leads both realists and empiricists to give inadequate *intellectual* attention to the latter, and in particular to its *epistemological* importance.

- 18 Hugh Stretton's (1969) brilliant and far too neglected text has, as its sub-title suggests, a lot of incisive things to say about the 'why that and not *that?*' issue.
- 19 Please forgive the bland philosophical generality!

References

- Cavell, S. (1979) *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Scepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, G. (1979) *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Connolly W. (1983) *The Terms of Political Discourse*, Oxford: Martin Robertson.
- Farr, J. (1983) 'Marx no empiricist', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 13, 465–72.
- Gouldner, A. (1980) *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory*, London: Macmillan.
- Hudelson, R. (1982) 'Marx's empiricism', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 12, 241–53
- (1983) 'A reply to Farr', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 13, 473–4.
- Kitching, G. (1988) *Karl Marx and the Philosophy of Praxis*, London: Routledge.
- (1994) *Marxism and Science: Analysis of an Obsession*, Philadelphia: Penn State Press.
- Markus, G. (1986) *Language and Production: A Critique of the Paradigms*, Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Marx, K. (1965) *Capital*, vol. 1, Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- (1970) *Selected Works in One Volume* London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Pleasants, N. (1996) 'A Wittgensteinian social theory? Introducing reflexivity to Marxism', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 26, 397–416.
- Rhees, R. (ed.) (1984) *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rorty, R. (1980) *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Stretton, H. (1969) *The Political Sciences: General Principles of Selection in Social Science and History*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Winch, P. (1958) *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1958) *The Blue and Brown Books*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1972) *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1980) *Culture and Value*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wright, E. Olin, Levine, A. and Sober, E. (1992) *Reconstructing Marxism: Essays on Explanation and the Theory of History*, London: Verso.

13 Marx and Wittgenstein on vampires and parasites

A critique of capital and metaphysics¹

Rupert Read

Everyday life is the supreme court where wisdom, knowledge and power are brought to judgement.

(Henri Lefebvre, 1958:6)

Introduction: do the ‘anti-philosophers’ refute themselves?

Marx and Wittgenstein are two of the most famous *end-of-philosophy* philosophers. Supposedly, they attack—or even ridicule—philosophy. And there is surely *some* ground, at least, for the supposition that they do.

But what then is the status of their own discourse? Do they stand in some privileged or Archimedean position, some place invulnerable to their own criticisms? What justification could they have for exempting their own claims from the criticisms they themselves make of philosophy?

To be a little more concrete: for Marx, very famously, the point was to change the world, not merely to *interpret* it, as philosophers inveterately do. Wittgenstein perhaps equally famously remarks that philosophy leaves everything as it is. A key question of this paper will be whether these claims are actually—as probably they appear to be—in tension with one another.

But in any case, we are immediately inclined to ask, of these unusual—‘limited’—visions of the nature and power (or impotence) of philosophy: are Wittgenstein and Marx describing, or interpreting, when they say these things, or what? If what they say—Marx, in the *Theses on Feuerbach*; Wittgenstein, at the end of the *Tractatus* and in *Philosophical Investigations*² (1968:§§124–33)—is not a condemnation out of their own mouths of what they do, elsewhere (and also perhaps here!), then what *is* it?

Consider the following remark of Harry Redner’s (1986:113):

Marx was the first major thinker to have explicitly undertaken the destruction of metaphysics on the basis of a new conception of language... The destruction of metaphysics and the creation of a new concept of language went hand in hand in Marx’s philosophy. Language was dis-covered as its metaphysical cover was dissolved. Marx begins by noting that metaphysics is language concealed: ‘The philosophers would only have to dissolve their language

into the ordinary language, from which it is abstracted, to recognise it as the distorted language of the actual world, and to realise that neither thoughts nor language in themselves form a realm of their own, that they are only manifestations of actual life.³

Indeed; what fascinates here is the strikingly ‘Wittgensteinian’ tenor of the quote from Marx. When we recognise in this remark an anticipation of Wittgenstein, we can begin to appreciate the depth of the problem of the status of philosophical discourse itself, especially that of Marxians or Wittgensteinians. Redner (*ibid.*) continues:

Marx characteristically overreaches himself and speaks too sharply of a general ‘dissolution of philosophy’, not distinguishing too sharply between ‘philosophy’ and ‘metaphysics’, and he was unknowingly followed in this by the other ‘Faustian’ thinkers, who frequently presented their critiques as attacks on philosophy itself.

Now at this point I need to say two things.

- 1 I don’t think that either Marx or Wittgenstein are *actually* well described as end-of-philosophy philosophers.⁴ Because, according to Wittgenstein, our tendencies to philosophise are deep and long-lasting, and are internally related to our deep inclinations to be misled by our language. Our inclination to philosophise is probably not, as Richard Rorty’s Wittgenstein would have it, a specific, local and eradicable cultural artefact. Wittgenstein thought of philosophy, of course, as an *activity*. ‘Philosophy’ will be needed as long as we continue to make certain kinds of deep errors, until perhaps conceivably a more general change in our *lives* might render us less prone to such endlessly tempting errors. Philosophy is an activity parasitic on error-making—but we have no grounds to think that even would-be pure Wittgensteinians (such as I hope to be) have yet begun definitively to overcome such errors. The tendencies towards them are embedded deep within our culture, within our language, within us. And these tendencies are arguably there even in our very efforts to think ourselves out of them.
- 2 Whether or not (1) in fact holds, neither Marx nor Wittgenstein are best read as hoping to find or tell the Truth, from a privileged philosophical vantage-point, way ‘above’ praxis. (*A fortiori*, they are not giving us a metaphilosophy to sort out philosophy.) Language is largely, basically ‘flat’—like many cities (see *PI*§18—Wittgenstein is obviously thinking here of cities more like Vienna than New York, or even Prague). ‘Philosophical language’ is just a part of the city, though it appears to be a panoptical tower (or observation balloon) rising far up above it. ‘Meta-language’ (and even ‘meta-philosophy’) is also part of this flatness (*ibid.*: 121). Meta-philosophy is not a tower growing yet further out of the philosophical tower, to survey *that* tower. Even if there were these

towers, it would do no good—for we would be launched on a pointless infinite journey. We would need always to resurvey the ‘enforcing’ meta-language we were using, in order to generate normative force with which to change the language ‘below’—and this need would infinitely ramify. Unless language can take care of itself, there can be no taking care of it. In this (crucial) case and sense, philosophy ‘leaves language as it is’.

Even given these provisos, we still need to be deliberate and careful with the picture we are building here. Rather than speaking of (say) ‘philosophical language’, we should really speak of ‘philosophical use of language’. For *use*, of course, is paramount, for Wittgenstein. So the spatiality and non-dynamicity of the ‘flatness’ and ‘city’ metaphors may mislead.

There is a further problem with (2) in the particular case of Marx. For he quite often self-identifies as a scientist, as a Truth teller. This is contrary to the tenor of Wittgenstein’s philosophy and Wittgenstein’s self-identification. I return to this later; for now, I think and hope that this self-identification of Marx’s is quite largely (though, one must admit, *not* completely) removable in favour of an alternative, more coherent and less troubling philosophical identification. Marx, surprisingly, can, most of the time, be successfully read against the grain of his rhetorical claims to scientific status.

Does Wittgenstein self-refute (through speaking ‘non-everyday’ language)?

The problem with which this paper began now emerges quite starkly, with regard to Wittgenstein’s so-called ‘meta-philosophy’. How can we *succeed* in construing of language as flat, and of philosophical uses of language as everyday? Consider *PI* §120:

When I talk about language (words, sentences, etc.) I must speak the language of every day. Is this language somehow too coarse and material for what we want to say? *Then how is another one to be constructed?*—And how strange that we should be able to do anything at all with the one we have!

I want to say: Wittgenstein is just saying that he is using ordinary words here. Not magical words. Not even special quasi-technical words. And his remark is itself perfectly humdrum.

But in what sense is the language of *PI* § 120 the language of every day? What is the occasion on which it can make sense to utter ‘propositions’ such as *PI* §120? It cannot be an occasion on which we are literally informing anyone of anything. But isn’t that what descriptions centrally do? Inform? Whereas (t)his talk is *not functional* in the manner in which he (Wittgenstein) claims that ordinary language is functional or able to be functional insofar as it is meaningful. For the descriptions of philosophy are—would be—‘pure’ descriptions. Which is as much as to say: they are not assertoric descriptions, not *informative*, not descriptions (of

matters of fact) at all. Again, we need to bear in mind that Wittgenstein held that there are no significant philosophical assertions, statements, propositions (see *PI* §128), and that his philosophical criticism was a criticism only of chimeras, of inchoate temptations of thought. But then we will be worried that Wittgenstein has failed to leave any room open for the status of his own remarks. Isn't he centrally interested in language in use; and isn't 'philosophical language', even his own, in an important sense *out of use*?

We want to say that philosophical language can be everyday, *and* that it has a problematic status with regard to its being a 'refinement' of our everyday language.⁵ It is, in fact, as we might say, parasitic upon it! For consider *PI* §116,⁶ in which Wittgenstein suggests that what we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday uses. Does Wittgenstein's talk here—of the 'original homes' of words, and of their everyday uses as opposed to their metaphysical uses—imply that there actually is such a thing as the metaphysical use of a word? If it did, then we could see what 'the everyday' was clearly (by contrast). But it would do so at the cost of leaving us no argument for why philosophers should not use metaphysical language, and yet wanting and needing such an argument.

How then should we to respond to the question just raised? Well, as usual, it doesn't much matter what you say, so long as you are clear about what you are saying when you say it. But I suspect it will be most useful to say, with Cavell, that 'metaphysical use' is a *fantasy*, albeit a deeply attractive one. As Martin Stone (2000:84) puts it:

Wittgenstein identifies philosophy's metaphysical voice as his critical target. But this alone would hardly distinguish him from any number of other philosophers within the huge Kantian wake of philosophy's self-criticism. So it would be a mistake to infer, from such a metaphysical target, that the contrast Wittgenstein wishes to draw [in *PI* §116] (between himself and others) should not embrace...those philosophers who set their face *against* metaphysics. 'We bring words back'—Wittgenstein is to be read as saying—'in contrast to the way other philosophers criticise metaphysics; in their form of criticism, words remain metaphysically astray'.

So, while there is indeed a powerful deconstructive voice in Wittgenstein's text, it is not any more *his view* than is the metaphysical voice, or even the 'official' voice, the voice of correction.

If words are truly to be brought back to their everyday uses, away from their pseudo-holiday-'homes', they must be brought back from a state of parasitic dependence upon these everyday uses to everyday uses, themselves.

But what is to be done (to achieve this)?

When a philosopher remarks, for instance, that we fail to 'recognise [philosophical language] as the distorted language of the actual world' (Marx), or that philosophy is always being 'tormented by questions which bring *itself* in

question' (Wittgenstein, 1968:§133), then *in virtue of what could such claims themselves be exempt from their own scope?*

It seems that there must be something peculiar about (all) philosophical language, even when the speaking of that philosophical language is a means towards becoming clearer as to what is awry with the language which is its subject. In other words: the moral of the *Tractatus* carries forward into Wittgenstein's later work. Wittgenstein did *not* think that his own philosophy was exempt from the criticisms he apparently makes of 'uses of language' which are in an important sense not genuine uses of language (i.e. alleged metaphysical 'uses' of language). And as Wittgenstein held throughout his life, the logic of language cannot be genuinely described (see Wittgenstein, 1979:§501).

If, then, there is no such thing as using language to get an account of language 'from the outside', and 'report' on its nature, then even to speak of 'everyday language' seems fated to be non-everyday, and indeed nonsensical.

If we are to approach closer to a resolution of the 'paradox' in Wittgenstein's philosophy which I have been discussing, then we need to find another way into the question of how quasi-pathological language—but language which is apparently not just nonsense as irrelevant to us as (e.g.) 'is dog a than' or 'sdihhvccvvd d a ifh'—is even *possible*.

How can we understand 'parasitical language'?

The question I have already suggested can be put as one of parasitism: a kind of parasitism, roughly, of 'theory' upon 'practice'. How can it be possible to achieve anything by means of parasitical language, if it is condemned out of its own mouth as nonsense?

But there may be a helpful analogy to hand. What is parasitism *in social relations*? What is it for there to be people who, though they are people (and people *do* things), live off the doings—the labour—of others? How can they be and do so?

These questions seem genuinely easier to answer than the questions we have been considering thus far. That is how the analogy may help us. For it should be clear that influential accounts have been given of everyday—'workaday'—parasitism, in society. Accounts of the relations in 'feudalism', and 'capitalism', and of certain social entities (rights in bodies, land, capital itself). Accounts which can be used to help answer these questions.

We start thinking, then, of everyday parasitism. We might remark that, like capitalists, philosophical uses of language very largely *don't do work*.

Now, while the 'purely economic' reality and power of capital may or not have been adequately accounted for by the Marxist tradition, it could be said that, at the *root* of the Marxist and other radical accounts of and attacks on the import of capital is the following: a sense that capital, and money more generally, is, as well as being a reality right now, an interpersonal *ideological 'construct'*, and an increasingly dispensable one (albeit one which has been vital to the actual historical and economic development of the species). A sense that

what is wrong is that capitalists and associated parasites *work* virtually not at all, while they reap vast rewards (from others' labour).

So: we have a class or classes, capitalists (plus to some extent *petit bourgeois*, etc.), who are parasites on the proletariat, on the workers. But there is also a crucial sense in which *there isn't anything other than* 'the proletariat', if only we construe the latter sufficiently broadly.

How might this be done? Another analogy: in 1789 the progressive elements of the first two estates in France came to recognise and believe that it was their democratic and patriotic and political duty to join with the Third Estate, in a meeting where the Third Estate would numerically dominate. This was, in a sense, an affirmation that *all there was/is* is the Third Estate; that only an ideology which was real in its effects but wrong—and approaching the end of its days—was fostering the illusion that the 'Estate-boundaries' marked real differences between human beings. The nobles and clerics, parasites on the commoners, were declaring that they *were* commoners—which commences the abolition of the distinction between commoners and the rest, and thus the elimination too of the category of 'commoner'.

I think the same is the logic of Marxism. *Really*—within the grasp of our linguistic/practical/communal realisation, at this point in history—'there is only' the proletariat, in a necessarily broadened and 'bloated' sense⁷—in the sense of workers, by hand or by brain.⁸ Capital and class are, we might say, social constructs in a more fundamental sense than are (say) people or work. If we can come collectively to cease to treat money as perfectly real, it no longer need be so. As in the case of the marvellously indolent Quashees, described by Marx (1978b:250): 'As far as they are concerned, capital does not exist as capital.' Similarly, if we come to recognise collectively in our linguistic *and non-linguistic actions* that really there is only the 'universal' class, that of workers, then the naked reality of present class-domination will be clearly open to view, exposed—and the abolition of class may be at hand.⁹

One of Marx's famous and excoriatingly powerful devices of literary art for describing capitalists is as 'Vampires'. But perhaps the upshot of the above is that we can't *simply*—and luckily don't necessarily *have* to—excise the 'vampires', the 'parasites'. We have, rather, to convince everyone, including them and ourselves, that there needn't any longer—and in a certain sense 'can't' really be—any such thing as 'class'. That conviction and re-cognition and the associated undertaking of certain practical actions (e.g. changes in 'managerial structures') will in the first instance be constituted by its being seen to be just ridiculous for some to live largely off the labour of others.¹⁰ The parasites can be integrated, once it is actively and *practically* 'realised' that they are nothing other than people, like us.

And this, I think, is how we can succeed in understanding Wittgenstein on 'philosophical language'. It is not that 'philosophical language'—even of the kind that Wittgenstein can be heard as speaking just insofar as we do not take completely literally and seriously his injunctions against 'theses' in philosophy—needs to be *excised*, because of its being nonsense. Rather, it needs to be shown for what it is—either plain nonsense, nothing (in which case what we have to find is a way of understanding that there is nothing to excise), or perfectly ordinary and everyday

remarks which everyone will agree to, and/or which have perfectly fine homes in particular language-games. In the latter sense(s), philosophical language can be integrated back in with our language-games—it does not need to be excised; it is not even, at a deep level, genuinely parasitic.¹¹ Because, if we can come to collectively cease to treat philosophical language as perfectly real and substantial, as usable, then of course it need no longer be so.

