Radical Philosophy Thirteen

Winch, Wittgenstein and Marxism

Ted Benton

A Introduction

This paper suffers from a certain 'instability'
deriving from its having been written some years
ago, and then substantially modified more recently
to serve quite different purposes. This modifica-
tion has, unfortunately, been insufficiently
thorough, although the instability of the paper
may be itself of some interest.

  The work for the original paper was produced in
the late '60s, in a context of extensive political
radicalisation of 'intellectual' youth in the
advanced capitalist countries, and also in the
Eastern Block. The realisation of the complicity
of the US intellectual establishment[1] in the
imperialist war against Vietnam was of particular
significance. It led, both in the USA and in
Britain, to students questioning not only the
social relationships within which 'knowledge' was
'transmitted' in the universities and colleges,
but also the very content of that knowledge. In
this, philosophy students were no exception and
attempts were made to establish precisely what
was the social/political significance of philo-
sophy. The dominant tendencies of 'linguistic
philosophy' and 'linguistic analysis' at that time
were not always clearly distinguished, and those
on the neo-Marxist left tended to reject the whole
of their philosophy curricula as 'bourgeois ideo-
logy'. Either, following Marcuse,[2] linguistic
philosophy was conceived as merely a new variant
of empiricism, so that it could be subjected to
the already well-established general critique of
empiricism, or, following Perry Anderson,[3]
Wittgenstein and other linguistic philosophers
were regarded as professional defenders of the
conceptual status-quo, and so as, intentionally
or not, politically conservative. In that general
context, I wrote this paper in order to defend
what I considered to be genuinely intellectually
liberating aspects of Wittgenstein's philosophy
against this tendency to submerge its particular
characteristics into an ill-defined and amorphous
'bourgeois culture'. It was also my objective to
indicate a path from Wittgenstein to Marx which
could be followed, I thought, without turning away
from some of the central philosophical advances
present in Wittgenstein's work.

  Since I wrote the original paper there have
appeared several defences (or partial defences)[4]
of Wittgenstein from a leftist and even Marxist
standpoint by academic philosophers on the left.
It therefore now seems to me to be necessary to
conduct a series of distinct investigations:

  (i) What, if anything, justified the original
        dismissal of Wittgenstein as a 'bourgeois
        philosopher'?

 (ii) What, if anything, is in the more recent
        attempts to uncover a 'progressive'
        Wittgenstein and connect him with Marx?

(iii) Can we use the answers to these questions
        to achieve a more reliable and objective

assessment of the place of Wittgenstein in
British intellectual history?

  In the course of these investigations, I hope,
some steps are made towards the development of an
adequate conception of ideology - a conception
which would, in my view, be a necessary condition
of any satisfactory situating of Wittgenstein's
work in its social and intellectual context. The
present paper, then, is to be understood as
simultaneously an exercise in critical history of
ideas and an attempt at conceptual analysis and
production.

B The Effects of Wittgenstein's work: the case of Peter Winch

In order to conduct the first investigation -
'what justified the rejection of Wittgenstein as
a bourgeois philosopher?' - it is necessary to
distinguish the philosophical achievements pre-
sent in Wittgenstein's work from the assimilation/
appropriation of Wittgenstein's work by British
intellectual culture - particularly in the fields
of philosophy, ethics and sociology. To quote
the Italian philosopher, Rossi-Landi:

  *Don't look for the meaning of a philosopher,
  look for his* use: *the meaning of a philosopher
  is his use in a culture.*[5]

I want to argue that in the particular case of
Wittgenstein there are important *differences*
between the meaning of the philosopher and his
use in the culture. To illustrate this point I
shall consider one text only: Peter Winch's
Idea of a Social Science. My argument will be
that the general methodology of the social stu-
dies which Winch argues for in *The Idea* is not
only misconceived on its own account, but more
importantly for present purposes, that quite
opposite methodological conclusions for the
social sciences can be drawn from a development
of aspects of Wittgenstein's work which Winch

