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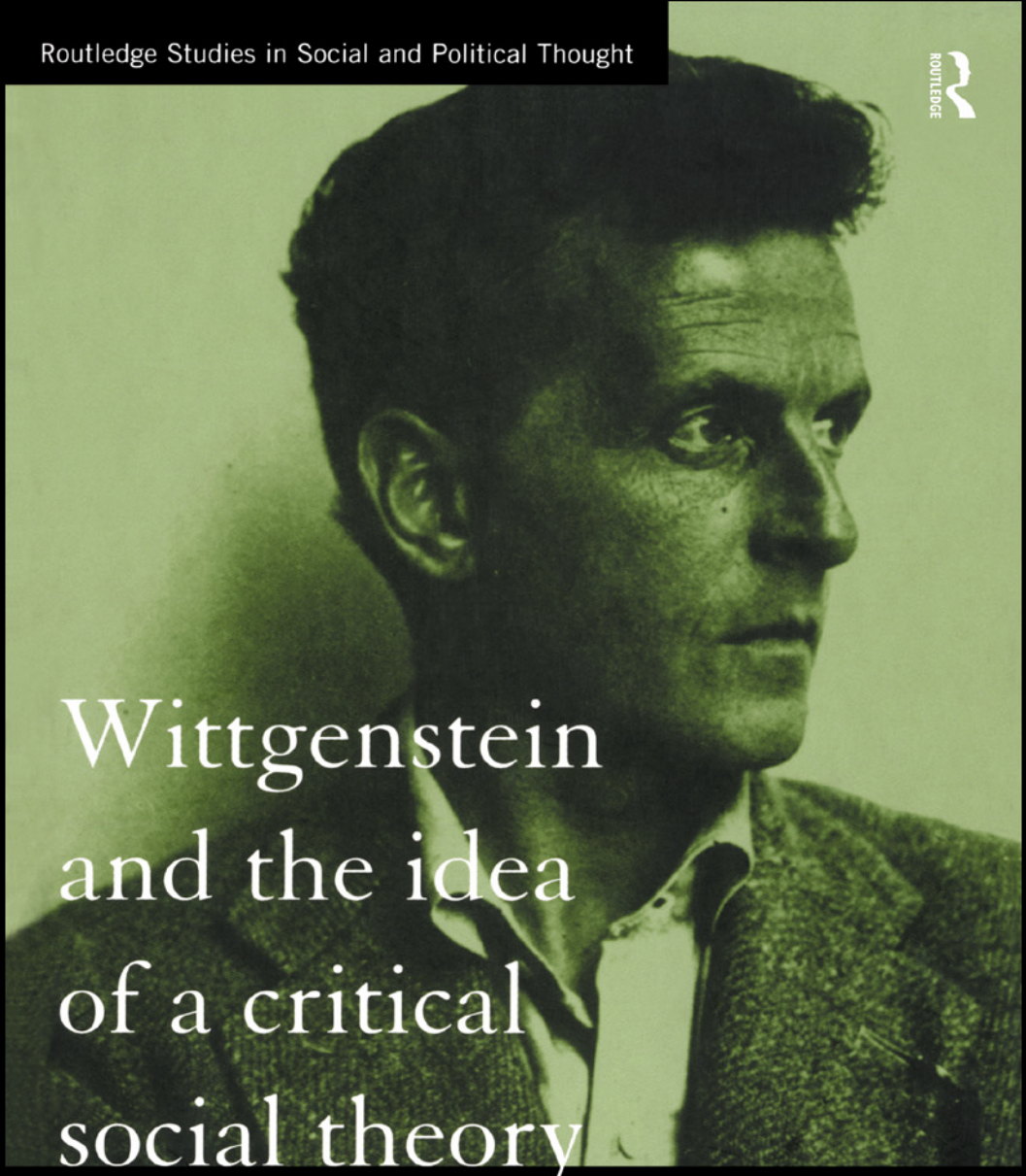

Wittgenstein and the idea of a critical social theory

A critique of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar

Nigel Pleasants

WITTGENSTEIN AND THE IDEA OF A CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

> Nigel Pleasants has written a brilliant book which calls into profound question both the radicalism and the genuine 'criticality' of 'critical social theory'. Deploying a deeply original reading of Wittgenstein's philosophy, Pleasants shows that the critical social theory of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar is, at bottom, a species of empty idealism which presupposes that reinterpreting the world 'theoretically' is, in itself, a way of changing it.
>
> Gavin Kitching

Wittgenstein is widely considered to be amongst the greatest of modern philosophers. He both revolutionised the subject of philosophy and made a profound impact on many disciplines across the spectrum of the humanities and the social sciences. In this book Nigel Pleasants examines Wittgenstein's influence on, and implications for, contemporary social and political theory.

Pleasants focuses on the 'critical social theory' of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar –each one of whom has endeavoured to assimilate Wittgenstein's philosophy to his own theoretical perspective. The distinctiveness of Pleasants's approach lies in prioritising Wittgenstein's rejection of philosophical theory and explanation. Pleasants draws upon Wittgenstein's critique of traditional philosophy in order to attack the central 'idea' of critical social theory: that a 'critical' social or political theory requires a foundational theory of individual and social 'ontology'. Pleasants argues that critical social theorists' models of individual agency and subjectivity, and transcendental social rules, are both incoherent and irrelevant to social and political criticism.

This highly regarded work also contains detailed and critical analyses of the ideas of related social and political theorists such as Winch, Hayek, Garfinkel and Milgram. It will provide an important new perspective for researchers and students of social sciences in general, political science, philosophy, social and political theory, and sociologists.

Nigel Pleasants is Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Exeter.

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CONTENTS

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1
WITTGENSTEIN AND CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

I Introduction

Ludwig Wittgenstein did not, in his main philosophical works, write about moral, political or cultural issues. However, his more 'personal' writings, post-humously collected in *Culture and Value,* show that he was in fact profoundly concerned with just these issues. It is entirely in keeping with his philosophy that such matters should not be addressed *philosophically*–which is not to say that he did not think that deliberation on them could not be improved by overcoming certain deeply entrenched confusions on what philosophy is and what it can be expected to do.

Wittgenstein's philosophy, then, does not have any particular connection with social and political issues. Nevertheless, a number of social and political theorists have claimed to perceive, or sought to establish, a Wittgensteinian social/political theory (for example Winch [1958] 1990; Danford 1978; Rubinstein 1981; Bloor 1983; Easton 1983; Schatzki 1996). However, I have no wish to construct a new 'Wittgensteinian critical social theory'. On the contrary, I regard the idea of a Wittgensteinian *theory* (of anything) as irreparably oxymoronic. But I am, like Wittgenstein, very much interested in social, political and cultural issues.

This book is written from the perspective of having attempted to learn from Wittgenstein's critique of philosophy and, in the light of that critique, examining how contemporary 'post-positivist/empiricist' theorists set about constructing a critical theory of modern social and political life. I focus upon 'critical social theory', which amounts, if not to a new paradigm, to a substantial 'new consensus' at least, in social, political and sociological theory. Critical social theory, as I characterise it, is represented pre-eminently by Anthony Giddens, Jürgen Habermas and Roy Bhaskar–each one of whom has attempted to assimilate to their own theoretical perspective what they take to be Wittgenstein's most important philosophical insights. Although there are of course considerable differences between each of these theorists, they manifest significant similarities and a common purpose. Part of my aim will be to identify and exhibit this common ground.

I find that critical social theory embodies very similar confusions to those that Wittgenstein identified in professional philosophical practice. I will endeavour to

show how Wittgenstein's critique of philosophy can be a valuable resource for revealing the incoherence and impotence of contemporary critical social theory. And I will argue that the central 'Idea' of critical social theory–that social and political criticism requires a foundational theory of individual and social 'ontology' –is a pseudo-scientific myth which they have erected upon the ruins of the old, now discredited, positivist conception of social science. Whilst my critique is directed at 'critical social theory' as a 'new consensus' in social and political theory, it will be prosecuted largely through detailed analyses and 'deconstructions'[1] of the central theoretical propositions of each of the aforementioned theorists.

In the remainder of this chapter I will outline my basic approach and attitude towards Wittgenstein's philosophy and adumbrate the main features of critical social theory, as I understand it.