So then: we (Wittgensteinians) don't say, 'You must leave the paradise of metaphysics.' We say, 'Look around you! This non-place you are half in, do you really want to call it "Paradise"?' We invite our interlocutor to live the reduction to absurdity of their own pretensions. (And the same invitation, I am intimating, is extended by Marx to his interlocutors. They too are invited to look around them; and to live differently.)

All this cannot be done with proofs, with arguments. Feuerbach was perhaps the first to see this clearly, in his reaction against Hegelian philosophy. As a consequence, Feuerbach has been almost completely misunderstood, and seen over and over again as a purveyor of weak arguments, poor proofs, as opposed to a purveyor of something quite different. Daniel Brudney (1998) has brilliantly brought this out—with an explication of Feuerbach's 'therapeutic' approach to questions of theology and philosophy, an approach intended to get his followers to radically re-understand religion and modern society.

Marx, and latterly Wittgenstein, 'followed up' on Feuerbach's path-breaking insights and efforts, by emphasising change in practice, aspect-seeing, by emphasising that it is not a belief or doctrine that needs altering but an attitude and even a way of life. And (thus) they have more successfully than Feuerbach avoided the risk of remnants of Hegelian idea-ism, and of making it seem as though the change to be made was *easy*.

Thus one *might want* to see the 'class interest' (!) of practical everyday language as requiring the 'excision' of philosophical language—but there is only likely to be a lasting peace if instead the 'parasitic' language is re-heard as being just more everyday language, only everyday language that we have unfortunately been 'systematically' and 'ideologically' educated to hear as magical. To foment this re-hearing is not an *easy* task, and not something that one can simply decide to do, even for oneself.

Try looking on Wittgenstein's work, then, as a critique of 'alienated language'—it needs to be brought back to the everyday, back to work.

But is there a disanalogy here? Is alienated linguistic utterance less plausibly described as alienated than is 'alienated labour'? The *analogy* is centrally this: that you are not achieving what you want to achieve, through what is alienated (your linguistic practices; your labour). You don't *express* yourself in and through it, when it is alienated. Your words do not mean what you want them to, and seem to stand over against you; your work is not your own, it does not issue in something which expresses anything you wanted to express, but rather in products which are not your own and actually disempower you. Words and sounds; and inanimate objects; controlling the lives of real people—that is alienation.

Metaphysical doctrine, metaphysical language is, as Wittgenstein (1980:11) said, like the magic gift in a fairy tale. In the enchanted castle, it appeared something splendid. You hoped to accomplish something miraculous with it. But actually it necessarily fails to accomplish that, or indeed anything. In the cold light of day, we see that it is only a piece of old metal. 'Philosophical language' in general is just such old metal, old metal which unfortunately our intellectualist philosophical traditions tend to get us to fetishise as something shiny and special. Philosophical language is the language of every day, transposed and misunderstood. There is in one important way, then, actually no parasitism of the kind we imagine, even we Wittgensteinians. To see 'philosophical language' as something special, to see 'it' as deep nonsense, or as language that succeeds in being pathological, is still to give it too much credit. There is, one would perhaps better say, no 'it'. But this is something that we have to realise in ourselves, to see, to make (it) true.

Wittgenstein's language, his own 'speaking outside language-games' (for, to return to the opening of this essay, is it not a *very* peculiar use of language to undertake what Wittgenstein does with it?), is transitional—it is intended to be part of a (probably never-ending) project of getting us to be able to be free of philosophical worries (of certain strange kinds of perplexity); even worries about the character of language being used 'outside language-games', ultimately.

Can Marx really be fairly read as 'Wittgensteinian'?

Some readers may suspect that I have cheated. I have, it may seem, arrived at some Marxian help in how to understand Wittgenstein only by already *smuggling in* a quasi-Wittgensteinian reading of *Marx*. I need then to give an account of how Marx's accounts could possibly be rightly described as (after Wittgenstein) descriptions. I need to go into a little more detail on how we can successfully hear such phenomena as class relations, etc., described in *Marx* as 'irreal', as artefacts of delusion or illusion, in a Wittgensteinian sense of those words.

Let us take as our example a crucial Marxian concept, one which 'underlies' both capital and the class structure for Marx: the commodity form. Let us look briefly at the opening pages of *Capital* (Marx, 1978a:312–3), at the notion of 'commodity fetishism'. I intersperse my comments with Marx's text, in square brackets:

Commodities come into the world in the shape of use-values...goods, such as iron, linen, corn, etc. This is their plain, homely, bodily form. [Their home is in their use.] They are, however, commodities, only because they are something two-fold, both object of utility, and, at the same time, depositories of value...

The value of commodities is the very opposite of the coarse materiality of their substance... Turn and examine a single commodity, by itself, as we will, yet in so far as it remains an object of value, it seems impossible to grasp it. [Compare: staring at a word, and hoping to 'see' the meaning (failing to

see that its meaning li(v)es in its use).] If, however, we bear in mind that the value of commodities has a purely social reality, and that they acquire this reality only in so far as they are expressions or embodiments of one identical social substance, viz., human labour, it follows as a matter of course, that value can only manifest itself in the social relation of one commodity to another. [Note the connections to (and differences from) the latter part of *PI* § 120, a quasi-Marxian moment in Wittgenstein: ‘You say: the point isn’t the word, but its meaning, and you think of the meaning as a thing of the same kind as the word, though also different from the word. Here the word, there the meaning. The money, and the cow that you can buy with it. (But contrast: money and its use.)’ Wittgenstein is pointing out the metaphysics which failing to understand social institutions can get one into. Marx is pointing out the metaphysics which social institutions themselves can get people into.]

I think Marx is saying terribly commonplace things about commonplace things here.¹² The Wittgensteinian interpolations, above, draw attention to the ‘ordinariness’ of what Marx is up to with words, like the ‘ordinariness’ (and the *practice-centredness*) of what Wittgenstein is up to. I don’t think Marx is offering us a ‘definition’ of the commodity, still less the opening of a theorisation of the economy.

This last claim may seem outrageous, and it is evident that, as *Capital* proceeds, there are parts of it which are at least attempted theorisations of the economy. And it is true that to some extent Marx gives us a new way of talking, a new ‘vocabulary’. I think Marx is trying to get us to see things about our commerce with objects and with each other that are perfectly straightforward, but also deeply obscured.¹³

Now, I am not saying that this way of reading Marx definitely works. Or that it will carry through into all of *Capital*. However, I do believe that it would be a mistake to see the discussion of commodities as the generation of a model that will be the basis for a subsequent thoroughgoing Theorisation—a mistake almost as great as reading the opening sections of Wittgenstein’s *PI* in such a manner. The ‘language-games’ of *PI* are demythologising ‘models’, objects of comparison (*PI* §130) to free one of mental cramps, nothing more. Must Marx’s approach be read quite oppositely? I am not saying that this way of reading makes all of Marx’s remarks acute or even comprehensible. For I think we should never cease to be struck by the strangeness of the opening of *Capital*, the strangeness of our being presented with these commonplaces. As, again, we should be struck by the strangeness of the opening remarks of *PI*—is this philosophy? What is the point of these ‘remarks’? Are they ‘theses’? Or trivialities?

What is engendered by a society where the exchange of commodities for money takes place, according to Marx, is a situation wherein

the social character of men’s labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the

relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour... [T]he existence of...things *qua* commodities, and the value-relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom. There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.

(Marx, 1978a:320–1)

Thus it is that commodities are rendered ‘mysterious’ to us; and this is something we do, this is a body of human activities. Commodities abstract away from their specificity as ‘use-values’, and from the specificity of the labour that went into them. They become interchangeable, and thus producers (labourers) no longer realise clearly that they (commodities) are now the mode through which they (people) *are relating to each other*—relating their labour, and everything else. This is the nature of money under capitalism. *But, in its everydayness, it is invisible.* In sum: there is then at least some good reason to read Marx in a quasi-Wittgensteinian fashion.

Does Marx’s ‘labour theory of value’ support or contradict this reading?

To see in more detail if and why there is good reason to read Marx ‘after Wittgenstein’, we come directly to the consideration of Marx on labour. And here what we find is very interesting: Marx precisely tries to get us to see what is hidden from our view through being so commonplace (cf. *PI* §129).

In his effort to understand what a commodity is (or rather, to avoid misunderstanding it, as he says ‘bourgeois economists’ consistently do), Marx notes that we cannot *depend* upon use-value; for it is precisely in their exchange-value, which abstracts from any particular uses, that things are commodities:

If then we leave out of consideration the use-value of commodities, they have only one common property left, that of being products of labour. But even the product of labour itself has undergone a change in our hands. If we make abstraction from its use-value, we make abstraction at the same time from the material elements and shapes that make the product a use-value; we see in it no longer a table, a house, yarn, or any other useful thing. Its existence as a material thing is put out of sight. *Neither can it any longer be regarded as the product of the labour of the joiner, the mason, the spinner, or of any other definite kind of productive labour.* Along with the useful qualities of the products themselves, we put out of sight both the useful character of the various kinds of labour embodied in them, and the concrete forms of

that labour; there is nothing left but what is common to them all; all are reduced to one and the same sort of labour, human labour in the abstract.
(Marx, 1978a:305)

All this is something that ‘the market’ does, not something that Marx is imposing upon it as a positive theory. Marx is following through, and attempting to depict, the ‘logic’ of our social life.

An exchange-based system has, then, a logic which makes all human labour entirely equivalent. But then, does Marx’s account of exchange-value as ‘congealed quantities of homogenous human labour’ pose as a true theoretical construct—or as something much more fantastical and absurd? David Andrews (Chapter 4 of this volume, p. 89) writes:

Is value the expression of socially necessary abstract labour or is this simply an illusion?... Marx’s use of the religious metaphor to describe commodity fetishism connotes some type of illusion, suggesting that there is something unreal, or at least of questionable objectivity, in exchange-values.

But while the objective character of value does have an illusory aspect to it, it is a ‘prosaically real, and by no means imaginary, mystification’. Marx points out that the idea that there can be social relations between things is ‘fantastic’, but he says that this is ‘what they are’.

For again, commodity fetishism and capital fetishism are things which people, perhaps regrettably, but as yet perhaps inevitably, do.

There is a serious problem of interpretation here in *Capital*, a problem which has been unsatisfactorily skated over or ‘resolved’ by many of Marx’s readers, especially those impressed by his theory of political economy. But Marx has not given us a theoretical ‘analysis’ which he then fatally undermines. He has given us a tool for use in ‘description’ of this capitalist mode of life, a tool which he *hopes* will enable one, among other things, eventually to leave it itself behind. In this regard, the ‘labour theory of value’ is rather like the ‘picture theory of meaning’, or even the so-called ‘use theory of meaning’ attributed to the later Wittgenstein. It is itself a picture, whose worth is ultimately to be appreciated precisely by means of our understanding its conceptual inadequacies and transitionality.

Marx was a prescient and highly intelligent economic commentator. But what I have suggested is not that the ‘labour theory of value’ is True, or good science, or a real positive contribution to economics. On the contrary, I am in complete agreement with Gavin Kitching (1988: ch. 4) that the labour theory of value is *completely hopeless*, considered as a positive contribution to the ‘social science’ of economics. ‘Values’ cannot be made the basis of any practicable economic theorising (or, if they are, they commit one to false claims). For, if postulated as ‘in’ the world, they are surely an intellectualist metaphysical fantasy.

But what the so-called¹⁴ ‘labour theory of value’ does is to reasonably perspicuously and dramatically present the following basic always-already

propagandistic, political and 'ethical' claim: Profit essentially requires exploitation. Working for an almost-non-worker (a 'capitalist') obviously involves supporting parasitism; even though it is hard (due to fetishistic 'ideology') for us to see this.

Marx hopes that the fantasticness of what he is showing us about ourselves will help us to revolt against it. He shows us the patent nonsense that in its everydayness we fail to see, the nonsense that we are latently committed to, in our lives, and he hopes that we will draw the requisite conclusions—in action, not just in mind.

Labour is something we *do*. I have suggested that we should see 'the labour theory of value' in its broadest sense, charitably, as:

- 1 a *reductio ad absurdum* of the pretensions of the 'scientific' political economy that Marx inherited;
- 2 a gambit in a therapeutic philosophical manoeuvre, designed to help us not only to see through the pretensions of political economy, but to confront the strangeness or even absurdity we are living in, if we live under capitalistic social relations; and
- 3 a persuasive tool in evoking a sense of ethical and political outrage—i.e. a vivid 'perspicuous presentation' (*PI* §122) of exploitation.

In short, Marx has not in fact given us an economic theory of capitalism—and a good thing too. He has given us something more 'important', more 'profound'. He has helped us fashion from our own resources a set of tools for reunderstanding, for vividly characterising, our current social relations—a set of tools which simultaneously may help us alter those relations.

Marx's 'position' is in a sense self-deconstructing. His 'analysis' does indeed in a strong sense ultimately undermine—dismantle—itsself. But this is its point. We need to draw the requisite conclusions eventually, against Marx's 'theory' itself (as we do against any 'positions' we find ourselves attributing to Wittgenstein). We don't even need Derrida to come along and do this. It really is implicit in Marx.

But this 'self-deconstruction' has to be understood in a very particular way. It is a deconstruction which has to be actualised by us (not simply conjured in an academic treatise, such as Derrida's (1994) *Specters of Marx*).

What is the upshot of Marx's 'Wittgensteinian' thinking?

What would be left to us, after a successful (i.e. 'charitably' altered) incorporation of Marx's simplified 'language-games' of (what he calls) 'value', his vocabulary, into our descriptions of social phenomena, and their consequent self-overcoming and self-deconstruction, would be an enhanced sense of the specificity of human needs and of human activity to satisfy those needs. The abstraction, 'general labour', would no longer remain. (For it would have no contrast class.) Truly back, at last, to the rough ground, we

would also be back to the variegated natures and uses ('use-values'?) of work and of things, back to the immense varieties of 'labour', to the vastly different ways humans construct and re-construct their environments (and themselves).

Andrews (Chapter 4, this volume, p. 78) writes that 'Marx himself drew an analogy between value and language: "the characteristic which objects of utility have of being values is as much men's social product as is their language"'. From the discussion above we can draw the following result: the internal connection between language-game and practical activity (sometimes usefully referred to as 'form of life') is an effective analogy for—because, basically, just a general case of—the relationship between our ordinary language-game of value and our ordinary practices ('form of life'). And Marx's account is an elaboration of—a bringing to self-consciousness of—the former. Marx's discussion of value—while sometimes obscurely written, and certainly deformed by some scientific elements of presentation, and by an only partly and (thus) insufficiently 'ethnographic' or 'anthropological' approach—is thus, as Andrews says, in a vastly different relationship with value-constituting activity than is assumed by a positivist or positivist-influenced perspective.

According to my reading of Marx, then, everyone *is* a doer, a copier, a labourer. But in society, and in psychology, there is 'false consciousness' and 'ideology'. So most of the privileged classes and the parasitised classes cannot see the reality of the privileged also being—labourers. Not divinities, not privileged by right, but just workers, workers who don't typically have to work very hard.

So: we have a class or classes, capitalists (plus also to some extent managers, *petit bourgeois*, etc.), who are parasites on 'the proletariat', on the workers. But there is also an important, a crucial sense in which *there isn't anything other than* 'the proletariat' (better: the labourers/workers), if only we let ourselves construe the latter sufficiently broadly. We are all workers. Although let us remember again that this would fail to stand, were it to be heard (as almost everyone does hear it), as a theoretical assertion, and thus in conflict with Marx's account of (the 'social-constructedness' of) exchange-value (heard in turn as a theoretical assertion):

[T]he value of a commodity represents human labour in the abstract, the expenditure of human labour in general... Skilled labour counts only as simple labour intensified, or rather, as multiplied simple labour, a given quantity of skilled being considered equal to a greater quantity of simple labour... For simplicity's sake we shall henceforth account every kind of labour to be unskilled, simple labour; by this we do no more than save ourselves the trouble of making the reduction.

(Marx, 1978a:310–1)

The logic of this could be extended up to managers, etc.; and why not all the way to the capitalist? It is only the grand shared fantasy of exchange-value which distinguishes the capitalist's (minimal) labour from everyone else's, which gives it a bright—blinding—shine.