---

1 N Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins*,
  Pelican, 1969
2 H Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, Sphere Books,
  1968, Ch.7
3 Perry Anderson - 'Components of the National
  Culture' (originally in *NLR50* and reprinted in
  Student Power, ed. R. Blackburn
4 See, for instance, Tony Manser, *The End of
  Philosophy: Marx and Wittgenstein*, Inaugural
  Address, Univ. of Southampton, 1973; John Moran
  'Wittgenstein and Russia', *NLR73*; K T Fann,
  'Wittgenstein and Bourgeois Philosophy,*RP8*;
  Also relevent are E Burke, 'Wittgenstein's
  Conservatism, *RP10*; and the contributions by
  Richard Norman and Tony Skillen to *RP1*
5 F Rossi-Landi 'Per un uso Marxiano di
  Wittgenstein', trans. Prof. Tony Manser. I am
  greatly indebted to Tony Manser both for his
  translation, and for the stimulation of his ex-
  cellent inaugural address on Marx and
  Wittgenstein.

neglects.

Winch represents his task in *The Idea* as extending Wittgenstein's treatment of the notion of 'following a rule' from the analysis of linguistic meaning to forms of interaction other than speech – to non-linguistic social actions and interactions which can nevertheless be said to have a symbolic character. In this way, it should be possible to develop a conception of sociological understanding along the same lines as Wittgenstein's conception of what it is to 'understand the meaning of' in connection with linguistic meaning. Already there are difficulties with this method of procedure:

(i) 'Social action' is not, generally, taken as the sole object of knowledge in the social studies. Winch seems to suppose that it *must* be without justifying his assumption.

(ii) It can not be correct for Winch to characterise this task as *extending the application* of Wittgenstein's treatment of linguistic meaning to 'forms of social interaction other than speech', since Wittgenstein's account of linguistic meaning *already* involves the concept of social action:
'I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the "language-game".' (P.I, Part 1, §7)
and
' 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.' (P.I, Part 1, §23)
We should rather view Winch as offering a further elucidation of Wittgenstein's conception of meaning by developing the notions of language-game and form of life beyond their rather primitive and gestural status in Wittgenstein's own work.

(iii) Winch, without ever making it explicit, presupposes the validity of the argument:
Social actions are meaningful.
The social studies aim at the understanding of social action.

Therefore: 'Understanding' in the social studies is understanding of the *meanings* of social actions.

Of course, the argument, once explicitly formulated, can be clearly seen to be invalid, but Winch's whole project of using Wittgenstein's work to shed light on the proper method in the social studies depends upon it.

My main purpose in this section is to examine Winch's presentation of the implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy for the methods of the social studies. I shall try to show (1) that these implications, as presented by Winch are, indeed, intellectually and politically conservative. It is, perhaps, 'appropriations' of Wittgenstein's work such as Winch attempts which formed the basis (such as it was) for a rejection of Wittgenstein's work itself as 'conceptual conservatism'. (2) I shall try to show that there are elements in Wittgenstein's work which could form the basis of a methodology for the social studies quite other than that proposed by Winch, and having none of the latter's conservative implications. It would be a methodology, indeed, having much in common with a certain way of understanding Marx's method. Such a presentation of Wittgenstein's work may be thought to justify more recent claims to the discovery of a 'progressive Wittgenstein'.
(1) I suggested above that implicit in Winch's position was the assumption that to understand a social action was to understand the *meaning* of

that social action. I shall begin by outlining a conception of what it is to 'understand the meaning of' which (a) is present explicitly or implicitly in much of the argumentation of *The Idea* and which (b) would carry, as implications of its being accepted as the *only* conception of sociological understanding, some of Winch's most extreme and controversial methodological prescriptions. The proposition '2 x 2 = 4' is a meaningful arithmetical proposition. Let us suppose that a teacher wishes to discover whether a pupil 'understands the meaning of' the proposition. Perhaps he/she may do this by getting the pupil to carry out various movements with pairs of counters or other objects on a desk, maybe by getting him/her to carry out other arithmetical exercises involving the use of 'x' and '=' signs, as well as the numerals 1-4. Consistent success in these exercises will satisfy the teacher that the pupil understands.

Being able to perform certain tasks which involve the relevant arithmetical rules, then, may be allowed to count as 'understanding the meaning of' a proposition such as '2 x 2 = 4'. Similarly with the meanings of words. To be able to use words in the correct contexts, according to the grammatical and other rules for their use, is to qualify as 'understanding the meanings of' those words.