II Wittgenstein: against theory

It is not my intention to provide a wholly 'new' reading or interpretation of Wittgenstein; indeed, for reasons which Wittgenstein himself espoused, I believe that there can be no such thing as 'a correct interpretation' which somehow captures what Wittgenstein *really meant*.[2] Rather, I want to propose that there are, broadly, two contrasting *attitudes* which can be assumed towards Wittgenstein's later philosophy, especially that of the *Philosophical Investigations*. The two attitudes involve either: (a) treating Wittgenstein's philosophy as a radically new method for providing a more accurate picture of certain phenomena (for example the nature of meaning, mental states, rule-following action, etc.) than traditional philosophical perspectives; or (b) accepting Wittgenstein's (1968:§109) statement that 'we may not advance any kind of theory.[3] There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all *explanation*.' In my view, these two attitudes are mutually exclusive–one cannot assert both that one should refrain from postulating explanatory theories *and* claim to be able to provide a *more accurate* picture of some phenomenon of interest.

Because of this conflict many theorists have chosen to ignore, or to de-emphasise, Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical stance. It is just this option that critical social theorists have taken–they have attempted to extract philosophical theses and 'ontological' insight from Wittgenstein's philosophy whilst rejecting his anti-theoretical stance as a disposable anti-scientific prejudice. Nor is it only social theorists who adopt this attitude towards Wittgenstein's philosophy; many, perhaps most, Wittgensteinian philosophers do so also, to varying degrees, though they rarely announce that this is what they are doing, and often seem to be unaware that they are doing it. My own approach to Wittgenstein's philosophy, by contrast, is to take his anti-theoretical injunctions seriously. In consequence of this, my critique of critical social theory will not be based upon any allegedly superior 'Wittgensteinian social theory'. I shall follow Wittgenstein in not claiming to be in possession of any special insight into (social and political) reality.

I referred above to two 'attitudes' towards Wittgenstein's philosophy because I do not want to claim that either is an 'interpretation' as such. Rather, the attitudes are better characterised as dispositional or presuppositional orientations that constitute a framework within which interpretation takes place. Moreover, I do not think that Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical recommendations can *be justified argumentatively*–at least not by conventionally accepted standards of philosophical argumentation. Any attempt to do so seems doomed to founder on self-referential paradox. Wittgenstein himself, anyway, did not attempt to argue for, or justify, his stance–as can be seen from the above quotation. His mode of expression utilises sweeping rhetorical flourishes; he once said (Wittgenstein 1970:28), quite openly, that he was 'making propaganda for one style of thinking as opposed to another'.

How could one set about proving that there cannot be a successful, informative or authentic philosophical theory? For a start, wouldn't one have to specify precisely what one means by 'theory'–which activities do, and which do not, count as instances of 'theory'? In other words one would need a *theory* of 'theory' –which would, of course, be self-defeating. Perhaps more to the point, one would have to claim to have a more accurate insight into the true nature of a phenomenon in order to be able to say *why* that phenomenon cannot be understood theoretically. In which case, one would be claiming to see, or know, more than any theory of that phenomenon could provide. But then wouldn't that 'seeing' or 'knowing' just be a *better* kind of theory than that which one rejects? These problems will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

In spite of myself, I have already been speaking too generally. Although Wittgenstein summarily renounces '*any kind of* theory', and advocates doing 'away with *all* explanation' (my emphases), he is, I contend, primarily concerned with a particular *kind* of theoretical explanation. In *Philosophical Investigations* he is preoccupied with what he calls 'pictures' of various phenomena.

Wittgenstein begins *Philosophical Investigations* with an account of 'a particular picture of the essence of human language' (Wittgenstein 1968:§1). This picture has exercised enormous influence on philosophers, from Plato to Wittgenstein himself in his early work; I will return to an analysis of it in the following chapter. A philosophical picture, in Wittgenstein's sense, is a theoretical representation which has lost its representational status and has been reified into a peculiarly compelling portrayal of the essence of some phenomenon. Such pictures are really only metaphors, analogies, models and representations, but they are experienced as knowledge of the essence of reality-in-itself: 'we predicate of the thing what lies in the method of representing it' (*ibid.:* §104). The compulsion is psychological as well as intellectual. When transfixed by a philosophical picture of some phenomenon–such as, for example, the nature of 'mind', 'consciousness', 'self, 'language', etc. –we feel as though we can see *directly* (not just 'theoretically') how these things *must* be, inherently, in and of themselves.

Many of the 'pictures' which occupy Wittgenstein's attention are not really *pictures* in the usual sense–they are reified representations of states of affairs which

cannot really be pictured at all. Or, rather, what can be pictured is just an aspect, or part of the whole phenomenon, which somehow seems to stand for such complex phenomena as 'language', 'mind', 'self, etc. Hence his critique is directed towards metonymical as well as metaphorical pictures. For example, a physical fact, such as 'the brain is located in the head', can be pictured unproblematically. But phenomena to do with mind and consciousness, which are not physical (at least not in the way that the brain is), cannot be represented pictorially–though it often seems otherwise because we are confronted by 'a picture which forces itself on us at every turn' (*ibid.:* §425). In this case, 'the brain' serves metonymically as a picture of mind and consciousness.

One of Wittgenstein's primary aims, in *Philosophical Investigations,* is to identify some of the most prominent, deeply entrenched, beguiling pictures which purport to reveal the real essence of 'language', 'meaning', 'understanding', etc.; 'a *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably' (*ibid.:* §115). Having identified and described these pictures, Wittgenstein goes on to show how insidiously misleading they are when it comes to thinking philosophically.

Our 'ordinary language' is, of course, heavily and unavoidably 'pictorial', metaphorical and metonymical. Wittgenstein does not suggest that there is anything wrong or unfortunate about this–on the contrary, 'we are not *striving after* an ideal, as if our ordinary vague sentences had not yet got a quite unexceptionable sense, and a perfect language awaited construction by us' (*ibid.:* §98). However, Wittgenstein believes that most professional philosophers are constitutionally committed to the use of reified, pictorial modes of representation–forms of thought that convey a spurious and deluded impression of quasi-scientific discovery and revelation. Such philosophers are self-deluded victims of 'grammatical illusions', and a 'misunderstanding of the logic of language' (*ibid.:* §§110, 93).

Wittgenstein's identification and analysis of a range of deeply entrenched metaphysical pictures, which are rooted in a variety of philosophical discourses, can be seen as a kind of ideology-critique. Or, as Wittgenstein himself describes his method, it is a kind of philosophical therapy (see Bouveresse 1995; also chapter 2, section III). This therapeutic method is called for because of the peculiar 'depth' (Wittgenstein 1968:§111) of entrenchment and compelling force of so many of the dominant pictures in philosophical discourse.

Wittgenstein makes no attempt to replace the metaphysical pictures that he deconstructs with new, improved, Wittgensteinian ones. His admonitions on theory, explanation and generalisation prohibit him from any such course–though as I said before, many post-Wittgensteinian philosophers have failed to see or acknowledge this. I shall follow Wittgenstein, in that my critique of critical social theory neither proceeds from, nor results in, any allegedly superior theoretical picture of social and political life. I will elaborate upon Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical stance at greater length and detail in the next chapter, but for now I proceed with a basic adumbration of the main features of critical social theory.

III Critical social theory: the new consensus

The so-called 'founding fathers' of modern sociology–Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim–produced a synthesis of various subjects, including philosophy, history, legal studies, anthropology, politics and economics. They can be, and often are, described as 'social theorists'. However, the kind of social theory with which I am concerned in this book is a quite recent development; it is a type of social theory that I regard as markedly different from its classical predecessor (mostly for the worst, I believe, but that is not my concern here). Critical social theory can be located somewhere between the philosophy of social science and social science itself. Whereas the philosophy of social science deals with epistemological questions, such as the epistemic status of 'law', 'truth', 'explanation', 'causation', etc., the main activity of critical social theorists is the construction of theoretical representations of the structures, rules, mechanisms and powers which (so they claim) constitute society, individual action and subjectivity.