Here we have the ‘democratic’ levelling potential of (understanding) the effects of ‘commodityism’. And all this comes out of thinking through carefully the practical logic of, the social relations of, an exchange-based system. But it is not the product of any theory, if by ‘theory’ we mean anything much resembling the kinds of things aimed at and relied on in the natural sciences.

Now, of course, as hinted earlier, we ought to be careful about how far we take this ‘parasitism’ analogy. For while Marxists indeed see capitalists as parasites, and as vampires (Derrida, 1994:193), they also recognise that these ‘vampires’ are invaluable, essential to the system as it currently stands. They *couldn’t* be simply *excised*. Expropriated, yes (deprived of at least most of their property; and/or placed under a new regimen no longer having a need for the concept of ‘property’); but not necessarily eliminated, either as persons or *as roles*.

Rather, there is what one might (over-)generously call a ‘symbiosis’—for some of the roles capitalists play (‘entrepreneurial’, etc.) would be essential even in a radically reconstituted society. It is not a question of simply abolishing capitalists; but nor, either, of simply giving them a bit more work to do. There is a ‘symbiotic parasitism’, an ‘ecological system’ involving mutual benefit—though hardly in a desirable state of equilibrium! It is in a state, rather, which Marx characterises as deeply exploitative, highly undesirable—and, moreover, literally *absurd*, shot through with ‘the delusive nature of [these] things’.

Should this useful correction of our parasitism analogy, this introduction of the idea of a symbiotic element to parasitism, cause us to give up the basic analogy? No. For, after all, this was no more than we should have expected of the multifarious possibilities offered us by the concept of ‘parasite’. For it is well known that the most effective parasites do not kill their hosts, and indeed perform certain services for them.¹⁵

The overall upshot of Marx’s Wittgensteinian thinking, then, is a somewhat new and I think less vulnerable version of how ‘parasitism’ in Marx can be glossed and understood.

How then should we read Wittgenstein on philosophy through Marx?

So, after what has I hope been an illuminating ‘detour’, if we now return to *PI* §120, I think we can more clearly see a reading of it that, while not shirking the drastic consequences of Wittgenstein’s proto-auto-critique, facilitates our not seeing that critique as in the final analysis dangerous criticism. There is only the language of every day, Wittgenstein is saying. But in saying that, which if heard ‘literally’ would itself be a metaphysical claim, it is possible that one is less likely to be misunderstood if one’s remark is taken as a suggestion, rather than as a description. Wittgenstein suggests that we try to get ourselves to hear *PI* §120 (etc.) as a description—but we have to be ‘persuaded’ to hear it that way. To say that there is only the language of every day is *not* to make one more philosophical super-statement. Wittgenstein’s own remark, seen aright, is just an ordinary everyday remark. But the fact that we find it systemically hard to see/hear it that way suggests that we have a long way to

go in ridding ourselves of the kinds of delusions that Wittgenstein takes us to be subject to. Only a transformation of our community will potentially enable us to really rest easy with Wittgenstein's remarks—and once we could rest easy with them, we would no longer need them. For likewise: only a transformation of our society (societies) will enable us to rest easy with the claim that 'Everyone is a worker; only some people don't work hard enough, and so others have to work much too hard (etc.)'; and once we could rest easy with such a remark, again we would no longer need it.

Is the early Marx also consistent with Wittgenstein?

Some may be surprised that I have focused, thus far, on 'the later Marx'. 'The early Marx' might seem a more natural ally for Wittgenstein. I have chosen perhaps the harder target—if I can convince the reader of illuminating affinities between Wittgenstein and the 'mature' Marx, then it will by and large be easier still to do the same job *vis-à-vis* the early Marx. And indeed, the early Marx's 'humanism' is, I think, centred around much the kind of vision that I have just now sketchily depicted.¹⁶ If there is to be real fulfilled humanity, then just about everyone must be persuaded that their deepest interests and hopes lie in giving up the 'reasonable delusion' that class is real, that capital is real. (Much as, likewise, if there is to be real fulfilled humanity, then we—very generally—must overcome *alienation*, and no longer be confronted by the objects we produce as alien things, but rather be part of a seamless web *with* them, and with [in] the broader environment.) But let me be clear what I do not intend by using the language of reality and illusion, etc., here: to see the ruling class as parasites can only be transitional—it is, again, not a seeing of things as they truly are *in the kind of sense in which we see things as they truly are when we clean our spectacles*. Because it is, broadly speaking, rather seeing in the sense of Peter Winch, and in the sense of Wittgenstein's (1968:§129): 'The aspect of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to see something—because it is always before one's eyes.)' A blind person will not be helped if you clean their spectacles. And nor (more precise analogy) will someone be helped to see the beauty in the world around them by having their spectacles cleaned, alone.

The point of such seeing and of persuading others so to see is an unavoidably ethical (but not necessarily in the sense usual in moral philosophy) and political one. It does not involve a quasi-scientific truth-claim, nor the consequence of a theory, but rather a *call*, a call which hopes in the longer term to hasten its own irrelevance. 'The truth', now, is that everyone is a worker—in other words, that no one is a worker in the sense in which we currently understand that term (as opposed to a capitalist, or some such). Equality between human beings is not something which can be quasi-apodictically argued for, or taught as doctrine—it is something which must be felt, lived, *built*.

Does Marx face a dilemma, between falling into 'idea-ism' or failing to have a criticism of capitalism?

By this point an objection may have been crystallising in the reader's mind, an objection to the apparently non-materialist (i.e. idea-ist) mode of my presentation of insights I am purportedly drawing from the Marxist tradition. Here is how Mulhall (1998:95) expresses the potential objection:

[T]hese formulations [of Marx's conception of human practical activity] may seem like metaphysical hocus-pocus or part of the excesses of Romanticism: are we meant to mount a critique of a system of economic production or of social relations on the ground that few of its participants experience a mystical union between subject and object?

Mulhall (*ibid.*: 98) goes on to argue that 'Marx's characterisations of fulfilling practical activity can be interpreted as picking out a very common...human experience, and one which can be characterised in ways less reliant on Romantic articulations of the agent's experiences and attitudes'. So he (*ibid.*) endeavours 'to bring Marx's characterisations down to earth'. Mulhall gives as common and ordinary examples a carpenter or a tennis player, on days when their work, their activity, is proceeding in an observably impressive 'seamless' manner. And he (*ibid.*: 99–101) backs this up by invoking certain key features of human behaviour as these are recognised by Heidegger and Wittgenstein:

Why should practical activity which manifests the fluidity and seamlessness to which Marx's notion of mechanical activity stands as a contrast be regarded as the fulfilment of human nature—the achievement of *genuine* humanity? // The answer can be stated as follows: Marx is able to regard this feature of human practical activity as fundamental to his conception of human fulfilment because it is a central aspect of our concept of *human* behaviour...// [T]his aspect of genuinely human behaviour is the subject matter of Heidegger's reflections on the readiness-to-hand of objects and on the way in which human existence is a matter of Being-in-the-world; and...it is also the focus of Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect-perception.

But these remarks of Mulhall's may yet not seem enough. A powerful form of the objection, to which they are perhaps not adequate, is to be found in Brudney's (1998) scrupulous and powerful book. In a nutshell, Brudney objects that Marx does not in fact allow himself the resources to mount a critique of capitalism. For he, perhaps unlike Wittgenstein, is determined to avoid the slightest suggestion of 'idea-ism' (idealism). In his express rejection of the Young Hegelians, Marx is determined to avoid the kind of language Mulhall sometimes uses (e.g. 'the field of expression of a soul'), and the kind of language I have sometimes resorted to above—viz. talk of what is *wrong*, or of *changing one's point of view* so as to see something important (about 'capitalism').

Marx, Brudney argues, is committed, unlike the Young Hegelians, to thinking that it will be very difficult for most people to become convinced by his criticisms of capitalism and by his positive claims for the alternative (communism, etc.). For the illusions that he aims to expose are deep and intractable, and capitalism systematically works to entrench and perpetuate them. Feuerbach thought it would be easy for his readers to recognise the truth of his ‘therapeutic translation’ of religion into humanism; Marx simply cannot hope for the same, and cannot hope (on pain of abandoning materialism) for the problem to be solved by ‘idealist’ changes of mind or of vision alone. This is principally, Brudney argues (and this is very much the central critical argument of his book), because *according to Marx himself*, systematic social factors, effects of capitalism, tend to make the claims that Marx wishes to make (about what kind of beings we are, about what kinds of society should succeed capitalistic society) arbitrary or even untenable. To take a central example: labour is multiply and deeply alienated under capitalism; but, if Marx is right about the degree of severity of that alienation, and about fetishism, then it will not be rationally possible for labourers to escape that alienation. They will quite rationally experience their labour as meaningless or worse, they will quite rationally take their co-workers to be competitors and nothing more, and so on.

We can distinguish between two ‘moments’ in the ‘problem of justification’, two questions which Brudney does not distinguish clearly:

- 1 How can *Marx himself come* to take up the point of view (critical, and, in my sense, ‘therapeutic’) that he does on capitalism, and the point of view (‘humanistic’, ‘communistic’) that he urges to succeed it?
- 2 How can Marx hope to persuade *the mass of labourers* of that point of view?

An at least partial answer to question (1), an answer both ‘flat’ and deflationary, suggests itself, I think, once one has separated (1) from (2): ‘never mind’ how; Marx *succeeded* (at least partially) in taking up such a point of view. Marx *has* a hope, *has* an outline future in mind. If there are theoretical arguments that he cannot have done so, then so much the worse for those arguments. The illusions that Marxian thought aims to expose cannot be entire, or entirely ‘objective’ (contrast Brudney, 1998:199 ff.), for otherwise *Marx could not even have written what he wrote*.

I believe that this also suggests at least part of an adequate answer to question (2). Ordinary labourers can succeed in overcoming alienation, in envisaging the outlines of a communistic future, by the numerous motley of means that Marx himself probably employed. Through, for example, the experience of mistreatment or degradation at work and naturally having or experimenting with certain manners of (individual or interpersonal) response to that mistreatment; through episodes of thinking and reading about society and philosophy, etc., which are not merely theoretical; and, perhaps most crucially, through actual experiences of solidarity with other people, especially with other workers, etc., in trade unions, in revolutionary organisations, and so on.

Brudney (1998:254–60) canvasses especially the last possibility. He (1998:259) concludes that it cannot work unless some of Marx's 1844 claims about workers' alienation are qualified: 'In particular, workers must be assumed now not to be especially alienated from one another.' I think that this should be expressed, rather, as follows: there would indeed be little hope for Marxism, if workers were '*entirely*' alienated from one another. If they could not see their own labour as ever having any meaning *at all*; if they did not ever experience *any* mutuality with one another; etc. But why should one suppose *that* to be the case (except perhaps in very rare, particular instances)? And can any passages be found in Marx's corpus which support that extreme interpretation of his work? In fact, bearing in mind the clearly 'Wittgensteinian' moments in the early Marx with which this paper opened, one can perhaps go further: how could there be any such thing as a total occlusion of, for example, non-manipulative human interaction, which would mean the total obliteration of human community? How could this be anything other than a fantasy?

To some extent, Brudney has made a classic intellectual's mistake. He has generated a problem that *in the strong form he raises it* has no reality in the actual world. Having generated the problem, he looks to mainstream philosophy to resolve it (e.g. by suggesting that Marxism should take up mainstream moral and political philosophy more than it has done, that a more or less conventional argumentational philosophical set of ideas offers the only hope of convincing people to change their minds and lives). But this backslides from a key recognition that makes his book otherwise far superior to most treatments of Feuerbach and Marx: his recognition that 'as with Feuerbach...it obscures the thrust of Marx's project to see him as engaged in any significant way in the usual kind of philosophical argument' (*ibid.*: 224). Indeed, I have likened what is fundamental (and largely unrecognised) in Marx (as in Feuerbach before him) instead to the highly non-standard version of philosophising (not of 'philosophical argument') which one finds in Wittgenstein, with its 'therapeutic' orientation, an orientation fundamentally bound up with re-grounding us in the concretion of our actual lives and with (*actually, practically*) laying to rest the metaphysics that distorts those lives.

So we can agree with Brudney that one cannot at present take up 'the standpoint of Communism'.¹⁷ In fact, I would go further than Brudney on this score. I have suggested that it is by and large a good thing, on philosophical grounds, that Marx is decidedly wary—like Hegel at his best (i.e. when Hegel is being, like Kuhn, properly un-Whiggish and un-prognosticator, when he is taking seriously the placement in the present of any philosopher), like Nietzsche except at his worst (i.e. when Nietzsche occasionally slips into the painting of a definite picture of how the future would be if his philosophy were to triumph), and like Wittgenstein throughout—of attempting to write down what will be born out of a partly unimaginable 'revolutionary transformation' of contemporary society. One *can nevertheless* take up something like what Kitching (1994) calls a 'Marxist point-of-view': that is, an intellectual and activist point of view on life and society; in particular, an opinion (which must not be a mere free-floating opinion) on some desirable directions of change for that society.

Thus there is no overwhelming reason to think that Marx's early work leaves him peculiarly vulnerable to a 'problem of justification' of his critique of capitalism, either for himself, or *vis-à-vis* others who might read his work (or who, out of whatever life experiences, act in the kind of fashion that, as it happens, Marx recommends). If one is impressed with the early Marx, one need not fall back into 'idea-ism' to stay so impressed. Arguments supposing otherwise, such as Brudney's, have not left enough room for Marx to be *different* from the tradition he inherited, or the traditions that have followed him; enough room for him to have a way of making something happen which does not fit into the established categories of politics, morality, philosophy. This, regrettably, is the usual reaction of commentary to greatness: attempted domestication.

To answer then the hard question posed in this section: I believe that Marx's approach, like Wittgenstein's, has to be seen as essentially practical, getting one primarily not to think something one doesn't think, but to do something one doesn't want to do. And, more generally, that resources are available to us—within Marx, within our lives and experiences, our societies, within 'common sense'—both to avoid 'idea-ism' *and* to embrace a vision and practice of changing the world (including importantly, as Wittgenstein would emphasise, oneself). Of course, to say this still does not in the slightest imply that it will be *easy* to do so.

What kind of 'humanism' is there in Marx and Wittgenstein?

If we have a 'philosophical anthropology' in our two authors, it is not one which we need worry about if we are somewhat impressed by recent critiques both of the Enlightenment and of Romanticism and, more generally, of humanism insofar as humanism is Essentialistic. I am advocating Marx's *historically sensitive* 'philosophical anthropology' only insofar as it is compatible with Wittgenstein and the best of Heidegger. Only insofar, that is, as (1) it is not 'Scientific'¹⁸ or 'Realist', it does not pretend that we are doing something quasi-biological when we give an account of species-being, and nor does it pretend that we see things as they truly are in a straightforward empirical way when we see things as 'the proletariat' see things; and (2) it is truly open to the openness and open-endedness of 'human nature'—it is in effect saying, among other things, something like that it is humanity's nature not to have a fixed nature, an essence. (Here is where Marx's emphasis on history can be a particularly valuable supplement to Wittgenstein.)

Wittgenstein has been called by Jerry Katz (1990) a 'deflationary naturalist'—the label seems to me apt. This is a *normative* naturalism, a naturalism only in being opposed to supernaturalism, not in being 'Scientific'. Wittgenstein regards humans as animals, but as cultural, speaking and doing animals. Again, I think that the key features of Marx, especially 'the early Marx', can be seen as quite compatible with this 'picture', with these purpose-relative and historically contextualised grammatical remarks. As Marx

(1963:157) says: '[S]ociety is the accomplished union of man with nature...the realised naturalism of man and the realised humanism of nature.'

We are now perhaps in a position fully to appreciate another of the great Wittgensteinian moments in *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels, 1976:446):

One of the most difficult tasks confronting philosophers is to descend from the world of thought to the actual world. Language is the immediate actuality of thought. Just as philosophers have given thought an independent existence, so they were bound to make language into an independent realm. This is the secret of philosophical language, in which thoughts in the form of words have their own content. The problem of descending from the world of thoughts to the actual world is turned into the problem of descending from language to life.