Similarly, we might go on to give an account of what it is to 'understand the meaning of' a social *action* in terms of the ability to perform those practices which form the context of the action in question. The performance of a social action (like the utterance of a statement) will generally occur within a definite social situation and with the expectation of some kind of response. Only a limited range of responses will count as meaningful responses to the original act. 'Responses' outside that range indicate a failure to understand the meaning of the original act.

An obvious example here is provided by the multiplicity of ways in which acts of economic exchange can be performed. Where, for instance, the eventual sale-price of articles is customarily arrived at by a complex process of bluff, counter-bluff and negotiation, the outsider who innocently takes the first demand of the salesman as a statement of the price of the article may be said to have '*mis*understood the meaning of' that social act.

In general, then, it may be said that someone understands the meaning of a social act if he/she is able to participate successfully in the social practice to which that social act belongs. In this sense, the ability to understand the meanings of social acts is a precondition for living any kind of social life at all.

It is understanding of this kind, which Winch has in mind when he compares the *sociologist's* understanding of *social phenomena* with the engin-

ABBREVIATIONS

I.S.S. – Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science* R & K P, 1958
R.F.G.B. – L Wittgenstein – 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*, trans A R Manser (University of Southampton, Philosophy Department)
P.I. – L Wittgenstein – *Philosophical Investigations*
R.F.M. – L Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, trans. G E M Anscombe, Oxford 1964
G.I. – K Marx and F Engels, *The German Ideology*. Part I, ed. C J Arthur, London, 1970

eer's understanding of his colleagues' activities:

*His (the social student's) understanding of
social phenomena is more like the engineer's
understanding of his colleagues' activities
than it is like the engineer's understanding
of the mechanical systems which he studies.*
(I.S.S. p88)

If this is, indeed, the conception of under-
standing which Winch has in mind, then the appar-
ently very extreme restrictions which he places on
the formation of concepts in sociology become in-
telligible. This is what he says:

*Now if the position of the sociological invest-
igator ... can be regarded as comparable, in
its main logical outlines, with that of the
natural scientist, the following must be the
case. The concepts and criteria according to
which the sociologist judges that, in two situ-
ations, the same thing has happened, or the
same action performed, must be understood in
relation to the rules governing sociological
investigation. But here we run against a diffi-
culty; for whereas in the case of the natural
scientist we have to deal with only one set of
rules, namely those governing the scientist's
investigation itself, here what the sociologist
is studying, as well as his study of it, is a
human activity and is therefore carried on
according to rules. And it is these rules,
rather than those which govern the sociologist's
investigation, which specify what is to count
as 'doing the same kind of thing' in relation to
that kind of activity.* (I.S.S. pp86/7)

Now, this, restriction on the sociologist – that
he must accept the criteria of identity for ac-
tion of those who participate in the social acti-
vities he studies is regarded by most sociologists
correctly I think, as the denial of the possibil-
ity of the scientific study of society. Why does
Winch say it?

Well, it does follow, I think, from the concep-
tion of 'understanding the meaning of' which I
just outlined. Someone who did not distinguish
between kinds of acts in more or less the same way
as others with whom he/she participated in social
practices would not be able to participate success-
fully in those practices (cf. my example of the
misunderstanding of the practice of 'bargaining')
[I overlook here the complexities of the concept
of 'ability' but I don't think this affects my
argument.]

A condition of successful participation in a
social practice, then, will be that the participa-
tor accepts (in his/her practice, at any rate) the
criteria of identity for actions of those with
whom he/she participates.

To identify sociological understanding with par-
ticipants' understanding will thus involve restric-
ting the sociologist to the criteria of identity –
to the classifications – of actions employed by
those whose activities he/she studies.

It is true that Winch goes on to qualify this
view, and I shall consider his qualification later,
but for the moment it will be worthwhile to con-
sider this unqualified statement of his. It is
this statement, suggesting, as it does, that
sociological understanding of a form of social
activity, in order to count as 'understanding' at
all, must be couched in terms of only those con-
cepts involved in the activity itself, which has
led to most of the controversy surrounding
Winch's work.