I have chosen to focus on Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar as the foremost exemplars of critical social theory–but the latter term refers to a widely pre-valent *mode* of social and political theory, not just to these three individuals. Critical social theory represents what I–alluding to Giddens's (1984:xv-xx) account of the demise of the positivistic 'orthodox consensus' in social theory–call the 'new consensus'. Critical social theory has reached such prominence that considerable theoretical work is devoted to its exegesis, elaboration and reconstruction. Some of this work has been critical, but very little, if any, has questioned–as I intend to do –the basic assumptions and presuppositions of the 'Idea' of a critical social theory.

Giddens's (1984:xvi–xvii) definition of 'social theory' in the following quotation encapsulates what I mean by 'critical social theory':

> I use the term 'social theory' to encompass issues that I hold to be the concern of all the social sciences. These issues are to do with the nature of human action and the acting self; with how interaction should be conceptualised and its relation to institutions; and with grasping the practical connotations of social analysis.

The purpose of my appellation 'critical social theory'–which is based on the theorists' own self-descriptions–is to distinguish contemporary from classical social theory, and also to advert to the 'new consensus'. The term 'critical social theory' is frequently deployed by Habermas, who uses it to differentiate his theoretical practice from that of Frankfurt School 'Critical Theory' (see chapter 8). Similarly, Bhaskar calls his philosophy of social science and his social theory 'critical realism'. And although Giddens (1982a:15) uses the more neutral-sounding term 'social theory', he nevertheless asserts that 'social theory is inevitably critical theory'. Each of these theorists postulates an intimate relationship between critical theory and accurate theoretical depiction of individual subjectivity, action and social organisation.

As I said before, there are, of course, a number of important differences between these theorists, and they have occasionally criticised one another, but I want to focus on their similarities and common ground. Wittgenstein's (1968:§66) notion of 'family resemblances' is an apt means of characterising the relationships of similarity and difference which pertain between Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar. Wittgenstein suggests that, in the case of 'family resemblance' terms, there are a 'network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing', and it is this which relates the range of different phenomena that are called by the same name–not one essence that they all possess (*ibid.,* and see chapter 2, section IV). Applying this notion to critical social theory, it will be seen that, for example, the social 'ontologies' of Giddens and Bhaskar are much the same in key respects (see chapters 4 and 6), whereas Habermas's is somewhat different, though similar in general orientation (see chapter 8). On the other hand, Giddens and Habermas place much greater stress on the constitutive role of language in psychological and social life than does Bhaskar. But then Bhaskar and Habermas are quite favourably disposed to historical materialism and the notion of evolutionary social change, whereas Giddens is outrightly hostile to these perspectives. I could go on in the same vein, but instead turn now to issues on which all three are in substantial agreement. The main features of critical social theory that I want to highlight are as follows.

Firstly, each theorist upholds the Enlightenment faith in the possibility and desirability of objectively valid scientific knowledge, which includes *social* scientific knowledge. Thus, in addition to its departure from classical social theory, as I noted above, critical social theory is vehemently opposed to contemporary post-modernist and post-structuralist social theories. Whilst acknowledging certain important insights contained in such theories, critical social theorists reject the radical relativism that these theories embrace. However, the objectivity to which critical social theorists subscribe is a 'hermeneutical' rather than a positivist or empiricist naturalism (see chapter 3, section VI).

Secondly, critical social theory is extraordinarily eclectic in its attempt to synthesise and reconcile a bewildering array of diverse and often contradictory schools and types of social theory and philosophy. In addition to classical social theory (Marx, Weber, Durkheim), both 'hermeneutical social theory' (Winch, Goffman, Schutz, Garfinkel) and 'continental hermeneutics' (Gadamer, Heidegger) have proven to be particularly attractive and alluring to critical social theorists. Philosophically, critical social theorists have sought to reconcile empiricism and rationalism to produce new theories of knowledge and consciousness (see chapter 4). And as I mentioned earlier, critical social theory has been heavily influenced by Wittgenstein and post-Wittgensteinian philosophy. A large part of the meaning of the term 'critical' in critical social theory consists in a 'critical' reformulation and recombination of these, and many other, social theories and philosophies.

Thirdly, critical social theorists reject positivism and empiricism as a false and outmoded philosophy and epistemology respectively. Positivism and empiricism are also condemned for providing theoretical legitimation for manipulative and

exploitative social sciences and social technologies. Positivist and empiricist social theories, particularly those of the classic social theorists, are attacked for promulgating a picture of individuals as passive subjects of deterministic social systems and historical forces. In this sense, critical social theory continues in the tradition of the Critical Theory inaugurated by Adorno and Horkheimer, where the latter regarded positivism and empiricism as the ideology of 'instrumental reason' and 'reified' society (see chapter 8).

Fourthly, critical social theorists conceive of their activities as a kind of Lockean theoretical 'under-labouring' for social science (Bhaskar 1978:10 n.8). This theoretical labour is often described by Bhaskar and Giddens as the elucidation of individual and social 'ontology', and by Habermas as the 'rational reconstruction' (1990:31) of communicative action and social systems. The two descriptions amount to basically the same kind of programme, but I will mainly use the term 'ontology' to cover both. The aim of ontological elucidation is to provide a highly generalised theoretical account of the fundamental nature of individuals (subjectivity, action, agency, knowledge, etc.) and social organisation (structure, system, mechanisms, institutions, etc.). These theoretical representations are cast in a universal and transcendental form; as Habermas (1989:119) puts it: 'analysis aims at structures that, in contrast to the historical shapes of particular lifeworlds and life-forms, are put forward as invariant'. Ontological elucidation is supposed to identify the structures, mechanisms, powers, states and processes which, it is claimed, underlie and generate individual action and social organisation as such. The powers, mechanisms and structures postulated in these theories of ontology transcend sensory awareness or detectability, and are inferred, or 'reconstructed', on the basis of being necessary to explain theoretically the known and observable features of society and individuality.[4]

Fifthly, critical social theorists have been strongly influenced by post-empiricist and post-positivist philosophy of science (developed by Popper, Kuhn, Polanyi, Harré, Hesse and others), and endeavour to apply the lessons (as they see them) of that movement to social and political theory. Each of my chosen critical social theorists advocates (post-empiricist) realism with respect to the ontological status of the theoretical entities that they conceptualise. This categorisation, I presume, applies uncontentiously to Bhaskar and Giddens,[5] but it may be more contentious for Habermas. Because of his 'intersubjective' conception of knowledge and his 'discourse theory of truth' (1993:162), Habermas is not usually considered to be a 'realist'–Bhaskar (1993:430), for example, objects to Habermas's alleged lack of realism and 'disdain for ontology'. However, in spite of this, I offer two major justifications–one negative and one positive–for my categorisation:

1 Realism does not necessarily entail any particular theory of truth; as Searle (1996:154) –himself a realist–points out: 'realism is consistent with any theory of truth because it is a theory of ontology and not of the meaning of "true"'. Indeed, Bhaskar (1986:6) is of the same view: 'realism is not a theory of knowledge or truth, but of *being*'.

2 Habermas's social theory, just like those of Bhaskar and Giddens, consists essentially in a 'theory of ontology'. His theory of communicative action entails the 'ontological presuppositions' of three interlinked and interdependent 'worlds', namely (i) the 'objective world' of external reality; (ii) the intersubjective 'common social world'; and (iii) the individual's 'own subjective world' (Habermas 1987:312–14).

Hence I categorise Habermas as a (post-empiricist) realist on the basis of his theoretical interest in ontology. It is true that his theory of ontology is somewhat different from Bhaskar's (though they share the same tripartite structure) and Giddens's– but that does not vitiate its status as a theory of ontology, nor does it make it an anti- or non-realist philosophy. Moreover, Habermas uses the same metaphorical language of 'ontological depth' as Bhaskar and Giddens, as is evident in his assertion that:

> rational reconstructions…explicate only in the essentialist sense; if they are true, they have to correspond precisely to the rules that are oper-atively effective in the object domain–that is, to the rules that actually determine the production of surface structures.
>
> (Habermas 1979:16)

The basic philosophical attitude of each of these critical social theorists is that epistemological questions are to be subordinated to *what there is to know*. They believe that the quest for a foundationalist epistemology is an inevitable product of the scepticism intrinsic to empiricist philosophy.