This passage can, I think, be read as a kind of prophetic gloss on my work in this essay and even on Wittgenstein's work in general. A key challenge, Marx writes here, is not to reify language. This is a task that Wittgenstein attends to endlessly; thus no one who thinks of 'language' as the subject-matter of philosophy is actually following Wittgenstein at all. And the whole passage asks us to perform the difficult task that Wittgenstein tries to perform and to encourage us to perform: the task of 'descending' to everyday life, to the world-as-we-live-and-speak-it. And the (difficult but not impossible) task of giving up, as so much dead metal (the allures of) gold, capital, metaphysics, and so on.

Does Marx's 'activism' clash with Wittgenstein's 'quietism'?

The above remarks perhaps raise again the spectre of a *conflict*, a deep and obvious conflict, between *Wittgenstein's claim* that '[Philosophy] leaves everything as it is' (*PI* §124) and *Marx's claim* that whereas philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it. Are these not two radically different ways of understanding what the appeal to 'the everyday' or to 'actual life' amounts to? Not necessarily. The reading of *PI* §124 as though Wittgenstein is a quietist has been under threat for some time now. Ernest Gellner's gross misreadings are not taken very seriously any more. We have even seen, by contrast, uses of Wittgenstein by neo-Pragmatists (e.g. Rorty, also Stanley Fish) which have pushed things in completely the other direction, and claimed that Wittgenstein may be of use to radical or reformist political causes. My own view is that it is vital to see that Wittgenstein didn't think that philosophy could be seriously engaged in anything other than processes of description and understanding—as opposed to *explanation and interpretation*. That is the contrast class intended.

But we need not assume that, for Marx, everyone who is not thoroughly philosophically ('Scientifically') 'informed' will be a victim of some false-consciousness. We are held captive by something much bigger than (academic) philosophy, and will surely need much more than philosophy to

liberate us. *A picture holds us captive, because our economy repeats it to us over and over—* but the delusive picture is also, for now, in a way, quite *true*:

To [producers] the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but *as what they really are*, material relations between persons and social relations between things.

(Marx, 1978a:321, my italics)

Further, the picture is of course *perfectly* useful and fine for the purposes of much day-to-day life (often including, incidentally, that of economists and of ‘Policy Studies’). And again, no merely mental change, no mouthing of the words of an explanation of it, will change this at all. No Rortian change of words or Young Hegelian change of mind is going to be *sufficient* here. Nevertheless, I have argued, against Brudney, that Marx is not inadvertently committed to the claim that *nothing* will be sufficient here. A change in ‘form of life’, based probably in one’s experience among those one loves, in radical political and trade union organisations, in team-work, perhaps in (psycho-) therapeutic settings, and so on and so on, is what is called for.

Explanation, for Marx, is of no real moment. One needs people, rather, to be no longer metaphysically misled in their understandings of their social relations. If Marxism is not a practical political project, involving a change of (way of) life, then it is nothing (Kitching, 1994:35, 228–31). If it is a ‘scientific system’, then it is useless, nothing. I am suggesting then that Marx could have endorsed *PI* § 124, and indeed substantially more of Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy, of his ‘methods’. For Marx too does not, at his non-scientistic best, want to change things through explanation, but through description interlinked with action. Appearances to the contrary, much of Wittgenstein’s anti-scientism is shared by Marx! This in turn implies that Wittgenstein could have endorsed Thesis 11 of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, and indeed substantial amounts of the recommendations of paths towards ‘utopia’—of the descriptions—that we find elsewhere in Marx! So we see that Marx was not the explainer people have taken him to be; and that Wittgenstein was not against changing things (even by means of philosophy!). There really is far less of a gap between them on this score than has almost invariably been supposed.

An objection that I have tried to finesse must be canvassed here: it may be all very well to open-endedly grow philosophy and its heirs into the future, and not to attempt to envisage how philosophy might be ‘closed’, not to attempt to say what comes next in philosophy. But how can it be OK to take such a ‘laissez-faire’ attitude to the organisation of society itself, to fundamental ethical and political questions, where the stakes are necessarily much higher than they are in the rarefied air of philosophy? For example, didn’t the taking of such an attitude result in disastrous problems when the Leninists seized power in (what became) the USSR, and were suddenly confronted with the task of running a country, a task for which Marxism had left them unprepared? In response, three things:

- 1 This is not an essay in practical politics. It is a consideration of the philosophies of praxis of Marx and Wittgenstein. It aims to show their mutual informativeness, and indeed to stress their inter-involvement with non-philosophical (political, etc.) action (in other words: to suggest that ‘philosophy’ here is in some important respects *not* rarefied at all); but it does not aim to lay out a political programme.
- 2 That said, I concede that there is a need for the kind of honest confrontation with the legacy of Marxism practised for example by Kitching and Steven Lukes, and that this need involves the allowance that both local ‘social experimentation’ (e.g. the attempt to live a different way of life in co-operatives)¹⁹ and *some* elements of Utopian thinking should be important parts of any serious contemporary ‘Marxian’ approach to politics. I think there is a need not only for the kind of imagination of Marx in relation to the other great (‘anti-philosophical’) philosophers of the recent Western canon that I have tried to practise in this essay, but for social and political imagination in literature and in planning and in practice.
- 3 Perhaps most importantly, recall that I have suggested that we should not expect that the kinds of changes in self and other desired by (e.g.) Marx and Wittgenstein will come anytime soon. Probably, Lenin and others have tried to short-circuit things. The aims that Marx and Wittgenstein wished to achieve are extremely difficult, involve a constant set of tendencies to backslide and to repeat mistakes, and will only be realised, if and when they are realised, by a very broad mass of persons. You cannot, I very strongly suspect, have a vanguardist route to extirpating philosophical illusion. Nor, I very strongly suspect, can you overcome with any rapidity the temptations towards inegalitarianism and fetishism which are deeply entrenched in our personas and our institutions.

We will make our own mutual future, albeit not under conditions of our own choosing. There remains a valid point in querying the attempt to plan and imagine it in too much detail—which, after all, is a main accusation made against ‘historicists’ (that they think they can theoretically or scientifically prophesy human destiny). There is a tightrope to walk here; if I haven’t completely fallen off it, that is good enough for me.

Conclusion: *do* Wittgenstein and Marx refute themselves?

I am not saying that Wittgenstein *entails* Marx, nor vice versa. But I think they can fit. Suggestions to the contrary are, I think, based on erroneous philosophical assumptions or political prejudices. Wittgenstein opposes Marx when Marx would treat a positive Scientific or ‘philosophical’ explanation of society (e.g.) as available. (I leave it to others to judge how much of Marx remains intact after the ‘charitable’ quasi-therapeutic anti-scientistic revisionism that I have attempted here.) But the point may indeed very much be still *to change the world*. A key question is likely to be whether philosophising

is well suited to making that happen. Or would just getting out there doing good deeds or getting active not be likely to succeed?²⁰ Possibly; but the thought behind such a question risks precisely the kind of naive opposition of 'theory' to practice that it was a prime aim of Marx and Wittgenstein, in their rather different ways, to undermine.

Such questions, of course, become somewhat transfigured if we recognise that there could be changes in the nature of our life which would render certain philosophical temptations and confusions otiose and powerless. And this keys in again with my remarks above about Wittgenstein's and Marx's (importantly and properly limited) imaginings of the way to 'utopia'. We can continually try to end philosophy through philosophy, but it will not really be ended until certain things happen in our lives, and in our societies, which are *not* conditioned only by philosophy. Thus the only 'real discovery' (*PI* §133) would (at best) be an experimental discovery whose character we cannot identify, in the future of human history.

If we leave aside the distortions that tend to be produced by the rhetoric of 'Scientific Socialism', we can see that and how Marxian thought on the nature of society, human beings and classes need not actually be incompatible with Wittgensteinian thought. There is a fairly clear sense in which one can say that people are victims of 'false consciousness', of 'ideology', of 'alienation'; but this sense is not in terms (for example) of some kind of cognitive or Freudian model of 'the unconscious'. People's 'false consciousness', which they have been involved in constructing, is continually available for deconstruction by them, by means of their own resources. Winch (1990) makes central for us the respects in which it is handy to understand humans as 'rule followers', and as norm-ridden doers, *not* as automata, *nor* as intellectuals. Winch, just as much as Marx, is committed to there being no caesura between 'theory' (the very word is unhelpful here) and practice. Their descriptions are intended to orient and 'persuade' us, to motivate action. This, again, is why we need not agree that either Marxists or Wittgensteinians must backslide into 'Idealism'.

Wittgenstein and Marx provided tools for living life differently. Metaphysics, class, 'commodity fetishism' are, unfortunately, things that we do. But not because of some innate and unalterable feature of 'human nature'. We do them less to the extent that we practise the thinking and living that Wittgenstein and Marx exemplify.

The quasi-reification of 'the everyday' and 'the philosophical' (or 'metaphysical') as categories are signs and symptoms of a society where there is still a need for some philosophising. They are both disease and cure. The reifying of the everyday is what people actually do, but to recognise this (albeit by means of talking in quasi-reificatory ways of 'the everyday') points the way towards an eventual partially imaginable abolition of philosophical categories, and thereby to a fuller and easier recognition, in practice, of the diversity of actual uses of language. The 'use-theory' of language, like the 'picture theory', and somewhat like the 'labour theory of value', is at very best a crude early way-station on the road to that change.

Understanding the mutual illumination we can attain between Wittgenstein's 'critique' of 'philosophical language' and the Marxian critique of ideology, alienation, commodity fetishism and class division and philosophical language can, I hope to have shown, bring all this rather starkly and strikingly into relief. If one wants to know where in Wittgenstein one finds notions which directly correspond to the Marxian notions of 'alienation' or 'estrangement', one need look no further than the notion of 'philosophical language'.

In sum, then, I have been thinking through the related status of concepts such as 'labourer' and 'capitalist' in Marxian thought, to the concepts 'everyday' and 'philosophical' in Wittgensteinian thought. If you take nothing else away from this paper, take at least that analogy.

Right now, 'capital' is part of the system we live, and the system cannot be wished away. While, at the same time, 'capital' is in another sense 'simply' a 'socially constructed' illusion. The same is true of philosophy. This is why no quick excision or abandonment is possible. Because we are *living* this illusion, and because while we live it it is not only an illusion, it is in us, and all around us. We constantly repeat it (to ourselves).

Wittgenstein's philosophy might seem more 'individualistic' than Marx's; the metaphor of 'therapy' might seem to confirm this. In my view, it is important to understand that Wittgenstein does not seek for individuals only to work upon themselves in a narrow and introspective way; he hopes rather (though he does not expect) that 'the darkness of this time' (*PI*: x) might be altered by people taking up his work and using it to think (and act) with. He hopes that it may make his readers less likely to engage in dangerous forms of thinking (e.g. over-generalisation, scientism, the myriad forms of linguistic mesmerisation). Putting it more boldly: he thinks, perhaps after Spengler and Freud, that *our culture*, in the deepest sense of those words, needs therapy, not just the individuals in it. It is for that reason that he can profitably be compared with Marx. For in Marx's case, it is obvious that, if 'therapy' be required, it is society and not its discontents (e.g. its proletarians) that requires it. But events since Marx's time indicate that such 'therapy' is as likely to come, if at all (Wittgenstein's pessimism), more slowly than Marx's optimism would suggest.

The change in our lives (including in our minds) necessary to overcome capital is at least as likely to be interminable as to be terminable. To act so as to become who we are may require revolutionary changes longer, subtler than those accomplishable by any merely political revolution.

Thus one lesson that those who want to think of themselves as followers of Marx may draw from my discussion is this: that Marxists should not be *too* dismayed that the prospects for realising Marx's goals seem very remote, at the start of the twenty-first century. For one should, I think, *expect* that some of the 'grander' and less well-defined changes which Marx wished to see will take a *very* long time to accomplish, if they are to be accomplished at all. Over a long time-scale, over generations, it remains possible that, through praxis, a very large number of people will come to find many of Marx's ideas compelling, and, until they do, those ideas are in any case very unlikely to be successfully realisable.

Here, I am strongly in agreement with Kitching's guiding thought that an 'undemocratic socialism' is a truly hopeless dream (nightmare). Communism may prove possible, in the kind of way that Wittgenstein's 'philosophy' may prove realisable—due to cultural changes that no one has full control over or can even clearly envisage, and due to the very gradual chipping away at and near-endless returning to the obstacles and problems (above all perhaps *of the will*) that could otherwise stand in the way of our making any such changes.

Notes

- 1 This paper has been excerpted, with the aid of the editors, from a longer manuscript. That manuscript includes some passages from a paper published in the on-line journal *Essays in Philosophy* 1, 2 (January 2000; www.humboldt.edu/~essays/), under the title, 'Wittgenstein and Marx on ordinary and philosophical language'; those passages which also occur in the present paper are reproduced here with permission. For help with *this* paper, thanks to the participants in the 'International Marx and Wittgenstein Symposium', Trinity College Cambridge, and to audiences at the Manchester Ethnography Group (M.M.U.) and the Kaplan Humanities Centre (NorthWestern University). Thanks also to Linda Zerilli, Terry Pinkard, Wes Sharrock, Wil Coleman, Mozaffar Qizilbash, Andreas Dorschel, Tim Dant, Angus Ross, Daniel Brudney, David Andrews, John Coates, Steven Lukes, Nigel Pleasants, Gavin Kitching, Emma Willmer and Luke Mulhall. Thanks to the AHRB for funding support which enabled this paper to be written.

I wish to dedicate this paper to Tess Read, whose criticisms have I hope sharpened it—and whose sibling love and support over many years have helped make this paper and my work in general possible. (Is any good serious change in anything possible without love?)

- 2 Hereafter abbreviated as 'PP'.
- 3 The nested quotation is from Marx and Engels (1976:447); cf. 'We have seen that the whole problem of the transition from thought to reality, hence from language to life, exists only in philosophical illusion, i.e., it is justified only for philosophical consciousness' (*ibid.*: 449).
- 4 For argument, see Read (1995).
- 5 Though here we should note the absence of technical terms from philosophy, as understood by Wittgenstein—this is very important. For further discussion both of this point and of the 'functionality' of (everyday) language, see Read and Guetti (1999).
- 6

When philosophers use a word...and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language, which is its original home? // What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical, to their everyday use.

(Wittgenstein, 1968: §116)

(I have emended the translation. The Anscombe translation misleadingly over-inclines one towards a reading according to which words really do have metaphysical uses, and according to which we could speak intelligibly of 'the metaphysical language-game'. Wittgenstein speaks not of language-games where words have their original homes, but simply of *the* language—'*der Sprache*'—language in use, which is the home of words. As opposed to words being exhibited—as they are in (too) much philosophy, and also (to pleasanter effect) in, for example, much poetry.)

7 See Marx's (1971:75) 'The Civil War in France':

The Commune was...to serve as a lever for uprooting the economical foundations upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore of class-rule. With labour emancipated, every man becomes a working man, and productive labour ceases to be a class attribute.

- 8 Capitalists too are workers, albeit often to a very minimal degree of actual labour-time/effort. Thus the category of 'worker' is one whose ('bloated', oppositionless) use can only be justified roughly on what Wittgensteinians think of as transitional and *therapeutic* grounds, as will be discussed further below (see also note 11).
- 9 I believe Marx to be too optimistic about the extent of the beneficial and transformative consequences of the genuine transcendence of class struggle (alone). *Some* questions of (e.g.) distributive justice (e.g. consider the disabled) and interpersonal morality (e.g. consider the experience of shame, and different possible responses to persons feeling ashamed) would simply remain, under communism.
- 10 Of course, we are glossing over some difficult greyer cases here—e.g. those of the very young, the very old, or of paralysed persons, who may be *incapable* of virtually any labour whatsoever.
- 11 But this does not vitiate our thinking through the concept of 'parasitism' in this essay. It is, I think, a stage one *needs* to go through in one's understanding of society or of philosophy. Only at a deeper level of understanding is one really *able* ingenuously to give up thinking of capitalists or metaphysicians as parasites/vampires on the economy or the life of the mind. It is not a matter simply (as Rorty might suggest) of voluntaristically *choosing* to live without capitalism or metaphysics. A massive change of view and of mode of life is essential.
- 12 Marx is *reminding* us that the monetary value of something cannot be deduced from its appearance—and nor even from its practical usefulness to us. And by taking 'simple' examples as his starting point, he may be following a procedure along the lines of the following: 'When we look at...simple forms of language the mental mist which seems to enshroud our ordinary use of language disappears' (Wittgenstein, 1975:17).
- 13 I am here taking seriously the unpopular notion, insisted upon by Socrates and Wittgenstein, as by Zen, that philosophy, etc., is not happily understandable as productive of knowledge in the ordinary sense at all. Did we know already what Wittgenstein (and Socrates, and, I am claiming, Marx) tell us before they told us? *In our practice, we did*—only in our wrongly oriented reflections on it did we sometimes find ourselves in deep confusion about it.
- 14 Perhaps regrettably (because somewhat misleadingly), so-called by Marx himself (whereas one should bear in mind that Wittgenstein himself never even proposed picture theories or use theories of meaning; these are entirely impositions on him by his alleged 'followers').
- 15 Here is Derrida (1988:90, cf. 77), putting much the same point:

It should also be remembered that the parasite is by definition never simply external, never simply something that can be excluded from or kept outside of the body 'proper'... Parasitism takes place when the parasite...comes to live off the life of the body in which it resides—and when, reciprocally, the host incorporates the parasite to an extent, willy nilly offering it hospitality: providing it with a place.