I shall consider here only one (central) diffi-
culty with this (unqualified) 'Winchian' notion
of what it is to understand social activity.
This difficulty is that it seems to follow from

what Winch says about the nature of the under-
standing of social life that certain sorts of
mistake about the character of one's own social
life would be impossible (compare the orientation
of most of the debate over Winch towards the ques-
tion of understanding 'alien' societies).[6]

There are at least two fairly obvious ways in
which, even on Winch's terms, someone could be
mistaken about the meaning of an act. Such a
mistake could occur as a result of a misperception
of the physical movement involved (eg the dispute
over the famous Harvey Smith 'V'-sign). This
would be analogous to mis-reading or mis-hearing
a word. Alternatively, someone may be insuffici-
ently well socialised, or familiar with an estab-
lished way of life, to recognise an act for what
it is. This would be analogous to having in-
sufficient grasp of a language – to not yet being
'master of the technique'. (P.I.§199)

However, there is no conceptual room at all in
Winch, as so far expounded, for this sort of sit-
uation: a situation in which *all*, or *most* of the
participants in a form of life are, not just
occasionally, but *quite generally*, mistaken about
the character of their social life. This is ruled
out by Winch, I think, because his conception of
participants' understanding makes the last arbi-
ters as to the character of any social action
those to whose social life the act belongs. No
sense can be attached to *their* misunderstanding
such acts since, in general, their practice
provides the criteria by which all attempts to
understand their social life are to be judged.
Now, it is precisely this sort of situation ruled
out by Winch, which many sociologists (and anthro-
pologists) believe it to be their task to detect
and expose. This is essentially the point which
MacIntyre makes (*Aristotelian Society, Supplement-
ary Proceedings,* 1967) when he says that Winch's
conception of sociological understanding, if
accepted, would require sociologists to cease
using the concepts of 'ideology' and 'false con-
sciousness'. It would also rule out any cross-
cultural social science. The sense in which
Winch's drawing out of the methodological implic-
ations of Wittgenstein's work is conceptually,
and hence politically conservative is, then,
fairly clear. The notion of social science as a
critique of the dominant (or even 'all-pervasive',
since cultural uniformity is also a presupposi-
tion of the Winchian methodology) ideology by
which a given social order understands and justi-
fies itself is a conceptual impossibility.

The story of Winch's 'appropriation' of
Wittgenstein's work to support a conservative
methodology in the social studies could be paral-
leled by other examples of Wittgensteinian moral
philosophy, philosophy of religion, philosophy of
education and so on. The relatively superficial
observer of the philosophical scene, assuming he
takes these readings of Wittgenstein to be authen-
tic, might well be justified in concluding that
Wittgenstein's main intellectual concern was with
conceptual apologetics. Hence, the 'bourgeois'
Wittgenstein!

(2) But *is* the Winchian appropriation of
Wittgenstein the only plausible one? There is in
Winch's work itself a conception of understanding
which seems to go beyond 'participants'' under-
standing as described above, but which plays a
relatively small part in Winch's over-all argu-
ment. This conception of understanding, though,

6 For a useful collection of some of the key items
  in this debate see B R Wilson, *Rationality*,
  Oxford, 1974

and a distinction that goes with it, is, I shall argue, quite central to the philosophy of Wittgenstein.

Early in Winch's *Idea of a Social Science* he claims that it is the central problem of both sociology and epistemology to 'elucidate' or 'throw light on' the concept of a 'form of life'. Winch does not give an account of what 'elucidation' is, but presumably it amounts to more than merely participation, or the capacity to participate, in that of which elucidation is sought. Again, following his analogy between social students and engineers, Winch says:

> I do not wish to maintain that we must stop at the unreflective kind of understanding of which I gave as an instance the engineer's understanding of the activities of his colleagues. But I do want to say that any more reflective understanding must necessarily presuppose, if it is to count as genuine understanding at all, the participant's unreflective understanding. (I.S.S. p89)

Sometimes Winch characterises this more reflective kind of understanding as involving technical concepts which presuppose the concepts of unreflective understanding, whilst elsewhere it seems that he might have in mind the distinction between reflective and unreflective application of a rule; the distinction between being able to follow a rule and being able to make explicit, or give an account of, the rules one is following.

This distinction is given much more prominence in Wittgenstein's work, and is connected with the distinction between depth and surface grammar. To return to the example of the arithmetical proposition '2 x 2 = 4', a criterion of 'unreflective' understanding of this proposition would be the ability to correctly manipulate the symbols of which the proposition consists. A criterion of reflective understanding would be the ability to state the relevant arithmetical rules. That these are different conceptions of understanding is indicated by the possibility that someone quite unskilled at arithmetic might well satisfy the second criterion and, equally, that a highly skilled mathematician might well be entirely incapable of satisfying it.