Having outlined the main features of critical social theory somewhat 'descriptively', I will now adopt a rather more evaluative stance, which introduces what I consider to be its central incoherence.

Perhaps the single greatest bequest of post-empiricist philosophy of science to critical social theory is the view that all knowledge-claims are irreparably *fallible*. But a perverse and unintended consequence of the post-empiricists' doctrine of fallibilism is that it has increased the (ontological) *certainty* of critical social theorists. Thus critical social theorists embrace both *epistemological relativism* and *ontological realism,* and indeed maintain that the latter necessitates the former (Bhaskar 1989a:57; Giddens 1976:145). This means that critical social theorists claim that we can know 'ontologically' that social organisation and individual subjectivity is constituted by certain structures, rules, mechanisms, powers, etc., of universal scope, whilst acknowledging that any particular account of this ontology is always (epistemologically) fallible and contingent. Thus, for example, Bhaskar (1978:29–original emphasis) asserts, in ontological voice: 'given that science does or could occur, the world *must* be a certain way…that the world is structured and differentiated can be established by philosophical argument'. But he also insists, now speaking epistemologically, that any knowledge-claims regarding particular entities must be regarded as contingent and fallible.[6] Habermas exhibits exactly

the same attitude, claiming that we can identify certain 'unavoidable', 'inescapable', and 'universal' conditions of speech and action–but that any particular theoretical representation of these abstract conditions and mechanisms is equally unavoidably fallible. (Sec chapter 8, section V.i for further critical analysis of Habermas's epistemological position.)

In my view, this conjunction of epistemological relativism and ontological realism is a 'conjuring trick' (Wittgenstein 1968:§308) whereby critical social theorists try to have the best of both worlds. The 'conjuring trick' is performed largely by declaring that ontological theory-construction must have priority over epistemological misgivings. Thus Giddens (1984:xx) warns that 'concentration upon epistemological issues draws attention away from the more "ontological" concerns of social theory', and he counsels against 'becoming preoccupied with epistemological disputes'. In similar vein, Bhaskar (1978:43) offers the following maxim: 'to be a fallibilist about knowledge, it is necessary to be a realist about things. Conversely, to be a sceptic about things is to be a dogmatist about knowledge.'

Because fallibilism extends in principle to the most (apparently) secure scientific knowledge, the abstractness, speculativeness and untestability of theories of social and individual ontology is seen to be no bar to their validity. One might, perhaps, have expected that the doctrine of fallibilism would have the opposite effect; that is, one might expect that it would make critical social theorists wary of claiming to know the fundamental nature of individual subjectivity and the underlying structure of social organisation–especially considering the spectacular lack of 'success' of the social sciences. But it is not so–critical social theory is decidedly anti-sceptical–and, I have to say, profoundly un-self-critical. Despite their professed acceptance of epistemological relativism, critical social theorists proceed as if this principle applies to all but their own theoretical pronouncements.

Each of the critical social theorists that I examine maintains that their project is 'anti-foundationalist'. However, this disavowal is predicated on the dubious assumption that foundationalism *only* applies to the Cartesian and Kantian quest for indubitable epistemic foundations. Critical social theorists' interpretation of the import of fallibilism therefore has the consequence of re-admitting a very close relation of foundationalism via the back door, as it were.[7] 'Ontological realism' is, in my view, simply an updated post-Cartesian/Kantian version of traditional foundationalism–it is an 'ontological foundationalism'.

IV Wittgenstein and critical social theory

Each of the critical social theorists upon whom I focus has been strongly influenced by Wittgenstein and post-Wittgensteinian philosophy. But the attitude that they have assumed towards this philosophy is that its (considerable) value is contained in the 'ontological insight' that it affords with respect to the nature and structure of individual subjectivity and social organisation. Indeed, Wittgenstein's philosophy is particularly attractive to critical social theorists because it seems to

say that many perplexing philosophical problems to do with mind, self, consciousness, meaning, etc. –which have bedevilled traditional philosophy– can be treated social-theoretically. For example, Wittgenstein's famous 'rule-following' remarks are seen to exhibit insightful ontological observations–but ones which can, and need to be, greatly improved by being incorporated into the critical social theorist's own more logically rigorous and systematic social theory. Thus Wittgenstein is regarded as a social theorist *manqué,* and his 'ontological insights' are seen as requiring theoretical clarification and reconstruction.

In sharp contrast to critical social theory, I prioritise just that side of Wittgenstein's philosophy that the former reject for being nihilistic, irrational and hence–so they believe–'conservative' and un-critical. I will attempt to show that Wittgenstein's critique of traditional philosophical theory can be extended *a fortiori* to critical social theory. My strategy will be to tackle, in a manner similar to Wittgenstein's 'deconstructions' of the pictures which dominate traditional philosophical thought, the theoretical 'pictures' which captivate critical social theorists. Because of the peculiar nature of critical social theory, as outlined above, I refer to the pictures which constitute their theoretical systems as *'ontological pictures'.* The theories on which most of my critical analyses are directed are: Giddens's theory of 'structuration' (chapter 4); Bhaskar's 'transcendental realism' and 'transformational model of social activity' (chapter 6); and Habermas's theories of 'communicative action' and 'discourse ethics' (chapter 8). In each case I identify, and 'deconstruct', the ontological pictures upon which these social theories are based.

I should stress that, in line with my approach to Wittgenstein's philosophy that I introduced above, my critique of critical social theory is an attempt to *apply* what I have learnt from Wittgenstein, and does not in any way invoke, imply, or presuppose an alternative 'Wittgensteinian' social or political theory.[8] My critique operates on two levels: firstly, it is a critique of the *social theory* of critical social theory and, secondly, it repudiates the latter's claim to be a *critical theory*. I do not, as such, claim that social theory is 'impossible', or even that it is totally worthless–but I do, following Wittgenstein's critique of traditional philosophy, advocate thoroughgoing scepticism towards the 'explanatory power' and critical efficacy of the social theory that is critical social theory. I do not measure critical social theory against some other kind of theory–rather, I judge it 'immanently' against its own standards and criteria (see chapter 2, section III).

The central aims of this book are (1) to present an approach to Wittgenstein which makes sense of his anti-theoretical and anti-explanatory stance, but which results neither in the relativistic *'paralysis of the critical will'* that Giddens (1979: 250–1) attributes to Wittgensteinian philosophy, nor the social and political conservatism (Nyíri 1982:59; Dunn 1985:175; my chapter 5) that is invariably associated with Wittgenstein and post-Wittgensteinian philosophy. (2) In the light of this approach, to 'deconstruct' the core concepts and theoretical schema through which critical social theorists construct their 'ontological pictures' of individual subjectivity, action and social structure/system. And (3) to reveal and exhibit the

incoherence and impotence of critical social theorists' post-empiricist reformulation of critical theory.

Finally, a word about the organisation of my argument. Because of the 'family resemblances' between Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar, and because this book is a critique of *critical social theory* as a new consensus in social theory—and not just a critique of these individual theorists—many of my arguments and 'deconstructions', even when directed towards particular individuals, apply also to other critical social theorists. Each of my chosen critical social theorists is the primary subject of at least one chapter—Giddens in chapter 4, Bhaskar in chapter 6, and Habermas in chapter 8, but in each case the argument extends to the others too. For example, chapter 4 criticises the notions of 'tacit knowledge' and 'transcendental rules', and does so through a detailed engagement with Giddens's theory of structuration—but these two concepts are equally central to Bhaskar's transformational model of social activity and Habermas's theory of communicative action. I focus on Giddens in this chapter because he has theorised on these concepts at greater length and detail than either Bhaskar or Habermas. The same rationale applies to Bhaskar's concept of agency in chapter 6 and to Habermas's idea of a critical theory in chapter 8.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide some stage-setting for the critical analyses to follow. Chapter 2 outlines my understanding of the nature and import of Wittgenstein's 'anti-theoretical' stance, and does so through comparing Wittgenstein's approach with that of Richard Rorty's radical pragmatism; it then examines the attempt of a 'realist' philosopher to apply Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblances' to a contentious debate in political philosophy. Chapter 3 documents the extent of Winch's influence on the reception of Wittgenstein's philosophy, and claims that Winch exercised a formative influence on the programme of critical social theory. Chapter 5 criticises Giddens's and Hayek's use of the concepts 'tacit knowledge' and 'transcendental rules' in their 'epistemological argument against socialism'. In Chapter 7 I examine ethnomethodology, a programme of social inquiry which has clear affinities with Wittgenstein's philosophy and which has, like Winch, been extremely influential on critical social theory. My critique of ethnomethodology is prosecuted through a critical comparison with Milgram's 'obedience experiments', the latter providing a valuable corrective both to the 'ontological picture' of the individual and the idea of a critical social theory propounded by Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar.