- 16 Let us be human, as Wittgenstein once remarked. Let us also be clear: this humanism is, at its best, not a limited Essentialist picture of what is human. It is

- rather an expansive, non-constrained vision, akin to that that we find in 'Pragmatist-Wittgensteinianism' (cf. the Pragmatist emphasis on *growth*).
- 17 See Brudney's (1998:200 ff.) exemplary discussion of why not.
- 18 Perhaps now it can be seen that I am suggesting that Marxism need be neither 'utopian' nor 'Scientific', in terms of Engels's categories. It can be, rather, *action* (words and deeds) both self-realising and 'ultimately' self-questioning (i.e. self-nihilating). Perhaps this could even be a 'Wittgensteinian' socialism.
- 19 And on this point, there is, of course, *something* right about Popper's (1960, 1962) championing of piecemeal reform, and trial and error, etc.
- 20 This connects again with a crucial comment of Wittgenstein's (1980:61), one which (again) I think Marx himself would be happy with, but which most 'Marxists' could not honestly endorse: 'I am by no means sure that I should prefer a continuation of my work by others to a change in the way people live which would make all these questions superfluous.' My own belief is that one must try—not only in the small way involved in purely academic work—to change oneself and one's world, if one wants to be taken seriously as a Marxian or a Wittgensteinian. One is not, I believe, really following *either* of those thinkers if one's 'following' is confined to the content of one's academic philosophical work. I, for example, am currently active in Trident Ploughshares, the Green Party and the Quakers.

References

- Brudney, D. (1998) *Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1988) *Limited Inc.*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- (1994) *Specters of Marx*, New York: Routledge.
- Katz, J. (1990) *The Metaphysics of Meaning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kitching, G. (1988) *Karl Marx and the Philosophy of Praxis*, London: Routledge.
- (1994) *Marxism and Science: Analysis of an Obsession*, Philadelphia: Penn State Press.
- Lefebvre, H. (1958) *The Critique of Everyday Life*, vol. 1, London: Verso.
- Marx, K. (1963) *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, edited by T. Bottomore, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- (1971) *On the Paris Commune*, Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- (1978a) *Capital*, in R. Tucker (ed.) *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition, New York: Norton.
- (1978b) *Grundrisse*, in R. Tucker (ed.) *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition, New York: Norton.
- Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1976) *The German Ideology*, in *The Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 5, London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Mulhall, S. (1998) 'Species-being, teleology and individuality, parts I, II and III', *Angelaki* 3(1) (April), 9–28, 49–58, 89–102.
- Popper, K. (1960) *The Poverty of Historicism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- (1962) *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Read, R. (1995) "'The real philosophical discovery'", *Philosophical Investigations*, 18(4), 362–9.
- Read, R. and Guetti, J. (1999) 'Meaningful consequences', *Philosophical Forum* XXX(4), 289–315.
- Redner, H. (1986) *The Ends of Philosophy*, London: Croom Helm.
- Stone, M. (2000) 'Wittgenstein on deconstruction', in A. Crary and R. Read (eds) *The New Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge.

- Tucker, R. (ed.) (1978) *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition, New York: Norton.
- Winch, P. (1990) *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, 2nd edition, London: Routledge.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1968) *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1975) *The Blue and Brown Books*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1979) *On Certainty*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1980) *Culture and Value*, Oxford: Blackwell.

14 Beyond Marx and Wittgenstein

(A confession of a Wittgensteinian Marxist turned Taoist)

K. T. Fann

Introduction

As Nietzsche observed, philosophy is always autobiography. That is especially true of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Wittgenstein himself said that nearly all his writings were private conversations with himself. I have been having some serious private conversations with myself since my retirement (from the Professorship in Philosophy at York University, Canada), trying to come to terms with the three thinkers who influenced me most: Wittgenstein, Marx and Lao-tzu. The symposium which gave rise to this book provided an opportunity for me to put my random thoughts together. I thank the organisers and apologise for my chapter's non-academic nature (and the lack of footnoting, since I am writing in a hurry mostly from memory).

I was born in 1937, the year the Second World War broke out in Asia. I grew up in Taiwan under Japanese occupation during the war. Near the end of the war we were under daily B-29 bombardment and I still remember the Japanese emperor's high-pitched voice announcing unconditional surrender over the radio. After the war, we lived through the Civil War in China until the remnants of the defeated army of Chiang Kai-Shek settled down and ruled Taiwan under martial law for the next four decades. Growing up in such turbulent times my chief concern was political. Which side should I be on in the big struggles between the communists and the nationalists in China and the communist camp and the capitalist camp in the world? I was clearly on the side of the underdogs, the oppressed, and hence my sympathies were with the communists. At that time, and for the next few decades, that sympathy could easily have landed me in death or in prison in Taiwan. I knew I had to leave.

My political orientation was clear. I knew which side I was on. But, underneath, deeper down, I had a nagging philosophical problem: the problem of the meaning of life. I felt I needed to know what life is all about; I needed to have a clear picture of the world and my place in it so that I could act and live accordingly. I first looked for that picture in religion. When I went to the US, I attended a small Mennonite college founded by a pacifist Christian sect. I was constantly arguing with my fellow students about two issues: the existence of God and whether violence was ever justified. I could never understand the concept of God, least of all the notion of God as the creator of the world. I could not understand why the world needed a

creator, and if a creator was needed, why he himself need not be created. As to the issue of violence, no amount of Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr could convince me that wars of liberation and revolutionary violence were not necessary. Later on I discovered a perfect religion, if religion was what I really needed. The Bahai faith presented me with a more tolerant and up-to-date picture that I found appealing. It claims that God sent different prophets to different places at different times to enlighten different peoples. Thus Confucius, Buddha, Christ, Mohammed, etc., were all God's messengers. Now comes the messenger Bahhaulla, who incorporated all the wisdom from previous messengers of God to unite all the peoples in the world to form a world family in which colonialism, imperialism, racism and sexism, etc., would be done away with under the auspices of a world government. It all sounded great to me, and its followers were the nicest people I'd ever met. However, to join the faith you had to believe in God, something I didn't know how to do.

Finally I realised that religion wasn't what I needed. I was too rational for any faith. What I needed was a rationally-arrived-at true picture of the world, which I took to be the task of philosophy. My undergraduate major was mathematics, not because I had any love or talent for it but because my command of English was so poor that the only subject I could study and pass was mathematics. As my English improved, I started to take philosophy courses. The first thing I noticed about philosophical books was that they contained a lot of words I couldn't even find in dictionaries. When I had difficulty understanding a philosophical text I naturally blamed my command of English. But when I tried hard to get into the swing of those words I seemed to understand them and each philosopher seemed to be able to lead me by the nose, via their rational arguments, to a system of conclusions which seemed to be perfectly reasonable. However, to each question there were many different, and some quite contradictory, answers. How could that be? I was more confused than ever. Thus when I encountered Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* in 1963, it came to me at the exact moment when I needed it. It came like a bolt of lightning striking down all my philosophical problems.

Wittgenstein

A philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about.'

The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense.

Philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*.

What we are destroying is nothing but castles in the air and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand.

What is your aim in philosophy?—To shew the fly out of the fly-bottle.

The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.

The clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But that simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear.
(Wittgenstein, 1968:§§123, 119, 38, 118 [amended translation], 309, 133, 133)

These were liberating words, coming from a famous logician and philosopher! Like the proverbial child who yelled, ‘The king is naked!’ when everyone thought the king was wearing the finest clothes and only stupidity prevented them from seeing it, Wittgenstein yelled: ‘Philosophy is empty! Philosophical problems are nonsense!’ when everyone had previously thought that philosophy possessed the most rarefied truth and only their stupidity prevented them from understanding it.

Yet Wittgenstein himself never managed to stop doing philosophy and he double-talked about ‘nonsense’ (‘don’t *for heaven’s sake*, be afraid of talking nonsense! But you must pay attention to your nonsense’; Wittgenstein, 1980:56). I accepted his friend Frank Ramsey’s advice: if ‘philosophy is nonsense’, ‘we must then take seriously that it is nonsense, and not pretend, as Wittgenstein does, that it is important nonsense!’ (quoted in Fann, 1969:35).

The sense of complete clarity from philosophical problems that I experienced must be quite similar to what Buddhists and Taoists experience when they achieve ‘enlightenment’. When I read philosophical books or listened to philosophical talks and couldn’t understand them, I no longer thought it was due to my stupidity or lack of English skills. On the contrary, I was confident that they did not know what they were talking about. They were talking nonsense. I further proved this to my own satisfaction with two ploys. First, I would master a set of the most abstract philosophical jargons about Being and Nothingness and talk to philosophers for hours with a straight face at parties or meetings, and they would consider me profound when I knew I was talking nonsense!

Second, whenever I saw an abstract philosophical discussion going at full steam, I would politely ask, ‘Would you please give an example to illustrate what you are talking about?’ and that would inevitably stop the discussion cold. Anyone who understands Wittgenstein would be well armed and no longer fooled by big words, logical tricks or pseudo-scientific theories. Unlike science, where an absence of a few years would mean serious falling behind, I have no fear that my absence from the philosophical scene during the last thirty years might result in missing something earth-shaking. As Wittgenstein (1980:15) remarked, ‘I read: “...philosophers are no nearer to the meaning of ‘Reality’ than Plato got...” What a strange situation. How extraordinary that Plato could have got even so far as he did!’ In fact, whenever I read Laotzu I am amazed that he got so far 2,500 years ago!

I believed then and still believe now that the most important aspect of Wittgenstein’s thought is his revolutionary conception of philosophy (Fann, 1969). Whenever a non-philosopher asked me, ‘What is Wittgenstein’s philosophy?’ I would say. ‘That’s a difficult question because Wittgenstein did not have a philosophy if you mean by it a systematic answer to some fundamental questions such as: what is the ultimate nature of the world? What’s truth? What is knowledge? What is

Beauty and Virtue? What is the meaning of life? etc. What he provided was a systematic questioning of the questions themselves and he aimed at dissolving them.' For him, philosophy is a tool which is useful only against philosophers and the philosophers in us. Wittgenstein was a philosopher's philosopher who was trying to get them to quit philosophy. As he put it, the aim of philosophy is to show the fly out of the fly-bottle. If you are not a fly in the bottle his instructions are of no use. Thus, to non-philosophers, or people who are not tormented by philosophical problems, he is useless. As a common saying goes: if your joints don't hurt, don't see a chiropractor! On the other hand there are plenty of flies who are happy to be in the fly-bottle and for them he is quite useless too. He was quite realistic about the usefulness of his own work. As he (1980:62) put it jokingly: 'My reflections are like the notices on the ticket offices at English railway stations [during and immediately after the Second World War]: "Is your journey really necessary?" As though someone who read this would think: "On second thoughts *no!*"' Elsewhere he remarked,

The sickness of a time is cured by an alteration in the mode of life of human beings, and the sickness of philosophical problems could be cured only through a changed mode of thought and of life, not through a medicine invented by an individual.

(Wittgenstein, 1978:57)

The medicine invented by him cured only a few people who wanted to be cured. He was always advising his students to quit philosophy and do something useful. Those who really understood him followed his advice, but most didn't. His fear that the seeds he was sowing would most likely give rise to a whole mass of jargon has become a reality. Witness the Wittgenstein industry mushrooming during the last few decades. There is a virtual cult of personality surrounding Wittgenstein. His every remark in diaries, students' notes and conversations are published and commented on over and over again like biblical pronouncements.

My study of Wittgenstein and Laotzu convinced me that a great thinker has a clear and simple message that he tries to express in different ways. Thus if you grasped Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy in the First Part of the *Investigations*, the rest of his writings become repetitious and boring.

Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy came to me at the right moment and I learned what could be got from him. I needed to move on to do other things. However, there are questions about Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy that might be raised here for consideration. His conception of philosophy was based on his conception of language. Although he regarded himself to be dealing with human language in general, he was in fact dealing with a specific form only, that of European alphabetical language. But there are other cultures (for example Chinese), and in fact the majority of cultures in the world do not employ the alphabet, but rather characters or ideograms that were originally pictures or signs. The ideogram gives one more information at a glance, and in less space and time, than is given by the linear, alphabetic

form of writing that must also be pronounced to be understandable. As an often quoted Chinese proverb says, 'One picture is worth a thousand words', for it is much easier to show than to say. What this fact will do to Wittgenstein's distinction between showing and saying in the *Tractatus*, I am not sure. But the effect of his Eurocentrism on the nature of philosophical problems is more interesting. He says (1980:15):

People say again and again that philosophy doesn't really progress, that we are still occupied with the same philosophical problems as were the Greeks. But the people who say this don't understand why it has to be so. It is because our language has remained the same and keeps seducing us into asking the same questions. As long as there continues to be a verb 'to be' that looks as if it functions in the same way as 'to eat' and 'to drink'... people will keep stumbling over the same puzzling difficulties and find themselves staring at something which no explanation seems capable of clearing up.

Chinese does not have the verb 'to be'. What does this fact do to Wittgenstein's conception? Again, I am not sure but the matter certainly needs to be looked at.

The more serious issue that was of more concern to me was the deeper causes of philosophical questions. Behind a language is a form of life, as Wittgenstein well realised, but why did he stop at language and not look for the causes in the form of life? He seemed to be subconsciously aware of this when he said that philosophical questions arise when language goes on holiday or when the engine of language is idling. This metaphorical description is revealing, for language does not go on holiday, it is language users who go on holiday! What kind of language user? It is precisely the idle class who can afford to go on holidays and engage in a life of idle speculation. I was reading Ray Monk's biography of Russell and was amazed at how he and his friends were forever going on holiday! And at the same time he was forever feeling lonely and worrying about not being understood. Applying Marx's theory of alienation here, it seems more reasonable to say that philosophical questions arise when humans are alienated from nature, from others and from one's self. Some typical philosophical problems seem to arise from these. Thus, idealism and the supposed problem of the existence of the external world would seem to arise from the first alienation. Unless one is totally alienated from nature how can one ever think that the existence of the external world need proving? The problem of other minds arises from the second alienation. The mind/body problem and solipsism seems to be connected to alienation from the self. Of the three, I think alienation from nature is the most serious and fundamental one.

The Greeks made the first mistake when they defined humans as rational or thinking beings, as if there is a qualitative difference between humans and non-human animals in terms of their ability to think. Descartes pushed it to the extreme with his mind/body dualism: only humans have mind or soul; animals are

machines which do not feel or think. Only people who are alienated from nature—city dwellers, who have no close contact with animals—can come up with such a ridiculous theory. No one who lives close to nature would raise the question, ‘Do animals think?’ Of course they do. Just look and see! Does a hunter wonder if his prey thinks when he is trying to outsmart his prey? What is thinking? Thinking is making a decision based on available evidence. To be or not to be; to jump or not to jump; to go ahead or not; etc. That’s the question. As such it is an essential characteristic of all animals, and not just humans. Look at pigeons in the park. They come and land on the arms of people who have gained their confidence by coming to feed them day after day without molesting them. But they do not land on anyone else who happens to have food in their hands. If you gain their trust first and then try to catch them, they will never return to you again. They learn faster than a lot of humans!