Winch's linking of propositional meaning with the meaning of actions suggests the further question: might not successful participants (or participant-observers) in forms of life remain quite incapable of making explicit or giving accounts of the rules that govern their practice? Provided it is accepted that the intellectual distance separating participation in forms of life and elucidating, or giving accounts of such forms of life may sometimes be very great, this distinction between participants' 'unreflective' understanding, and reflective understanding might have yielded methodological implications quite contrary to the ones which Winch actually drew. The conception of the task of the social studies which *might* have been developed would have been analogous to Wittgenstein's own conception of philosophy as the description of language-games (P.I. Part 1, §109), though it would not get its purpose from specifically *philosophical* problems.

But this task of describing language-games is not such an innocent exercise as it sounds. Wittgenstein also described philosophy as a battle against the 'bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language' (P.I. Part I, §109). It is one thing to be a language-user, quite another to be able to give an adequate account of the uses of language. One is constantly misled, for instance, by the superficial grammatical forms of sentences. From the grammatical similarity of

'I have a sharp pain in my knee' and 'I have a sharp pencil in my pocket' we may be led to think of 'pains' as a strange kind of 'thing' which we cannot share with others, which no-one else can perceive, and so on. In this way philosophers, psychologists and others are led to think of 'mental' predicates as referring to strange 'private' objects which may be investigated only by introspection or may be entirely inaccessible to other persons.

Although most of us are quite capable of using such words as 'pain' quite correctly in everyday contexts, we are readily misled by the grammatical forms of our sentences, and fall into confusion when we attempt to give accounts of their use (P.I. Part 1, §664). Giving an account of the use of any item of language in such a way as to avoid these confusions involves describing the part it actually plays in human social interactions ('forms of life' and 'language-games'). This is to give what Wittgenstein calls the 'depth' as distinct from the 'surface-grammar' of the expression. Again, if linguistic expressions have both a depth- and a surface-grammar perhaps social actions, and forms of social action, too, have depth- and surface-grammars? Might not the surface appearance of some social actions and relationships belie their true character, and so 'bewitch the intelligence' of anyone who would give an account of them?

If this were so, then at least part of the task of the social scientist could be characterised as exposing mistaken interpretations of forms of social activity in so far as they result from the 'bewitchment of the intelligence' by the superficial appearance of those forms of interaction. The complementary task of providing 'correct' interpretations would consist in laying bare the 'depth-grammar' of forms of social interaction. It would consist in giving what Wittgenstein calls 'perspicuous representations' of those activities whose interpretation is in dispute. Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language, together with his distinction between depth- and surface-grammar could, then, plausibly found a conception of 'understanding' in the social sciences which amounts to exposing ideologies as misrepresentations of social life.

This, perhaps, is that underlies the claim that, Winch, Phillips and co notwithstanding, there is a 'progressive Wittgenstein' awaiting his presentation on the philosophical scene.

C Wittgenstein and Marx; Wittgenstein or Marx?

In this section, I shall begin by drawing attention to three areas of enquiry in which Marx and Wittgenstein share similar or analogous positions. These apparent similarities may seem to give even more basis to the 'progressive Wittgenstein' interpretation. I shall, however, conclude the section with a brief statement of some of the fundamental differences between the theoretical positions of Marx and Wittgenstein.

1 Wittgenstein and Marx

(a) *The relationships between language and social life.* An insistence on the practical character of language, on language as an assortment of instruments or 'tools' which have a variety of uses is present in the work of both thinkers. The indispensably social character of language was also argued by Wittgenstein through his analysis of the notion of 'following a rule' and the connected 'private-language' argument. The concepts of

'language-game' and 'form of life' which appear in Wittgenstein's later work are also introduced at least in part to establish this point. The same point is made in a strikingly similar way by Marx and Engels:

> *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.* (G.I. Part I, p51)

There is even, in Wittgenstein's notes on Frazer's *Golden Bough*, the elements of a materialist conception of ritual practices and even of general intellectual life:

> *There can have been no trivial reason, i.e. on the whole no reason that caused certain races of men to venerate the oak tree except that they and the oak tree were united in a form of life; thus it developed not from a choice but like the relation of the flea and the dog with each other. (If the flea developed a ritual, it would be concerned with the dog).*
>
> *It could be said that it is not the union (of oak and man) which caused the ritual, but in a certain sense their separation.*
>
> *For the awakening of the intellect goes with a separation from the original soil, the original foundations of life itself.*[7]
> (R.F.G.B. Manser tr. pp8/9)