2

DOES WITTGENSTEIN MEAN WHAT HE SAYS?

The rejection of 'theory' and 'explanation'

> We predicate of the thing what lies in the method of representing it…we think we are perceiving a state of affairs of the highest generality.
>
> (Wittgenstein 1968:§104)

I Introduction

Following on from the previous chapter, this chapter enlarges upon my attitude towards the 'anti-theoretical' stance of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. This strategy contrasts with that attitude which regards the latter as a font of superior 'ontological' insight into the nature of things. My aim here is to provide an outline of Wittgenstein's approach to the philosophical issues with which he was preoccupied and to indicate how this contrasts with orthodox philosophical theory and critical social theory. To a certain extent this chapter violates one of my main interpretive principles: by topicalising Wittgenstein's approach to theory it carries the risk–which I want to avoid–of reifying this approach into an *alternative* theoretical perspective. Therefore I ask the reader to bear in mind that I shall be attempting to 'say' that which can only really be–or at least is much better–'shown' or 'done'.[1]

The difficulty that I face is that of 'saying', without 'theorising', *why* we should desist from universal, transcendental theoretical pictures and propositions in social and political criticism. Nevertheless, I will, in this chapter, attempt to show roughly what Wittgenstein's approach to philosophical theory is, and leave to subsequent chapters the question of how this relates to social and political criticism. The usefulness of Wittgenstein's approach will be shown in the way that I go on to criticise critical social theory.

The main theme of this chapter is Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, and his diagnosis of a deeply entrenched 'misunderstanding of the logic of language' (1968:§93). In order to bring out the distinctiveness of Wittgenstein's position, my analysis will not be restricted to critical social theory. My insistence on taking seriously Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical stance is very likely to suggest a position

close to Rorty's radical 'Wittgensteinian' neo-pragmatism. I will therefore use Rorty's philosophy as a foil to address the 'performative contradiction' (Habermas 1990: 129) to which an anti-theoretical stance is potentially susceptible, and to which Rorty (in my view) succumbs but which Wittgenstein avoids. The aim is to clarify which *kind* of theory Wittgenstein repudiates. In the light of this discussion of Wittgenstein's attitude towards theory and explanation, I go on to examine an attempt by a 'realist' political philosopher to apply Wittgenstein's anti-essentialist notion of 'family resemblances' to contemporary disputes on the nature of 'the market'. I focus in some detail on an article by John O'Neill (1995) in which the author attempts to appropriate Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblances' in the service of an 'essentialist' theory of meaning and reference. Although not one of the three critical social theorists with whom I am predominantly concerned, O'Neill typifies their (and others') penchant for reading Wittgenstein 'ontologically'.

II Misunderstanding the logic of language

Wittgenstein was, of course, centrally concerned with 'language'. I shall shortly explicate and defend his claim that he offered no *theory* of 'language in general'. Most philosophical and social-theoretical commentators completely ignore Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical disclaimers, and attribute to him a number of metaphysical theses concerning language, meaning, rules, etc. Examples of these abound in the exegetical literature on Wittgenstein. For example, it is frequently reported that Wittgenstein propounded the neo-Kantian thesis of linguistic idealism, which states that reality is in some way intrinsically 'linguistic'. Thus Wittgenstein allegedly believed, in Genova's (1995:105) words, that 'there truly is nothing beyond language' (see also Williams 1981; Hekman 1986:137). Another metaphysical thesis attributed to Wittgenstein, often as a corollary of the former, is the idea that reality is composed of 'language-games', each with its own internal meaning-constituting rules. An example of this 'ontologisation' of the concept 'language-game' is Apel's (1980:22) attribution to Wittgenstein of 'the new working hypothesis of an unlimited number of different, but more or less related, "language-games" which develop and disintegrate historically'. (Apel's reading of Wittgenstein exercised a formative influence on Habermas; see chapter 3, section II.)

However, although Wittgenstein's investigations frequently feature instances and scenes of language use, he did not promulgate the view that language is the *primary,* or *only,* reality. In fact, as Wittgenstein makes abundantly clear in *On Certainty,* he thought that realism, scepticism, idealism and linguistic idealism are equally distorted philosophical perspectives. It is also routinely assumed that Wittgenstein inaugurated 'ordinary language philosophy', and with it the celebration of 'commonsense' (of the 'ordinary' person-in-the-street) as a body of judgement blessed with superior wisdom to that of science and philosophy.[2] But *On Certainty,* which contains Wittgenstein's most thematically coherent and

sustained set of observations, is primarily directed at criticising G.E.Moore's 'commonsense realism' (see chapter 6, section VI).

Wittgenstein made no grand statements about the ontological categorisation of language, but he showed no such reticence in characterising his view of philosophy:

> 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. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems.
>
> (1968:§109)

It should be patently obvious, therefore, that this view of philosophy leaves Wittgenstein no space from which to make *any* metaphysical assertion, such as those above, and many others, that are so frequently attributed to him. Another reason for offering no view on the ontological status of language is that Wittgenstein thought it deeply mistaken and reificatory to assume that there is any such entity as 'Language' *simpliciter*. 'we are under the illusion that what is peculiar, profound, essential, in our investigation, resides in trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language' (1968:§97).

Perhaps the single most difficult theme in Wittgenstein's later writings, which philosophers and social/political theorists alike seem to be constitutionally unable to see or accept, is that he offers no philosophical theory at all. No theory, that is, of 'language', 'meaning', 'rule-following', 'form(s) of life', etc. *as such* and *in general*.[3] Commentators on Wittgenstein adopt a number of strategies to deal with his anti-theoretical stance, ranging from passing over it or simply rejecting it, to converting it (usually surreptitiously) into some other kind of meta-theory. An example of the latter is Genova's (1995:20, 27) claim that although Wittgenstein prioritised 'seeing over thinking', nevertheless his notion of a 'perspicuous representation remains a kind of "net" for describing reality'. On this view, then, Wittgenstein is supposed to be in command of a superior view of 'reality' than ordinary philosophers.

Wittgenstein (1968:§122) says that 'the concept of a perspicuous presentation *[Übersichtliche Darstellung]* is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things' (amended translation). The difficulty of translating *Übersichtliche Darstellung* has often been noted, but it is usually the rendition of *Übersichtliche* which is questioned. However, in my view, Anscombe's translation of *Darstellung* as 'representation' is strikingly infelicitous. Although 'representation' is generally a perfectly acceptable translation of *Darstellung,* in Wittgenstein's case it is not. In my view the proper translation of *Darstellung* in this passage is *'presentation'* (it can be translated as either 'presentation' or 'representation').[4] 'Presentation' fits in much better with Wittgenstein's insistence on *describing the facts* as they present themselves, without '*re*-presenting' them in a

putatively explanatory theory. As Wittgenstein says (1981:§220), 'Nonsense. Nonsense, –because you are making assumptions instead of simply describing. If your head is haunted by explanations here, you are neglecting to remind yourself of the most important facts.'

My objections to 'representation' in this context are, firstly, it suggests a relatively fixed image–that is, a 'picture' in Wittgenstein's sense (see chapter 1), which supposedly portrays the 'essence' of a phenomenon. Secondly, it is too 'theory laden', which obviously conflicts with Wittgenstein's method of 'deconstructing' theoretical representations. Wittgenstein does not say or mean that a *Übersichtliche Darstellung* is some special method or perspective ('a kind of "net" for describing reality') which reveals 'the way things really are'. It is simply an admonition to describe *(present)* the relevant facts in such a way as to 'remind' us of what we already know (but have 'forgotten' under the thrall of philosophical theory)–without *re-presenting* (and thereby distorting or falsifying) them in some preconceived philosophical theory. This fixation on the translation of one particular word might appear to be overly pedantic and un-Wittgensteinian, but its significance should become more apparent later on.