Marx (and Marxism)

With philosophical questions out of my system I returned to my political concerns. Marx’s ringing battle cry: ‘Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways, the point however is to change it!’ became my motto. I studied Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky and Mao carefully. I also studied the anarchist critique of Marxism, especially that of Bakunin. I found in Marxism, first, a method of analysing the world which allowed me to gain a correct picture of the world. I agreed with its analysis of capitalism and imperialism. Second, Marxism provided a method to change this world through revolution. Third, Marxism provided a commitment to building an ideal world in which the free development of each would be the precondition for the free development of all, where the principle of society would be: ‘From each according to his ability; To each according to his needs.’ Not only did it seem to me a sound theory, but it also had the support of about half of humanity at that time. In the early 1960s the socialist camp, comprised of the two largest nations on earth, seemed to be quickly gaining the support of all revolutionary movements throughout the Third World and in the heartland of capitalism itself.

By 1960 I fully considered myself a Marxist-Leninist. But, as a foreign student living in America in the grip of McCarthyism at that time, my political sympathy with the communist camp, if known to the authorities, would have meant instant expulsion from the US. I studied Russian with the intention of going to the Soviet Union for further study and eventually going to China to serve the cause of socialism. For the next twenty-plus years I followed every victory and defeat of every revolutionary movement in Asia, Africa and Latin America. I supported the anti-Vietnam War movement and the Black Liberation movement in the US. My heroes were Mao, Che Guevara and Malcolm X. The assassination of Kennedy shocked me but did not touch me personally, but the assassination of Malcolm X, the murder of Che and the death of Mao touched me personally.

When the socialist camp began to split along the Sino-Soviet ideological divide, I followed their every argument and decided Mao was the true guardian of the revolutionary line. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution initiated by Mao in 1966 was further proof that Mao was a genuine defender of communism. I became a self-appointed propagandist for the Chinese brand of communism in the West. In 1972, at the later stage of the Cultural Revolution, I visited China for the first time. I travelled extensively and had long discussions with their leaders, including Chou En-Lai. I was immensely impressed by what I saw on the surface, an egalitarian society consciously building a new society totally different from capitalism. There were no commercials for goods or advertisements for commodities, only propaganda of ideas and ideals. For someone living in the bowels of capitalism and despising it, to visit revolutionary China during the Cultural Revolution was to witness one's dream being realised; it was an exhilarating experience that is hard to describe. I knew how John Reed felt when he visited Russia right after the October Revolution and declared, 'I have seen the future and it works!'

After the first visit I returned to China innumerable times, and as I gained a deeper understanding of China a nagging thought kept surfacing in my mind. Could I live with the total lack of the freedom of speech and thought to which I was so accustomed? I realised that in a revolutionary movement it's necessary to have a unity of thought and action. Maybe it was my bourgeois hang-up or philosophical elitism, but I felt I could not possibly submerge my individual opinion under the party line at all times. I remembered Wittgenstein's (1981:§455) remark: 'The philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas. That is what makes him into a philosopher.' I also remembered his advice to a student who thought he should join the Trotskyite Revolutionary Workers' Party. He said something to the effect that to be a party member you must follow the party line, but to be a philosopher you must be constantly ready to change your ideas.¹ I was too much of a philosopher in this sense to join even the community of my dream.

The dream, however, eventually turned into a nightmare. After the death of Mao, China quickly dismantled its socialist superstructure and started to restore capitalism. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the spectre unleashed by Marx, which had been supposedly haunting capitalism, vanished into the thin air. The great experiment accompanied by such sound and fury and promise ended in utter defeat. The failure of the Cultural Revolution and the collapse of the communist movement came as a real shock to me. It shattered the *raison d'être* of my adult life. But as a philosopher, you must have the ability to change your ideas and learn from facts.

Some of Wittgenstein's remarks which I did not appreciate while under the spell of Marxism now rang true. He said: 'Who knows the laws according to which society develops? I am quite sure they are a closed book even to the cleverest of men' (1980:60). (Laotzu said something similar.) 'You can't *build* clouds. And that's why the future you *dream* of never comes true' (1980:41). And in a letter to an ex-student he said: 'The thing now is to be in the world

in which you are, not to think or dream about the world you would like to live in' (quoted by Malcolm, in Rhees, 1984:xvii).

Marx and Wittgenstein?

During my Marxist years, I never felt any incompatibility between Marx and Wittgenstein. I regarded myself a Wittgensteinian Marxist: Wittgensteinian in philosophy, Marxist in social and political matters. I was alone in that strange intellectual mix, as most Wittgensteinians I knew were religious or conservative while most Marxists I knew sneered at Wittgenstein as a typical bourgeois philosopher. To convince some of my Marxist friends to pay more attention to Wittgenstein I tried to find similarities between them, and there are some important similarities. They shared the same pragmatic and social conception of language. Both proclaimed the end of philosophy. Both gave primacy to praxis in human activity. (Engels and Wittgenstein both quoted approvingly the phrase from Goethe's *Faust* 'Im Anfang war die Tat'.) And there seems to be a curious parallel between Wittgenstein's attack on private language and Marx's attack on private property, and between Marx's advocacy of public property and Wittgenstein's (1993:406) reminder that 'Words are public property.'

Were these and other similarities purely coincidental? Was Wittgenstein's attempt to settle in the Soviet Union merely that of a naive romantic trying to relive the Russia of Tolstoy's time, as his biographers at that time would have us believe? I didn't think so but couldn't find out anything. I did write to the one person mentioned by Wittgenstein himself as the most influential source of his later philosophy, Piero Sraffa. Sraffa politely wrote back saying that he was an unbelievably slow writer even in his own field of economy. He had never written anything on philosophy or on Wittgenstein. If he did try it he doubted if he would ever succeed. I didn't know then that he was a Marxist.

Wittgenstein's relationship with Sraffa and all the things that are coming out into the open now about the Cambridge communists are very interesting indeed. But while we are discovering these things we must keep in mind one thing: there is not a necessary connection between one's philosophy and one's political views, and this is especially true of Wittgenstein and his followers. Marxists are accustomed to think there is a logical connection. If you are a Marxist then you must be a materialist in philosophy, an atheist in religious matters and leftist in politics.

Wittgenstein, by contrast, keeps reminding us that he was only destroying castles in the air and clearing the ground on which they stand. After the ground is cleared you can plant different seeds in it or build different structures on it. He used to tell his students that one advantage of his philosophy is that when you accept it you can still be religious or non-religious. Thus a Wittgensteinian can be a Catholic or an atheist, a Marxist or a conservative. In fact, among his closest students and friends we find Catholics and Marxists. Wittgenstein himself was spiritually religious (a lot more so than I expected) and politically a leftist (also a lot more so than I expected). There is no need for a philosophical or theoretical justification,

definitely not a scientific justification, for your religious beliefs or political orientation. As he (1980:60) put it,

If you fight, you fight. If you hope, you hope.

You can fight, hope and even believe without believing *scientifically*.

This remark was almost certainly directed at Marxism. Although he sympathised with the Marxian ideal of a classless society and generally supported the political left, he did not accept Marx's theory, especially its claim to be scientific, not because he thought such a theory was false but because such a theory was not possible.

As to Lenin's philosophical writings, Wittgenstein thought they were absurd, like all other philosophical writings. To one of his closest students, Rush Rhees, who was a Trotskyist Marxist at the time, Wittgenstein said: 'Marx could describe the kind of society he would like to see, that is all' (quoted by Rhees, 1984:206).

As Rhees pointed out, this was not a disparagement or belittling of Marx. Wittgenstein was saying there could not be a theory which establishes the judgements Marx wanted to express in such notions as 'truly human' or 'the only really human community'. If Marx made what he called a scientifically (or dialectically) grounded prediction that a communist society would be realised, this would not be a reason for adopting it, nor a reason for fighting to bring it about. When he saw a book by Max Eastman called *Marxism: Is It Science?* in Rhees's room he said Eastman seemed to think that if Marxism was to help revolution it must be made more scientific, which was a bad misunderstanding. 'In fact,' he says (in Rhees, 1984:202), 'nothing is more *conservative* than science. Science lays down railway tracks. And for scientists it is important that their work should move along those tracks.'

It is here that the difference between Marx and Wittgenstein is most profound. A great part of Marx's appeal, especially to intellectuals, lies precisely in the theoretical nature of his writing. This was certainly what I felt was needed. The simple fact, however, was that I had already formed my political views *before* encountering Marx, and Marx only provided *post facto* theoretical justification for my views. Even in his most theoretical work, such as *The German Ideology*, or scientific work, such as *Capital*, Marx's discussion of alienation and his description of the condition of factory workers read more like condemnations, and he certainly writes with the force of someone fighting against it. No wonder he inspired not an army of social engineers, but a mass of revolutionary movements fighting with almost religious fervour.

Marx, although a revolutionary, still belongs to the mainstream of modern western civilisation. The spirit of this civilisation manifests itself, according to Wittgenstein, in the science and technology of our time and in the belief in progress. Wittgenstein, however, considered himself to be outside this tradition, and if there is a point to Wittgenstein's philosophy besides debunking philosophy, it is debunking science and the faith in progress. When

Philosophical Investigations first came out I don't think anyone understood the point of the motto he selected for it: 'It is the nature of every progress, that it appears greater than it actually is.' Even von Wright thought that was directed at Wittgenstein's own writings. With the publication of *Culture and Value*, however, Wittgenstein's anti-science and anti-progress stance became abundantly clear and unambiguous:

Science and industry, and their progress, might turn out to be the most enduring thing in the modern world. Perhaps any speculation about a coming collapse of science and industry is, for the present and for a *long* time to come, nothing but a dream; perhaps science and industry, having caused infinite misery in the process, will unite the world—I mean condense it into a *single* unit, though one in which peace is the last thing that will find a home.

Because science and industry do decide wars, or so it seems.

(1980:63)

Or again, and from the same text:

It isn't absurd, e.g., to believe that the age of science and technology is the beginning of the end for humanity; that the idea of great progress is a delusion, along with the idea that the truth will ultimately be known; that there is nothing good or desirable about scientific knowledge and that mankind, in seeking it, is falling into a trap. It is by no means obvious that this is not how things are.

(*ibid.*: 56)

Almost twenty years ago, when these words of Wittgenstein were first published, and for many years afterwards, I certainly thought it absurd to entertain such ideas. But now I not only no longer think them absurd but believe them to be quite true. On this and many other issues my mind's journey was slow and tortuous, for it required some really drastic changes of direction. One such drastic change was with regard to the 'means/ends' relationship. Very early in my journey I accepted the priority of ends. All means necessary for the attainment of noble ends are justified. Thus, to realise lasting peace, we must engage in just wars; to achieve true democracy, we must first exercise proletarian dictatorship; to abolish the oppressive state, we must first organise an even more powerful state, etc. All these propositions I accepted as necessary lesser evils to be overcome in the process of building an ideal communist society, and I put aside Bakunin's well-argued critique of Marxism. Now I realise that you cannot fight poison with poison without poisoning your ideal. The means you employ must be consistent with the goal you are trying to achieve.

On the personal level, when you join a movement you give over the self to a greater cause, a theory or an ideal. You treat your life as a means to an end and not as an end in itself. This leads to alienation from others, the world and one's self. One thing that always disturbed me while I was in the 'movement' in North America was the fact that most of the individuals in the 'movement'

were not particularly nice or happy people. They were not necessarily good friends, spouses or parents. They were not better, and were often worse, than my other 'ordinary' friends. So how, then, are we to expect them to build a new and better society?

An even more disturbing example was revealed in a biography of Che Guevara I read recently. Che sent a group of fighters under the leadership of an intellectual named Massetti to start a revolutionary *foco*, or cell, in Argentina. Even before they got started, while training in Algeria they executed one comrade suspected of wanting to desert. Once a dozen of them finally managed to sneak into the jungle of Argentina they started to execute one would-be deserter after another even before any engagement with the enemy occurred. Those executed only asked to leave the movement when they discovered they could not possibly survive the harshness of jungle life. This was a case of cold-blooded murder committed in the name of revolution. How many similar cases occurred in revolutions such as the Russian or the Chinese?

After half a century of the communist experiment on the grandest scale in China, the net result is that China, on the whole, can only be described as a form of state monopoly capitalism. There are only a handful of communes still surviving in China. Comparatively, Taiwan, the nemesis of communist China, is today more prosperous and more socialistic than China. 'Who knows the laws according to which society develops?' asked Wittgenstein. I certainly don't.

Laotzu

At this point in my life I must say that I am quite allergic to social theories or ideologies and am most suspicious of ideals. Here allow me to quote one saying from Laotzu which has been totally misunderstood by most previous commentators, including myself. The depth of the misunderstanding can be shown by quoting my own first attempt at a translation:

Hence, only he who is ready to give his life for the sake of the world may be entrusted with the world. Only he who can do it with love may be given custody of the world.

The translator was obviously translating under the Marxist spell! My new translation (and I am confident this is the correct one) reads:

Hence, only he who values his own life more than serving the world may be entrusted with the world. If he loves to sacrifice himself for the world, how can we give him custody of the world?

Isn't it amazing that the same passage should give rise to such contradictory translations? This in itself is a good lesson for a philosopher.

My philosophical journeying from Wittgenstein to Marx and back to Wittgenstein and then beyond to Laotzu means I am at the stage where I am

living my life as an end in itself and not as a means to an end. Wittgenstein (1980:50) said: 'Thoughts at peace. That is the goal someone who philosophises longs for.' My thoughts are at peace. I don't think Wittgenstein himself ever achieved it. He lived an all-too-serious life. He was too harsh on others and on himself. Fun was lacking. He kept writing in his notebooks the injunction, 'Be Happy!' as if ordering himself. Elsewhere he writes (1961:75), 'In order to live happily I must be in agreement with the world. And that's what "being happy" means.' So far so good. But then he goes on to say, 'I am then, so to speak, in agreement with that alien will on which I appear dependent. That is to say: I am doing the will of God.'

Here Wittgenstein is treating his life as a means to an end. No wonder he says (in Rhees, 1984:88): 'Of this I am certain, that we are not here in order to have a good time.' Happiness is for him doing the will of God and not having a good time. But, I want to say: 'Of this I am certain: whatever we are here for, we should have a good time!' In fact I am inclined to say: 'We are not here for anything other than to have a good time!' It's kind of touching that, before he died, Wittgenstein's last words were: 'Tell them I've had a wonderful life,' as if to reassure his friends that, contrary to appearance, he was happy. I want to live my life in such a way that when I die there would be no doubt in anyone's mind that I lived a happy life.

Originally I had intended to include in my chapter a discussion of my encounter with Taoism. But that's not really a subject for this book, and I think I have tried the reader's patience long enough. I will merely end with an enigmatic saying from Laotzu: 'In pursuing knowledge, one learns more every day. But in following Tao, one does less every day. Doing less and less until you do nothing. And when you do nothing, nothing is left undone.'

Note

- 1 This is a reference to a conversation between Wittgenstein and his student Rush Rhees, who at the time of the conversation was considering joining a Trotskyist political group. What Wittgenstein actually said, according to Rhees (1984:208), was:

If you are in the habit of trying one way, then turning back on your tracks like this and trying another, you will be no use as a party member. Perhaps the party line will change. But meanwhile what you say must be what the party has agreed to say. You keep along that road.

Whereas in doing philosophy you have got to be ready *constantly* to change the direction in which you are moving. At some point you see that there must be something wrong with the whole way you have been tackling the difficulty... Go back and start from scratch. And if you are thinking as a philosopher you cannot treat the ideas of communism differently from others.

Some people speak of philosophy as a way of living. Working as a member of a communist party is also a way of living.

References

- Fann, K.T. (1969) *Wittgenstein's Conception of Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Rhees, R. (1984) *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1961) *Notebooks 1914-16*, edited by G.Anscombe and G.H.von Wright, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1968) *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1978) *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1980) *Culture and Value*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1981) *Zettel*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1993) *Philosophical Occasions*, Indianapolis: Hackett.