Compare this with two quotations from Marx and Engels in the *German Ideology*:

> *1 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.*
> (G.I. p47)
>
> *2 Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears... From this moment onwards consciousness can flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, ... from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of 'pure' theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc.* (G.I. p52)

For Marx and Engels, then, 'pure' theoretical disciplines arise from a separation of mental and manual labour, whilst for Wittgenstein 'the awakening of the intellect' goes with a parallel 'separation from the soil'.

(b) *The Conception of Philosophy.* Philosophy, like other intellectual disciplines, arises from a separation of language, or of intellectual practices involving language, from practical life, from social practice. This is so for both Marx and Wittgenstein. Compare Marx and Engels (and in quote *2* above):

> *Hitherto men have constantly made up for themselves false conceptions about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be. They have arranged their relationships according to their ideas of God, of normal man, etc. The phantoms of their brains have got out of their hands. They, the creators, have bowed down to their creations.* (G.I. p37)

with Wittgenstein:

> *The confusions which occupy us arise when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing work.* (P.I. Part 1,§132)

Again, for both Marx and Wittgenstein, the

resolution of philosophical puzzles is to be achieved by bringing language, thought, and social practice back into contact with one another. Compare Marx and Engels:

> *For philosophers, one of the most difficult tasks is to descend from the world of thought to the actual world... The philosophers would 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* (G.I.)

with Wittgenstein:

> *What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.*
> (P.I. Part 1, 116)

Finally, for both Marx and Wittgenstein, this method of resolving philosophical puzzles also spells the end of philosophy, strictly speaking, and the beginning of a new practice.

Compare Marx and Engels:

> *When reality is depicted, philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge loses its medium of existence.* (G.I. Part 1, p48)

with Wittgenstein:

> *The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.* (P.I. Part 1, 133)

(c) *What is to replace philosophy?* The battle against the bewitchment of the intelligence that Wittgenstein proposed, involving the description and invention of language-games so as to display the depth, as distinct from surface-grammar of expression could, I have argued, be extended to found a social-science methodology of ideological exposure. Such a methodology is closely analogous to Marx's way of representing his own critique of certain categories of Classical Political Economy in *Capital*. Particularly relevant here are Marx's treatment of the ideological effects of the commodity-form (*Capital*, Vol.1, Ch.I) in the well known concept of 'commodity-fetishism', and the similar treatment of the wage relation and the category of 'value and labour' (*Capital*, Vol.1, Ch.XIX).

If we substitute for Marx's distinction between 'phenomenal forms' and real or 'essential' relations Wittgenstein's distinction between surface- and depth-grammar, Marx's argument can be represented plausibly enough. In the case of the wage-relation, Marx can be represented as arguing that the 'surface grammar' (Marx actually speaks of 'the surface of bourgeois society') of the relationship between capitalist and worker has 'bewitched the intelligence of Smith, Ricardo and their followers, as well as capitalists and workers themselves. Marx's battle against this bewitchment is to display the 'depth-grammar' of the relationship – to display it as principally a *production*-relation, and only in virtue of this an *exchange*-relation. This exposure of the dual-character of the wage relation enables Marx to distinguish between 'labour' and labour-power, and to expose the wage-relation as exploitative.

2 Wittgenstein *or* Marx?

Despite these similarities and analogies, there are nevertheless fundamental differences between

---

7 I am indebted to Prof. A R Manser for this translation. The 'Remarks' were first published in *Synthese*, Vol.XVII, 1967, with an introductory note by Rush Rhees. A partial translation, omitting the passage I quote, by A C Miles and Rush Rhees was published in *The Human World*, No.3, May 1971

the theoretical positions of Marx and Wittgenstein. Unfortunately I have space only to summarise these:

(a) The typified episodes of interaction which Wittgenstein gives as examples of language-games are not related by him to the more-or-less enduring social practices from which he abstracts them. Moreover, there is no conception of the relationships of such practices to the social totalities ('forms of life') which they constitute. The notion of 'form of life' itself has an extremely shadowy existence in Wittgenstein's work. There are no criteria of identity and difference for 'forms of life', nor any conception of what constitutes the unity of a social formation (these questions become crucial for Winch, for whom the unity of a 'culture' becomes surreptitiously identified with the unity of a social formation). There are, in the Marxist tradition, at least *attempts* to solve these problems with concepts such as mode of production, articulation or modes of production, juridico-political superstructure, determination-in-the-last-instance, and so on.