It is extremely rare for Wittgenstein to be taken at his word on the epistemic status of his investigations. Some ethnomethodologists come close to following through with his methodological policy–but even these, so I will argue in chapter 7, ultimately remain entwined within a social-theoretical problematic dominated by the task of theoretical representation. However, rather than assuming either that Wittgenstein did not really mean quite what he said, or that what he said is untenable, I will endeavour to treat his injunctions on theory and explanation *hermeneutically*. The task of assuming a genuinely hermeneutical *attitude*[5] towards puzzling textual claims is illuminatingly described by Kuhn (1977:xii):

> When reading the works of an important thinker, look first for the apparent absurdities in the text and ask yourself how a sensible person could have written them. When you find an answer…when these passages make sense, then you may find that more central passages, ones you previously thought you understood, have changed their meaning.

This is what I have attempted to do with Wittgenstein's account of his method – an account which most philosophers and social theorists (including my former self) experience great difficulty in accepting. And I believe that, just as Kuhn says, once the 'apparent absurdities' in Wittgenstein's text (in this case, his remarks on philosophy, theory and explanation) have been rendered intelligible, new light is cast on the meaning of those sections which are taken to be quasi-sociological, explanatory accounts of individual action, rules and rule-following, etc. As Kuhn's hermeneutical principle says, the rule-following sections of *Philosophical Investigations*–which carry the weight of an enormous body of established interpretation–do indeed seem to change their meaning when Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical and

anti-explanatory stance is taken at face value. I will elaborate upon this claim in chapter 4.

Wittgenstein vehemently rejects the idea of any universal theory capturing the fundamental reality of the human condition. Theories of this kind, he says, postulate an 'order existing between the concepts of proposition, word, proof, truth, experience, and so on. This order is a *super*-order between–so to speak–*super*-concepts' (Wittgenstein 1968:§97). But for Wittgenstein, the reality of this 'super-order' of 'super-concepts' does not extend outside the theoretical system –the 'language-game' –in which it is formulated. Instead of such 'grand' theorising, Wittgenstein counsels that we should be content with accounts and descriptions of phenomena tied to particular tasks, or as he says, 'assembling reminders for particular purposes' (1968:§127). It is my contention that this applies (reflexively) to the notion of *praxis,* or 'practice'– and to the other master-concepts attributed to Wittgenstein, such as 'form(s) of life', 'language-game' and 'rule-following'. There is indeed a very seductive temptation (to which many Wittgensteinian philosophers have succumbed) to reify these terms into concepts which identify and explain whole classes of phenomena existing 'out there' in the world, or comprising its structure. Wittgenstein believes that this temptation is caused by 'a misunderstanding of the logic of language'.

This misunderstanding has a number of interlocking components which Wittgenstein subjects to quite systematic criticism in the opening sections of *Philosophical Investigations* and in an *ad hoc* manner throughout the book. These criticisms are well known, but philosophers and social theorists rarely manage to take heed of them in their own work–not even when that work consists in exegesis and exposition of Wittgenstein. The most pervasive misunderstanding comes from regarding language as a special universal medium of meaning. This picture portrays 'language' as a kind of quasi-physical, quasi-spiritual, Platonic medium of meaning which exists over and above individual language users and mediates between 'subjective' thought and 'objective' reality. In this picture, 'these concepts: proposition, language, thought, world, stand in line one behind the other' (*ibid.:* §96).

The ontological primacy accorded to language by 'continental' hermeneuticists, such as Gadamer and Heidegger, conveys just such a picture of 'Language' as a 'super-order' of being: 'the universality of human linguisticality [is] a limitless medium that carries *everything* within it' (Gadamer 1977:25).[6] (See chapter 3, section II for further discussion on Wittgenstein's relation to the hermeneutical tradition.) A very similar position is attributed to Wittgenstein by Hintikka and Hintikka (1986:1), which they call the thesis of 'language as the universal medium'. But, tellingly, they claim that Wittgenstein never articulated this thesis because although he allegedly believed in the truth of it, he thought it was unsayable due to another thesis that he is supposed to have held, namely 'the *ineffability of semantics*' (*ibid.:* 2). These authors wilfully refuse to see that, in his later work, Wittgenstein explicitly repudiated his earlier *metaphysical* doctrine of the 'unsayable': 'a nothing

would serve just as well as a something about which nothing could be said' (1968:§304).

This transcendental view of the overall function of language is conjoined to another, subservient, picture which depicts the operation of language in particular instances in terms of a 'model of "object and designation"' (*ibid.:* §293). Wittgenstein commences *Philosophical Investigations* by describing what he calls 'a particular picture of the essence of human language' (*ibid.:* §1). This picture is deeply embedded in the minds of philosophers. It provides a generalised, universal model of *the* essential function of language: 'individual words in language name objects—sentences are combinations of such names…Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.' *(ibid.)*

Wittgenstein has two main objections to this 'name-object' picture of language. Firstly, it begs the interesting question: *some* words obviously are used as names for objects, but the practice of naming does not, in itself, *explain* anything. 'Naming' is a particular practice amongst other linguistic practices, and therefore cannot serve as a foundational explanation of *all* those practices (nor does it explain itself, as it were). Secondly, and relatedly, generalising from the linguistic practice of naming-objects to an explanatory model of 'Language' itself, involves the extension of a (poorly understood) practice to an unspecifiably large and diverse number of linguistic practices that are nothing like 'naming an object'.[7] Indeed, the very act of referring to 'language' in this way reifies the manifold practices denoted by the term 'language' into a self-subsistent 'quasi-object' with a 'name'—that is, 'Language' (with an implicit capital 'L') —thereby making it a proper noun (see also Kitching 1994:137).

One of the main causes of theorists' misunderstanding the logic of language is what Wittgenstein (1972:17) diagnoses as the 'craving for generality'—a condition he thought to be endemic to the philosophical profession. This craving is based on the feeling that because there is an established practice of using a concept which *seems* to function as a 'name' for some object, event, structure or process, then it must be possible and desirable to formulate some proposition or set of propositions which represent the essential property or properties of the phenomenon in question. Hence, for example, the *de facto* currency of expressions (amongst professionals) such as 'social phenomena', 'language', 'knowledge', 'form of life', etc., gives theorists the impression that it must be possible to produce a theoretical account which encompasses all empirical instances of the expres-sion.[8] But whilst we have no problem identifying a particular act as an instance of 'a social phenomenon', it is chimerical to believe that one could say something both true *and interesting* about 'social phenomena' *per se*. There is something viciously circular about the craving for generality: the terms 'language', 'social phenomena', etc., when used by theorists, are motivated by the desire to say something of universal applicability (this is what guarantees such pronouncements their theoretical status). Because these theoretical terms are not obviously meaningless (if for no other reason than that the profession of theorists generates and sustains

the meaning through their own usage) it is assumed to be a legitimate and important task to produce a theory of the phenomena putatively named by general concepts. This is a kind of 'boot-strapping' process, and it exemplifies Wittgenstein's contention that 'theoretical problems' are self-generated by theorists' own practice.

Wittgenstein's later approach to language was to investigate some of the ways in which the myriad of different linguistic practices operate, rather than presupposing (as he did in the *Tractatus*) a *single* metaphysical connection between 'language' and 'the world' as an explanation for *the* way in which 'Language' functions. Hence Wittgenstein's (1968:§43) famous statement, that 'the meaning of a word is its use in the language', should be seen as a methodological injunction, *not* a new theory of meaning–the latter being the way that critical social theorists (and many others[9]) interpret it. Thus Habermas (1991:115) praises Wittgenstein's 'use *theory* of meaning', and similarly Giddens (1987:13) credits Wittgenstein with a *'discovery'* concerning 'the grounds' of linguistic 'meaningfulness' (my emphases).