Index

Note: M and W indicate Marx and Wittgenstein respectively

- Abrichten* (training) 53
abstraction 8–9, 16, 137–8, 139–40, 141, 163, 247–8
action and activity 4–6, 10, 150, 151–5, 209, 217, 269, 274, 280; culture and 70–5, 156–9; language as 106–7, 223; M and W as natural historians 55–61; philosophy as 255; postmodernism 95, 102, 103, 105–6; reflexive Marxism 234, 236–8, 242, 243, 245, 246, 248; Sraffa's influence on W 116–27; *see also* forms of life; *praxis*, practice
aesthetics 71–2
Alexander, J. 65
alienation 148, 201, 268, 270–1, 276, 277, 286, 287, 290; critical use of M and W 171, 172–4, 177; linguistic and philosophical 209, 210, 222, 260
analytical philosophy 131, 140–2, 147, 232, 241; *see also* Moore, G.E.; Russell, B.
anarchism 287
Anderson, P. 168
Anderson, R. 33
Andrews, D. 135, 173, 264, 266
anger 69, 73
animal rights 176–7
Anscombe, G.E.M. 185–6, 187, 220
anthropology 40, 70, 72; anthropological turn in M 106, 172, 272; anthropological turn in W 9, 106, 114, 121, 126; scientific, Winch's criticism of 169–76
anti-naturalism 150–9
anti-subjectivist philosophy 214
Apel, K.-O. 168
Arendt, H. 223
Aristotle 192, 223
Augustine, St 203, 204
Austin, J.L. 23, 28, 30, 37, 40, 100
Austrian Socialist Party 18
authors 95–6; M as author 98–108; W as author 98–9, 103–8
autobiography 96
Ayer, A.J. 24
Azande 67, 73, 156, 169–76, 251
Bachtin, Nicholas 1
Bahai faith 283
Bailey 87
Baker, L. 32
Bakhtin, M. 17, 213, 215–16, 218–20
Bakunin, M. 287, 291
Barrett, M. 97
Barthes, R. 194
base/superstructure 63–5, 67, 75, 217–18
Bates, S. 28
Bechterevev, V. 216
Becker, G. 70
behaviourism 57, 194, 216
Bemerkungen über die Grundlagen der Mathematik (W) *see* *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*
Bennett, A. 25
Benton, E. 2, 10, 11, 161
Bergmann, G. 195
Berlin, I. 97
Bernstein, R. 57, 160, 174–5
Beyond the Fringerevue 25
Bharadwaj, K. 131
biographical tradition 95–9
birth, as universal 156–9
Blue and Brown Books, The (W) 34, 67, 68, 82, 126, 163, 188
Böll, H. 38
Bourdieu, P. 36, 70–1
Bouveresse, J. 36
Bradley, F.H. 191
British Journal for the Philosophy of Science 186

- Brudney, D. 260, 269–72, 274
 Bukharin, N. 115, 116, 125, 126, 134
 Burke, E. 11
 Butler, J. 70, 100
- Cambridge:Sraffa in 115, 120, 140;W
 and his students in 11, 115, 148,
 198–9, 289
Capital (M) 75–6, 78, 84–92, 97, 99, 104,
 108, 160, 179, 202, 239, 241, 242, 243,
 244, 261–6, 274, 290
 capitalism 15–16, 150, 160, 162, 163,
 167, 239–44, 245–6, 258–78
 Carmichael, J. 97
 Cartesianism *see* Descartes, R.
 Carver, T. 95, 96, 97, 98, 100, 104, 108,
 172
 catastrophic equilibrium 132–4, 137, 139
 causes, causality 152, 153, 154, 217–18,
 231, 233–8, 248
 Cavell, S. 18, 27–8, 39, 252, 257
 central state materialism 55
 change 102, 103, 165, 169, 175, 177, 178,
 271, 272, 274, 275–8, 287
 Chinese communism 288, 292
 Chomsky, N. 27, 211
 Chou En-Lai 288
 circumstances 5–6, 195
 Clack, B. 32
 Clammer, J. 27
 class 132–4, 259, 268, 276, 277
 classical economics 122, 124, 137, 200,
 202–3, 223
 classical political economy 7, 248, 249
 Cleaver, H. 89
 Cohen, G.A. 86, 177, 178, 232, 238, 239,
 242
 Cohen, M. 24, 26, 27, 37
 Cohen, T. 28
 Collingwood, R.G. 25
 commodity fetishism 78, 85–92, 172–3,
 174, 202, 261–3, 264, 276, 277
 commodity production 78, 83–93, 167,
 172, 174, 200–1, 202, 203, 261–7;
 Sraffa and social relations of 121–5
 commodity value 83–5, 93;*see also* labour
 theory of value
 communicative action 152, 221, 223
 communism 6, 58, 278, 287–8, 292
Communist Manifesto (M and Engels) 175,
 179
 Conant, J. 39
 confession 13
 Connell, E. 73
 Connolly, William 17, 252
 consciousness 64–5, 74, 125–6, 162, 163,
 204–5;false 64, 65, 149–50, 266, 276
 conservatism, of ordinary language
 philosophy 30–40
 consumption, Sraffa and social relations of
 121–5
 context 120, 125, 127, 136–8, 141, 149,
 154, 163, 192, 199, 201–2, 207, 216,
 223
 continental tradition of ideas 131, 132–40,
 148;interaction with British tradition
 140–2
 ‘Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s
 Philosophy of Law: introduction’ (M)
 107
Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,
 A (M) 16, 63, 90–1, 93, 96, 98, 166
 conventionalism 68–9
 Copleston, F. 24
 Cornish, K. 97
 Crary, A. 178
 Crick, B. 24
 criteria 114, 116–27, 151, 157–8, 194
 critical realism 152
 critical standards 170, 174–7
 critical theory 17, 166, 168–9, 175, 177
 critique 131, 132–42;use of M and W 150,
 160–81, 218, 224, 231, 240
 Croce, B. 134
 cultural relativism 10, 30–6, 67, 73, 155
 Cultural Revolution 288
 cultural training 67, 68–9, 72–3
 culture:cross-cultural understanding 10,
 156–9, 169–76;M and 63–6, 70–5;W
 and 10, 63, 66–75, 158, 277
Culture and Value (W) 2, 98, 114, 231, 261,
 284, 285, 286, 288, 290, 291, 293
- Danford, J. 17
 Darwin, C., Darwinianism 50, 52, 100
 Davis, J.B. 8, 9, 31, 128, 135, 136, 137
 de Rougemont, D. 71
 death, as universal 156–9
 debate 15–16
 Deleuze, G. 24
 democracy 6
 Democritus 55
 Derrida J. 265, 267, 279
 Descartes, R., Cartesianism 55, 66, 68, 73,
 103, 105, 163, 214, 286
 description 254, 256–7, 267, 273, 274,
 276, 290;critical use of M and W 164,
 166, 167, 170, 173, 176–7;reflexive

- Marxism 243–4, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 252
- Deutscher, M. 37
- dialectical materialism *see* materialism
- dialectical method 231
- Dilthey, W. 206
- discourse 218–20
- disgust 73
- Dobb, M. 1, 202
- Donagan, A. 41
- Doney, W. 24
- Dostoevsky, F.M. 219, 220
- doubt 66, 105
- Drury, M.O'C. 30
- Dryson, F. 197
- dualism 3–6, 57
- Dummett, M. 24, 41
- Durkheim, E. 25, 64, 69, 152
- Eagleton, T. 17, 97
- Early Writings* (M) 71
- Eastman, M. 290
- Easton, S. 11, 126, 161
- Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (M) 50–1, 56, 58, 96, 272–3
- Economic Journal, The* 114, 121, 123
- economics:language and value in W and M 78–94;Sraffa's influence on W 7–9, 113–43, 200–4
- Economist, The* 23, 24, 37, 39–40
- Edgerton, R. 72
- Edmonds, D. 97
- Eidinow, J. 97
- Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (M) 5, 65, 119
- eliminative materialism 55
- Eliot, T.S. 156, 157
- Elster, J. 63, 66, 72, 86, 91, 252
- Emmett, K. 32
- emotions 68–9, 73
- empiricism 93, 191, 210, 214, 252
- Engels, F. 51, 55, 56, 63, 65, 91, 96, 97, 99–100, 115, 125–6, 148–9, 175, 195, 204–6, 221, 273, 280, 287, 289
- Enlightenment 272
- Epicurus 55
- ethical and moral issues 12–16, 63, 159, 175–7, 268;reflexive Marxism 240, 242, 243, 245, 247–9
- ethnocentrism 172, 174
- Eurocentrism, of W 286
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 73, 169–76
- evolutionary psychology 70, 71–3
- explanation 273, 274;critical use of M and W 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 177;and reflexive Marxism 238–43, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 252
- Falck, C. 24
- false consciousness 64, 65, 149–50, 266, 276
- family resemblance concept 26, 37, 132, 138–40, 158
- Fann, K.T. 7, 11, 12, 13, 36, 284
- Farr, J. 252
- fear 73, 235, 236, 237
- Feuer, L. 65
- Feuerbach, L. 56, 102, 148, 195, 248, 260, 270, 271;W as modern 220–4
- Feyerabend, P. 224
- Findlay, J. 24, 187
- Fish, S. 273
- Flew, A. 23, 26, 30
- Flowers, F. 37, 38
- Fodor, J. 28
- Foley, D. 94
- Forguson, L. 36
- forms of life 31–2, 33, 35, 53, 57, 66, 67, 68, 75, 79–83, 106, 138, 139, 149, 155, 174, 219, 225, 266, 274;commodity fetishism as 78, 85–92
- Foucault, M. 14
- Frankfurt School 166, 168–9
- Frazer, Sir James 33
- Frege, G. 55, 114, 194
- Freud, S. 34, 277
- Friedman, P. 28, 29
- functionalism 74
- Gadamer, H. 178, 224
- Garegnani, P. 124–5, 128
- Garfinkel, H. 166
- Garver, N. 29, 32, 49, 50, 54, 82
- Gasking, D.A.T. 17
- Geertz, C. 70
- Gellner, E. 12, 67, 68, 273;criticism of W and ordinary language philosophy 23–46
- Gemeinschaft*, cult of 67, 68
- gender language-games 70
- generality 26, 103, 140, 163;*see also* universals
- German Ideology, The* (M. and Engels) 51, 55–6, 60, 63, 65, 74, 91, 106–7, 115–16, 125, 166, 169, 178, 204–6, 221, 273, 290
- German Social Democratic Party 18
- Giddens, A. 161

- Gier, N. 32
 Ginzburg, A. 131
 Goodman, R. 35
 Gouldner, A. 231
 Gramsci, A. 7, 115, 131–5, 137–8, 139, 140, 142, 153, 178
 Greek thought 286
 Grice, P. 27, 28, 30, 39
Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie (M) 60, 64, 208, 259
 Guevara, E. ‘Che’ 287, 292
- Habermas, J. 24, 152, 166, 168, 170, 221, 223, 224, 226
 Hacker, P. 27, 28, 37, 41
 Hanfling, O. 27, 28, 30
 Hänsel, L. 38
 happiness 293
 Hare, R.M. 36–7
 Harris, Z. 211
 Hawking, S. 179
 Hegel, G.W.F. 55, 65, 78, 100, 101–2, 131, 132, 133, 134, 140, 173, 187, 190, 192, 195, 204, 214, 222, 232, 248–9, 260, 271
 Hegelian Marxist tradition 7, 9, 213–27, 231, 232, 240–1, 248–9
 hegemony 132–4
 Heidegger, M. 269, 272
 Heller, A. 224
 Henson, R. 28
 Herbst, P. 186
 Herdan, G. 28
 Herder, J.G. 207
 hermeneutics 108, 150, 155, 156, 157, 224
 Hertzberg, L. 27, 32, 35–6
 Hintikka, J. 211
 Hinton, J. 30
 historical materialism 2
 historicism 275
 Hobsbawm, E. 11
 Hudelson, R. 252
 humanism 96, 226, 268, 272–3
 humanity 10, 102, 105, 126, 162, 269, 272–3, 276; and culture 70–5; and natural history 50–61
 Humboldt, W.von 207
 Hume, D. 152, 155, 163, 191
 Hunter, J. 32
 Husserl, E. 55
 Hutt, R. 1
 Hutten, E. 186
- ideal language philosophers 29
- ideas, idealism 6, 55, 63–6, 70, 71, 74, 75, 102, 134, 150, 151, 168, 210, 269–72, 276, 286, 292
 identity theory 55
 ideograms 285–6
 ideologies 63, 70, 74, 149–50, 164, 200, 217–18, 266, 276, 277, 292
 immanence 132–4, 137
 incommensurability 67–8, 73–4
 individual 103, 162–3, 198, 214, 277
 ineffable, the 192
 instinctive behaviour 53, 69, 70, 71, 72–3
 International Congress of the History of Science and Technology (London 1931) 115
 interpretation 168, 254, 273; textual 95–6
 Inuit 72
Investigations (W) *see Philosophical Investigations*
 Isenberg, A. 24
 Israel, J. 17, 161
 Itkonen, E. 36
 Ivanov, V.V. 215
- Jackson, A.C. 17
 Janik, A. 17, 18, 67, 161
 Japanese aesthetics 72
 Jarman, D., film about W 97
 Jevons, W.S. 200
 justification 33, 34–6, 246–7, 249, 272
- Kant, I. 67, 134, 163, 169, 198, 214
 Katz, J. 28
 Katz, Jack 72
 Katz, Jerry 272
 Kaufman, A.S. 41
 Kenny, A. 97
 Keynes, J.M. 114–15, 196, 200
 Keyt, D. 211
 Khatchadourian, H. 29
 Kindi, V. 28
 Kitching, G. 2, 11, 12, 27, 33, 36, 60, 160, 161, 166, 233, 245, 249, 264, 271, 274, 275, 278
 Kolakowski, L. 38, 99
 Körner, S. 24
 Kripke, S. 38
 Kuhn, T. 271
- labour theory of value 208, 222, 223, 263–5, 276
 Lamb, D. 11, 73
 language: commonalities in M’s and W’s thought 3–6, 103, 105, 106–7, 108, 148–50, 204–6, 248–9, 273, 277, 289;

- and culture 66, 68, 70, 74; M and 125, 208, 221, 254–5, 257, 266; and natural history 50, 55–7, 60–1; of philosophy 55–6, 149, 254–5, 256–61, 273, 277; philosophy of 207, 213–27 (*see also* analytical philosophy; ordinary language philosophy); social science and 10; and value 78–94; W's philosophy 12, 23–46, 66, 68, 78–94, 114, 138–40, 150, 154–5, 169, 190–5, 203–11, 213, 214, 216, 219, 220–4, 225, 241, 252, 256–8, 267, 285–6
- Language and Solitude* (Gellner) 25, 31
- language-games 31–2, 34, 35, 53, 57, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 74, 75, 79–83, 107, 132, 138, 139, 149, 150, 154, 193, 194, 197, 202, 207, 209, 222, 225, 260, 262, 266; value as 78, 83–5, 93, 265–6
- Laotzu 282, 284, 285, 288, 292–3
- Lebensäußerung* (life expression) 53
- Lebensform* (form of life) 53
- Lebensmuster* (life pattern) 54
- Lebensteppich* (weave of life) 4
- 'Lecture on Ethics' (W) 165
- Lefebvre, Henri 254
- Leiber, J. 27
- Leisi, E. 207
- Leninism 274, 275, 287, 290
- Lennon, J. 38
- Levi-Strauss, C. 224
- Levine, A. 232–53
- Levy, R. 69
- Lewin, H. 86
- liberalism, liberal democracy 15–16, 71
- Lichtenberg, G.C. 207
- linguistic alienation 209, 210, 222, 260
- linguistic philosophy *see* analytical philosophy; language, philosophy of; ordinary language philosophy
- linguistic positivism 224
- linguistic turn 30, 155, 214–15, 218
- linguistics 27–8, 207
- Locke, J. 33, 163, 199
- logical atomism 140, 191
- logical positivism 232
- Lubasz, H. 101
- Lukacs, G. 17, 224
- Lukes, S. 275
- Lyas, C. 28
- Liotard, J. 67
- McDowell, J. 32, 61
- McGuinness, B. 41, 97, 187
- MacIntyre, A. 24, 36, 74, 178–9
- McLellan, D. 97
- Main, A. 25
- Malcolm, N. 17, 34, 52, 97, 135, 138, 165, 189, 190, 196, 197–8, 206, 289
- Malcolm X 287
- Malinowski, B. 25, 72, 237
- Maneschi, A. 135
- Manser, A. 11
- Mao Zedong 147, 287, 288
- Marcuse, H. 24, 147, 168
- Markus, G. 213–14, 215, 224–6, 252
- Marshall, A. 8, 114, 123, 132, 135–7, 141
- Marx, K. 122, 132, 134, 287; as author 98–108; biography 96–8, 99, 101, 102; commonalities with W 2–6, 11, 148–50, 160–1, 195, 202, 210–11, 273–5, 289–90; conception of philosophy *see* philosophy, M's conception; critical use of 160–81; differences from W 1–2, 150, 290–2; influence on W 128, 161, 204–6; as natural historian 49–62; as philosopher 97, 100–1, 160, 240; as political activist 1–2, 101–2, 103, 240, 273–5; postmodernism and 95–110; as scientist 244–6, 256; and value 78–94; Wittgensteinian analysis 232, 249; Wittgensteinian reading of capitalism 261–78; *see also Capital; Communist Manifesto*; 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law'; *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy; Early Writings; Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts; Eighteenth Brumaire; German Ideology; Grundrisse der Kritik; Paris Commune; Poverty of Philosophy; Theses on Feuerbach; Towards the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*
- Marxism 25, 36, 95, 100, 147, 164, 287–9; as critique 150, 160–81, 218, 224, 231, 240; Hegelian 7, 9, 213–27, 231, 232, 240–1, 248–9; and moral issues 13–15, 16; and philosophy of language 213–27; reflexive 231–53; as (social) science 2, 12, 100, 168, 231–53, 272, 274, 290; Sraffa's influence on W 7–9, 114, 115–16, 125, 131–43, 148, 200–4; use of W 200, 204–11 (*see also* Wittgensteinian Marxism); W's attitude to 1, 105, 150
- Marxist-Leninism 15
- material/ideal dualism 4–6, 75
- materialism 54–7, 60–1, 71, 74, 75, 102, 103, 106, 108, 134, 195, 209, 218, 226