(b) There is the merest recognition in Wittgenstein that language-games, and thus forms of life, are subject to change:

> ... *but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten.*
> (P.I. Part 1,§23)

also:

> *The sickness of a time is caused by an alter-ation in the mode of life of human beings, and it was possible for the sickness of phil-osophical problems to get cured only through a changed mode of thought and life, not through a medicine invented by an individual.*
> (R.F.M. p57, quoted in Manser 1973)

But there is in these occasional references to the 'fact' of change no conception of the causes of historical and cultural changes, no conception of the historical process, nor even of language and culture as themselves historical *products*. The timelessness of the forms and language and thought in the *Tractatus* remains in the *Investigations* conception of language.

(c) There is, in Wittgenstein, no connection between 'the bewitchment of the intelligence by means of language' and the interests of antagonistic social classes, as there is in Marx. Indeed the whole notion of 'shared' forms of life, central to Wittgenstein's conception of language and meaning is quite inconsistent with any conception of class remotely resembling the Marxian one.

(d) For Marx, the relations between thought, language and social relations are theorised as part of a general theory of history – of social formations and their transformations. By contrast the philosophical practice of the later Wittgenstein – the description and invention of language-games and forms of life – has a deliberately ad hoc character. There is no attempt at a general theory, the interest in forms of social life and their description getting 'its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems'. (P.I. Part 1,§109)

(e) Finally, both Wittgenstein's notion of philosophical practice, and the representation of Marx's methods of ideological exposure which I have given, fall foul of epistemological objections – but of rather different sorts. In the case of Wittgenstein, the questions arise: how do we know when a 'puzzle' has been resolved, when a language-game has been perspicuously presented, or accurately described? Surely this cannot be

something that is just spontaneously recognisable – or why speak of a 'battle' against bewitchment? Wittgenstein's answer, presumably, is: 'The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to' (P.I. Part 1,§133). One trouble with this is that it is a purely personal and subjective criterion – some are prepared to stop doing philosophy earlier than others. Also, it fails to come to grips with the persistence of several mutually incompatible accounts of particular language-games, and forms of life. Each account may be seen, from the standpoint of the others as the result of a bewitchment of the intelligence.

In the case of Marx, the conception of scientific practice as 'ideological exposure', as a stripping away of the veil of appearance to reveal the underlying reality seems to suggest, again, that reality (='depth grammar') is somehow just spontaneously *recognisable* as such. But not only does this conception, like Wittgenstein's threaten to descend into epistemological relativism, but it also has the defect of concealing the work of theoretical production of new concepts with which to grasp the nature of social reality in a scientific way (at least in Wittgenstein there is no claim to scientific status). There are, however, other, perhaps more fruitful ways of reading Marx on these questions. In particular, the attempt to build upon Marx's own conception of sciences as a distinctive mode of theoretical production (outlined, not in *Capital*, but particularly in the 1857 Introduction to the *Grundrisse*) seems to hold out most hope of real progress.

D Situating Wittgenstein

Finally, the attempt to adequately situate Wittgenstein in British intellectual culture is clearly well beyond the scope of this paper. A number of memoirs and biographical documents, together with investigative reports[8] are now available, and between them they contain the raw materials for some such future attempt. But lest the latter parts of this paper have tended to re-instate the 'conservative' Wittgenstein, perhaps I had better conclude with an extract from Wittgenstein's own assessment of his intellectual debts:

> *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 increasingly prac-tised on my thoughts. I am indebted to this stimulus for the most consequential ideas of this book.* (P.I. Preface, pviii)

'Mr Sraffa' is a Neo-Marxist economist.

8 See for instance, P Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein with A Memoir*, Oxford, 1967; K T Fann, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Man and his Philosophy*, NY, 1967; N Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, London, 1958, with a biographical sketch by G H Von Wright. J Moran's 'Wittgenstein and Russia, *NLR*, 1973, is full of interesting information, but is relatively weak philosophically.