Like many other philosophers and social theorists, Habermas and Giddens project theoretical models onto Wittgenstein's remarks. Thus Giddens (1979:4, 34–ori-ginal emphasis) attributes to Wittgenstein the following 'semantic theory': 'the meaning of terms *are never "present" in their utterance or enunciation,* and "exist" only in the continual process of their actualisation within forms of life'. In transmogrifying Wittgenstein's methodological injunction into a 'semantic theory' (albeit a 'social' one), Giddens merely propounds yet another metaphysical *theory* of meaning. Giddens's 'Wittgensteinian' semantic theory consists of a negative claim about where 'the meaning of terms' is not to be found and, conversely, a positive claim on where it *is* to be found. Though not a mental process, meaning remains, on Giddens's reformulation of Wittgenstein's views, a 'quasi-object' in a 'quasi-space' –Giddens 'interprets a grammatical movement made by [himself] as a quasi-physical phenomenon which [he is] observing' (Wittgenstein 1968:§401). This semantic theory requires the introduction of a new ontological category, that of 'virtual' existence (Giddens 1979:46).[10] Wittgenstein (1972:57) says of this kind of philosophical thesis that a 'new notation', a new 'form of expression' is being proposed. It is therefore important to notice that 'virtual existence' and 'the play of difference' (Giddens 1979:33) are not *discoveries* of new facts about meaning. Giddens uses everyday words ('existence', 'presence' and 'difference') –which ordinarily convey their meanings quite unexceptionably–in a very peculiar way, the upshot of which is presented as a new 'discovery'. He thus continues to be ensnared by the 'metaphysics of [quasi] presence' from which he wishes to escape.

According to Wittgenstein, a 'new notation' in philosophy does not, as its author claims, bring us into closer contact with 'reality', with 'the way things really are' at their most ultimate level of being (ontology); it *is just* a new way of speaking or writing. In forthcoming chapters I will try to show, firstly, that critical

social theory is just a 'new(ish)' way of speaking and writing critically about social and political phenomena, and, secondly, that it is an outstandingly *bad,* indeed inac-curate–though evidently seductive–'new' way of speaking and writing in this domain.

It is now time to address more fully Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical stance. How does/can he avoid the problem of self-referential inconsistency and charges of *tu quoque* with respect to his uncompromising rejection of theory?

III Wittgenstein's rejection of theory and explanation

Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy throws up some difficult problems and puzzles, for example: how does one justify such a position? Doesn't such a position embody just that 'craving for generality' against which Wittgenstein warns? How does one distinguish 'theory' and 'explanation' from plain 'description' – do we need a criterion of demarcation? Doesn't Wittgenstein face the same self-referential conundrum as the extreme relativist who insists that *all* knowledge claims are relative; that is, is Wittgenstein surreptitiously drawing upon an implicitly superior version of that which he rejects? Doesn't the rejection of theory, explanation and metaphysics ultimately rest on some higher-order theory, explanation and metaphysical world-view? This latter possibility is in fact realised in the pragmatist stance adopted by Rorty–a philosopher famed for his attempts at fulfilling Wittgenstein's desire to bring metaphysical philosophy to an end.[11] It is instructive to examine Rorty's pragmatism because although he claims to imple-ment Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical recommendations, he does not succeed in this endeavour, and in fact exemplifies the contradictions to which this stance is (potentially) vulnerable.

Rorty repudiates metaphysical philosophy as vehemently as Wittgenstein did, and he counsels that we should give up philosophical theory in favour of more 'literary' pursuits. In particular, Rorty urges that we should abandon such traditional philosophical shibboleths as 'Truth', 'Objectivity', 'Rationality', 'essence', 'foundations for knowledge and morality' and 'grand narratives' of historical progress. He optimistically looks forward to the coming of a 'postmetaphysical', 'historicist and nominalist culture' (Rorty 1989:xvi). All of this might well appear to be–and is presented by Rorty as–exactly what Wittgenstein wanted. However, despite his avowed hostility to metaphysical philosophy, Rorty presents a very detailed and extensive 'ontological picture' of reality and the human condition to support his anti-philosophical stance.

Rorty's overarching ontological picture is designed to exhibit 'the sheer contingency of individual existence' (*ibid.:* 26). Acknowledging the 'universality and necessity of the individual and contingent' leads to the 'repudiation of the very idea of anything–mind or matter, self or world–having an intrinsic nature' (*ibid.:* 26, 4). From this 'big picture' of contingency, Rorty derives a certain conception of social solidarity, the desirability of political liberalism, and a picture of individual creativity as the invention of new 'vocabularies' and metaphors–

'anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed' (*ibid.:* 73). Thus Rorty seeks to replace old-fashioned scientific and philosophical ideals of 'discovery' and 'accurate representation' with 'invention' and 'creativity'. On this view, all social, political and scientific power is essentially linguistic: we should see 'the poet, in the generic sense of the maker of new words, the shaper of new languages, as the vanguard of the species' (*ibid.:* 20).[12] Rorty insists that there is no essential 'human nature' for philosophical theories to represent; particular people and peoples are what they make themselves to be through their use of language (this is the Nietzschean idea of self-creation: 'to change how we talk is to change what, for our own purposes, we are' *[ibid.]*). It rather looks as though Rorty is saying that the essential purpose of language is creativity and expression– a straight swap for the old philosophical idea of 'representation'. There can be no doubt that Rorty presents a very definite 'ontological picture' –a world in which there are no essences; a radical 'nominalist' contingency between 'language' and 'world'; language, consisting of a series of different (often incommensurable) 'vocabularies' as the means by which 'truths' and 'knowledge' are created; 'freedom' consisting in 'the recognition of contingency' (*ibid.:* 26). Similarly, a statement such as the following is a very clear example of a highly generalised philosophical theory: 'the human self is created by the use of a vocabulary' (*ibid.:* 7). In short, Rorty has a comprehensive metaphysical, psychological, social and political world-view–an 'ontological picture'–to commend, and this is symbiotically related to his conception of philosophy. Thus it is because there are no essences to or in the world that metaphysical philosophy is redundant. Philosophical theories are useless because there *are* no generalities to be discovered or represented–there is just the 'universality and necessity of the individual and contingent' (*ibid.:* 26). In other words, Rorty pronounces that traditional philosophy has no 'conditions of possibility'–the world just does not correspond to the way that it is assumed to be by the philosophical tradition. I was being deliberately ironic in my use of Kantian terminology (which is anathema to Rorty) in the previous sentence to characterise Rorty's position. Nevertheless, Rorty surely invites this kind of description. Unless he wants to attach a highly unusual and idiosyncratic meaning to the term 'metaphysical', I can see no reason why his views on the contingency of language, world and self are not accurately described in this way. I now want to utilise a notion which plays a central role in Habermas's philosophical programme, namely the idea of a 'performative contradiction'– though the use that I make of it will differ significantly from his. The notion of performative contradiction brings me to the heart of the problem which Rorty needs, but fails–unlike Wittgenstein– to avoid. Habermas (1990:129) explains 'performative contradiction' as that which occurs when someone 'makes performative use of something he expressly denies'. Habermas uses this idea to 'refute' the sceptic who wants to argue that there are no universally valid rules of argumentation, by pointing out that, in the very act of *arguing* her position, the sceptic has *already,* necessarily, helped herself to the very rules that she claims to reject. This is a useful way in which to view Rorty's position too: in the very act

of renouncing 'metaphysical' philosophy, and general theories of 'the way things really are' (Rorty 1989:8), Rorty presents an alternative ontological picture and general theory of 'the way things really are'. Rorty does display an awareness of the potential for 'performative contradic-tion'–at one point he highlights the 'difficulty' of avoiding the suggestion 'that my sort of philosophy corresponds to the way things really are' (*ibid.:* 7–8). However, in my view, the vital point of the notion of a 'performative contradiction' is that one does not (cannot) avoid it simply through what one *says,* but through what one does, or does not, *do.* Austin's introduction of the idea of 'performatives' was to show that 'speech acts' not only express, assert, etc., but that they simultaneously *do* something in the act of saying what they say. And this is the sense that I give to the term 'performative' in 'performative contradiction'. Thus although Rorty *says* he wants to avoid suggesting that his philosophy 'corresponds to the way things really are', the latter is precisely what he then proceeds to *do.* Even though his ontological picture presents an image of essenceless contingency and linguistic creativity, it is still an *ontological picture.* Although he *says* that he renounces metaphysical philosophy, what he actually does, 'performatively', is to provide an *alternative*–albeit radical and iconoclastic–ontological picture of 'the way things really are'. Moreover, the anti-metaphysical rhetoric serves principally to increase the force with which the alternative picture of essenceless language, self and world is communicated and commended.