- Mates, B. 27
 Mauthner, F. 207
 Mayo, B. 24
 Mead, M. 157
 meaning 108, 191, 195; contrast theory of
 26; of life, search for 282–3; social
 phenomenon 162, 163, 168, 169, 217;
 social science 150, 151, 152–9; Sraffa's
 influence on W 116–27, 138–40; and
 use 5, 55–7, 66, 82, 95, 138, 149,
 192–5, 202, 207, 208, 216, 264
 means/ends relationship 291–2, 293
 Medvedev, P.N. 215, 216
 Mehring, F. 96
 Mehta, V. 37
 mentalism 57
 meta-language 29–30, 255
 meta-philosophy 255–6
 metaphor 237
 metaphysics 139, 160, 195, 254–81
 methodological holism/individualism
 221, 252
 Meyerhoff, H. 25
 Miller, W. 73
Mind 24, 41, 186, 188
 mind 55–7, 162
 mind/body problem 55, 286
 Mongiovi, G. 135
 Monk, R. 1, 11, 13, 37, 38, 97, 98, 105,
 114, 148–50, 286
 monopoly 137
 Moody-Adams, M. 176
 Moore, G.E. 37, 66, 140, 141, 188, 198–9
 moral issues *see* ethical and moral issues
 Morris, J. 86
 Morris, P. 215, 216, 219
 Mounce, H.O. 37
 Müller, M. 206
 Mullhall, S. 23, 269
 myths 65, 206
- Naldi, N. 131
 Napoleoni, C. 200–1
 Native Americans 73
 natural history 49–62, 70
 natural sciences, linguistic turn 214–15
 naturalistic fallacy 26, 27–30
 nature 10, 50–2, 59–60, 102, 272–3; and
 culture 68–70, 71, 155–6, 158–9
 Naturgeschichte *see* natural history
 Neapolitan gesture, Sraffa's 114, 121,
 138, 197
 Needham, R.y 36
- neo-classical economics 70, 122; Sraffa's
 critique 7, 8, 134–8, 200
 neo-Pragmatism 273
 neo-Ricardianism 7
 New, C. 28
New Statesman 38
 Nieli, R. 35
 Nielsen, K. 66
 Nietzsche, F. 72, 271, 282
 North, Douglas 63
Notebooks 1914–16 (W.) 293
 Nuchelmans, G. 24, 37
Nuovi Argomenti 11, 185
 Nussbaum, M. 70
 observer-observed dualism 3–4
 Ogden, C.K. 187
On Certainty (W) 12, 53, 66, 68, 166, 174
 oppression 171, 172–4, 176–7, 201
 ordinary language philosophy 12, 23–46,
 148, 199–200; Gellner's pillars of
 25–30; supposed social conservatism
 36–40; W portrayed as conservative
 relativist 30–6
 Ortega y Gasset, José 38
 Oxford analysis *see* ordinary language
 philosophy
- pain 68, 69, 70, 149
 Panico, C. 135
 paradigm case argument 25–7
 parasitism 258–68
Paris Commune, On the (M) 279
 Pascal, F. 1
 Pavlov, I. 216
 Payne, R. 97
 Pears, D. 97, 187
 Peirce, C.S. 73
 perception theories 56
 Perrin, N. 72
 persuasion 167, 175, 249, 265, 267, 268,
 270, 276
 phenomenology 178
 Phillips, D.Z. 28, 36, 39
Philosophical Forum 11
Philosophical Investigations (W) 2, 7, 9, 12, 32,
 34, 79–83, 85, 92, 93, 95, 98, 99,
 103–4, 106–7, 108, 149, 155, 158, 221,
 222, 225, 247, 250, 252, 283–5, 290–1;
 compared with *Tractatus* 190–5; critical
 use of W 160, 162, 163, 164, 165, 168,
 173, 174, 177; and culture 66, 67, 68,
 69, 70, 73, 75; formative influences
 195–204; influence of Sraffa 113, 114,
 126, 135, 139, 140, 141, 148, 201–4;

- Marxian use 206, 210; and metaphysics 254, 255, 256, 257–8, 262, 263, 265, 267, 268, 273, 274, 276, 277; and natural history 49–50, 53, 57, 59; translation and publication 185–90, 220
- Philosophische Bemerkungen* (W) 187
- Philosophische Untersuchungen* (W) *see* *Philosophical Investigations*
- philosophy 283; M's conception 1–2, 95, 99–108, 148–9, 161, 169, 178, 254–6, 289; moving beyond M and W to Taoism 282–94; W's conception 2, 39, 95, 97, 99, 103–8, 148–9, 160, 161, 163–4, 169, 173, 178, 192–3, 206, 209, 210, 225, 254–6, 273, 279, 283–5, 288, 289–90
- physicalism 55
- picture theory of language/meaning 114, 116, 138, 192, 196–7, 264, 276
- Pinker, S. 71, 72
- Pitkin, H. 17, 35, 36
- Plato 104, 163, 167, 190, 284
- Pleasants, N. 2, 10, 11, 98, 100, 103, 105, 106, 107, 108, 162, 164, 166, 167, 169, 173, 233
- Plekhanov, G. 134
- Pole, D. 187, 196
- politics 108, 268, 287–9; Marxian approach 1–2, 101–2, 103, 240, 242, 243, 248–9, 273–5; moral issues 13–15; ordinary language philosophy and 36–40; radicalisation in 1960s 147; W and 1–2, 12, 38, 105, 289
- Popper, K. 23, 24, 25, 37, 224, 280
- positivism 14, 25, 92, 93, 249; linguistic 224; logical 232
- postmodernism 67, 73, 95–110, 233
- poststructuralism 25
- Potier, J.-P. 121
- Poverty of Philosophy, The* (M) 75
- power 14, 108, 132–4
- praxis*, practice 6, 10, 11, 16, 107, 134, 140, 204, 210, 218, 223, 275, 277, 289
- private language argument 149, 150, 162–3, 168, 194, 202, 204, 219, 221, 225, 289
- private property 289
- Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 188
- production: action as 57–8, 59, 60; *see also* commodity production
- progress 290–1
- property relations 235, 236–7
- propositions 92, 191, 196–7
- psychology 216
- Putnam, H. 36
- Quinton, A. 24, 40
- Radical Philosophy* 11
- Ramsey, F. 7, 113, 128, 196, 199, 284
- Read, R. 2, 13
- realism 155, 247, 249, 272
- reality 3–6, 55, 56, 73, 164, 167, 192, 209, 222, 284
- reason, rationality 55, 57, 226, 286; and culture 66–70, 72–3, 156, 169–70, 173
- Redner, Harry 254–5
- Rée, J. 36
- Reed, J. 288
- reflexivity 171, 176, 249
- refutation, self-refutation of M and W 254–8, 275–8
- religion 282–3
- 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*' (W) 10, 53
- Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (W) 34, 173, 187, 225, 285
- Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (W) 34, 50
- Renner, K. 64
- responsibility 12–13, 14, 247–8
- Rhees, R. 1, 13, 38, 97, 114, 121, 161, 289, 290, 293
- Ricardo, D. 7, 84, 127, 135, 200
- Richards, I.A. 23, 25
- Richman, R. 28
- ritual 53, 235, 236, 237
- Robinson, Austin 115
- Robinson, Joan 41
- Romanticism 269, 272
- Roncaglia, A. 135
- Rorty, R. 70, 247, 255, 273, 274, 279
- Rossi-Landi, F. 7, 11, 36, 160, 161, 207, 213–14, 220–4
- Rubinstein, D. 2, 3, 10, 11, 36, 57, 161
- rules, rule-following 67, 74–5, 126, 132, 138–40, 150, 151, 152, 168, 169, 194, 225, 276
- Runciman, W.G. 36
- Runes, D. 97
- Russell, B. 14, 24, 29, 41, 114, 140, 141, 148, 190–1, 198, 210, 286
- Russia *see* Soviet Union
- Russian formalism 207
- Ryle, Gilbert 23, 24, 26, 28, 37, 40, 188, 199, 208

- Sahlins, M. 33, 64, 72, 73, 75
 Salvadori, N. 122, 124, 135
 Saussure, F. de 207, 216, 222, 223
 Savigny, E. von 32
 Schatzki, E. 10
 Schelling, F.W.J. 190
 Schlagel, R. 35
 Schlick, M. 188
 Schopenhauer, A. 148
 Schwarz, H.-P. 42
 scientism: anthropological 169–76; Marxist
 see Marx; Marxism
 Seery, J. 98
 Seigel, J. 97
 Sewell, W. 64
 sex, as universal 156–9, 235, 236
 Sharpe, K. 8
 Sharrock, W. 33
 signs 217, 218
 Simpson, D. 32
 Singer, P. 176–7
 Skorupski, J. 32
 Slater, B. 28, 39
 slavery 175, 176
 Smith, A. 83–4, 200
 Smith, B. 36
 Snow, C.P. 41
 Sober, E. 232–53
 social change *see* change
 social constructionism 64, 68–9, 70
 social criticism *see* critique
 social experimentation 275
 social grammar 119–20
 social ontology 167–72
 social relations 103, 108, 117–18, 120–6,
 150–2, 159, 162–4, 168, 208, 218, 222
 social science 1, 2, 3–4, 10, 12, 150–9,
 161–2, 167–72; culture and 70–5;
 ordinary language philosophy and 36,
 40; *see also* Marxism
 social structure 64
 social theory 10–11, 168, 173, 292; *see also*
 critical theory
 socialism 6, 140, 163, 178, 278, 287–8
 society 2, 4, 57–60, 61, 102, 105, 133,
 153, 209, 272–3, 276, 277
 sociology 40, 64, 70, 160
 Socrates 164, 165, 177, 279
 solipsism 202, 286
 Solomon, R. 69, 73
 'Some remarks on logical form' (W) 188
 Soviet Union 6, 23, 150, 274, 289
 Spengler, O. 277
 Sraffa, P. 1, 16, 93, 208, 223; influence on
 W 7–9, 113–43, 148, 196, 197, 200–4,
 289
 state 132–4
 Steedman, I. 93
 Stone, M. 257
 strategic action 152–3
 Strawson, P. 23, 41
 Stretton, H. 253
 structural Marxism 240–1
 structuralism 194, 210, 216, 223, 224
 struggle 18
 student protest in 1960s 147
 subject-object dualism 3–4
 Sullivan, J. 30
 surplus approach, in economic analysis
 128, 200–1
 Svensson, G. 32

 Taiwan 292
 Taoism, moving beyond M and W to
 282–94
 textual interpretation 95–6
Theses on Feuerbach (M) 2, 55, 56, 58, 95,
 102–3, 108, 148–9, 162, 169, 172, 178,
 231, 248, 254, 274
 thinking, thought 192, 194–5, 204–6,
 286–7
 Thomas, P. 97
 Thomson, G. 1
Times, *The* 23, 24
Times Literary Supplement 36
 Titunik, I. 216
 Todorov, T. 215, 219, 226
 Tompkins, J. 95
 totalitarian societies 176
 Toulmin, S. 18, 161
*Towards the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of
 Right* (M) 179
Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (W) 34, 79, 80,
 81, 104, 115, 187, 188, 190–5, 196,
 199, 204, 207, 225, 254, 258, 286;
 Sraffa's influence on W 7, 8, 116–20,
 127, 138, 141, 201, 202
 training 53; cultural 67, 68–9, 72–3
 transcendence 134
 transcendentalism 155, 214
 transcendentalist relativism 32
 Trier, J. 207
 Trotsky, L. 18, 287
 truth 103, 106, 108
 Tucker, R. 97

 understanding 55, 273

- universal 69–70, 134, 140, 156–8; critical standards 170, 174–5
- Uschanov, T.P. 10, 12, 38
- use theory of language/meaning 190, 264, 268; *see also* meaning, and use
- Utka Eskimos 69, 73
- utopianism 275, 276, 280
- value 78–94, 265–6; *see also* labour theory of value
- values 245
- Venuti, L. 98
- Vico, G. 156
- Vienna Circle 195
- Vitello, V. 201
- Volosinov, V.N. 17, 213, 215–18, 223
- Waismann, F. 160, 165, 188
- Wallgren, T. 32
- Walras 200, 201
- Warnock, G. 24
- Watkins, J. 24, 41
- Weber, M. 59
- Weil, S. 171
- Weiler, G. 207
- Weinberg, J. 211
- Weisgerber, L. 207
- Weitz, M. 27, 30
- Wertheimer, A. 34, 39
- Wheen, F. 97
- White, H. 96
- White, M. 24, 37
- Wicksell 200
- Williams, B. 32
- Williams, R. 17
- Wilson, E.O. 71
- Winch, P. 9–10, 12, 31, 32–4, 36, 64, 67, 68, 73, 74, 150–9, 160, 161–2, 165, 167–72, 177, 268, 276
- Wisdom, J. 41, 187, 188, 199
- Wittgenstein, L.: anti-science stance 2, 163, 290–1; attitude to Marxism 1, 105, 150; as author 98–9, 103–8; biography 97–8, 104; commonalities with M 2–6, 11, 148–50, 160–1, 195, 202, 210–11, 273–5, 289–90; conception of philosophy *see* philosophy, W's conception; conservatism 12, 36–40, 168–9; as conservative relativist 30–6, 169; critical use of 160–81; differences from M 1–2, 150, 290–2; Ernest Gellner's criticism 23–46; influence of Frank Ramsey 196; influence of M and Marxism on 128, 131–43, 161, 204–6; influence of Sraffa 7–9, 113–43, 148, 196, 197, 200–4; Marxian use of 185–212; national identity 148; as natural historian 49–62; personal study of 147–8; philosophy as a way of seeing 164–7, 169, 268; politics 1–2, 12, 38, 105, 289; postmodernism and 95–110; quietism 273–5; reading through M 267–8; religion 289; scholasticism 196; translation 185–90, 220; *see also* *Blue and Brown Books*; *Culture and Value*; 'Lecture on Ethics'; *Notebooks 1914–16*; *On Certainty*; *Philosophical Investigations*; *Philosophische Bemerkungen*; 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*'; 'Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics'; 'Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology'; 'Some remarks on logical form'; *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*; *Zettel*
- Wittgensteinian Marxism 3, 11, 92–3, 232, 249, 261–8; Marxist use of W 200, 204–11; moving beyond 282–94
- Words and Things* (Gellner) 23–46
- Wright, E.O. 232–53
- Wright, G.H. von 17, 37, 38, 97, 114, 188, 189, 190, 196, 197, 211, 291
- X, Malcolm 287
- Yanomami Indians 72
- Young Hegelians 91–2, 101–2, 269, 274
- Zen 279
- Zettel* (W) 34, 38, 66, 67, 68, 69, 73, 288