Habermas, though, understands the notion of performative contradiction 'metaphysically' rather than 'performatively'; that is, in the example cited above, he concludes that the sceptic's entrapment in contradiction proves that universally valid, transcendental, rules of argumentation *must* exist. Habermas takes a performative contradiction to show that the act of denying something actually proves, on the contrary, the necessary existence of that which the proponent tries to deny (see also his [1990:80] example of Descartes's *cogito*). Extending this reasoning to Rorty, the conclusion would be–as Habermas does conclude[13] – that it is impossible to renounce metaphysics and philosophical theory, because the renunciation presupposes that which one attempts to renounce. This is not the conclusion that I draw.

Wittgenstein avoids the performative contradictions that Rorty becomes entwined in simply by avoiding the moves that Rorty makes. When Wittgenstein rejects theory and explanation he does not, like Rorty, go on to do what he says he will not do. Wittgenstein offers no theory or ontological picture–essenceless or otherwise–of language, self or world in *Philosophical Investigations.* His *modus operandi* is completely different not only from that of traditional philosophy, but also from Rorty's 'anti-theoretical' and 'anti-essentialist' neo-pragmatism. I will now try to outline a little more clearly what I take Wittgenstein to have meant by his rejection of theory. This will involve a certain amount of reconstruction; that is, I do not claim that Wittgenstein actually said all that I attribute to him, but that it is a perspicuous way of looking at what he says, and a way which follows the sense of his explicit anti-theoretical statements. (There is a self-referential problem in how far one can go in

spelling out the implications of Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical stance–there can be no water-tight *theory* of the virtues of such a stance.)

Wittgenstein (1968:§109) asserts, forcefully and unequivocally, that 'we may not advance any kind of theory'; 'we must do away with all explanation'. What he means by 'theory' and 'explanation', primarily, is the assumption that the task of philosophy is to explain that which is apparent, observable, or known, by identifying an underlying (transcendental) causally-generative order of powers, mechanisms, structures, processes, etc. (precisely the model of explanation advanced by critical social theorists). Theoretical explanations, in philosophy (and critical social theory), are supposed to show us 'the way things really are' at the deepest level of reality.

Prime examples of ontological pictures that Wittgenstein was particularly solicitous to 'deconstruct' include the Kantian picture of transcendental rules 'hidden in the medium of the understanding' (*ibid.:* §102); the Cartesian picture of the human essence as an inner mental space in which individuals are intimately and immediately acquainted with their mind and self; the empiricist picture of the 'essenceless' human subject constituted by a 'bundle of perceptions'; and his own earlier Tractarian picture of the 'incomparable essence of language' (*ibid.:* §97). However, it would be a mistake to expect a stipulation of the essential defining characteristics of the kinds of theory and explanation that Wittgenstein rejects. It would be a mistake based upon the idea that in order to use words meaningfully we must be able to provide a precise definition of their meaning. This is a mistake, because 'I use the name "N" without a *fixed* meaning. (But that detracts as little from its usefulness, as it detracts from that of a table that it stands on four legs instead of three and so sometimes wobbles)' (*ibid.:* §79). Equally, we should not expect an exact account of all the delusory effects of a particular kind of theory and explanation: 'it is, in most cases, impossible to show an exact point where an analogy begins to mislead us' (Wittgenstein 1972:28).

Wittgenstein does not say that there can be no explanation or theory *tout court.* Such a claim would amount to saying: there has never been, and never can be, any genuine explanation or theory of anything. This would be patently absurd, and it would violate his own recommendation that, for the philosopher, 'description' should take the place of explanation. One of the things that Wittgenstein wants to get away from in his later work is the Kantian, and his own earlier Tractarian, conception of the philosopher-as-legislator–one who, in Strawson's evocative phrase, maps out 'the bounds of sense' (see also chapter 4, section XI).

It is often remarked, in our 'post-empiricist' philosophical culture, that '*all* observation is theory-laden'. If this claim were accepted, Wittgenstein might be in danger of 'performative contradiction' in appealing to some supposedly 'plain' un-theoretically-mediated 'facts'. If it really were the case that '*all* observation is theory-laden', Wittgenstein's rejection of philosophical theory would be untenable because there would be no possibility of avoiding a theoretical view of *anything.* He would then be faced with a performative contradiction in Habermas's

'metaphysical' sense–that is, the contradiction would show that 'theory' is inescapable. However, the claim that '*all* observation is theory-laden' entails an essentialist definition of 'theory' and 'observation', whereas on Wittgenstein's view they are better seen as 'family resemblance' terms (see next section). Thus in order to counter the charge of 'performative contradiction', we just need some 'reminders' of the vast range of differences between different uses of the terms 'theory' and 'observation' that the post-empiricist statement tempts us to overlook. For example, there is a big difference between being guided by certain theoretical expectations when looking into a microscope, and expecting where to find one's shoes in the morning. If the post-empiricist wants to insist that the latter is an example of 'theory-laden observation', Wittgenstein's response might be: 'now you are only playing with words' (1968:§67).

'Theory' and 'explanation' clearly play a central role in the theoretical and applied sciences. Wittgenstein obviously does not advocate that practitioners in these disciplines should 'give up theory'; however, he does counsel against the confusion that arises when scientific theories are removed from their scientific setting and extended into 'philosophical explanations'–as, for example, in Eddington's famous 'two tables' argument.[14] 'Explanation' and 'theory' are also activities in which people routinely engage outside of scientific and philosophical contexts. For example, I may construct various hypothetical explanations of why the door to my house fails to open; I may theorise that the depiction of gratuitous violence on television tends to make certain people in certain situations more violent than they would otherwise be.

These, and countless other kinds of theory and explanation, involve various degrees of generalisation without being *ipso facto* metaphysical, philosophical theories. Wittgenstein does not recommend that we should all cease such activities in favour of 'pure description', and that we should stop speculating about things which are not immediately apparent and uncontroversial. Rorty, on the other hand, argues that theory, explanation and generalisation are bad *per se,* and that everyone, from scientists to factory operatives, should avoid such practices. In fact, Rorty (1982:193) actually redescribes successful scientific 'theory' and 'explanation' as *really* poetic innovation: scientists, allegedly, 'use the same banal and obvious methods all of us use in every human activity…Galileo's terminology was the *only* "secret" he had…he just lucked out.'

Wittgenstein has often been criticised for advocating a 'commonsense' view of the social and natural world, in which everything is just what it appears to be, and there is nothing puzzling, troubling or mysterious to understand (see Gellner [1959] for a particularly egregious critique along these lines). However, I think that Wittgenstein's attitude is quite the opposite of this; he is trying to say that, on the contrary, the world is vastly more complex, puzzling and mysterious than can be captured in a philosophical theory. Consider, for example, his (1968:§129) suggestion that 'the aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity…we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful'; and: 'we find certain things about

seeing puzzling, because we do not find the whole business of seeing puzzling enough' (*ibid.:* 212). In a nutshell, Wittgenstein does not renounce philosophical theory because there is nothing that requires any special effort of the understanding, but because he believes that philosophical theory obfuscates the understanding. So the question now arises: why does Wittgenstein think that philosophical theories inherently obfuscate the understanding? The first thing to note is that it is philosophical *theory* which is condemned, not philosophising *activity* in the sense of critical, reflective thought on issues that are of interest and importance. Wittgenstein does not argue that philosophical theories, such as those propounded by Hume, Descartes and Kant, present an entirely *false* picture of mind and the 'incomparable essence' of the human condition. Each of their 'ontological pictures', no doubt, depicts something that is 'real' in some sense or other. His objection is that such pictures are bound to distort what they purport to represent because they essentialise one feature, seen from a particular point of view, into the essence of 'the way things really are'. Wittgenstein's rejection of philosophical 'ontological pictures' is analogous to rejecting the suggestion (should anyone make it) that Monet's paintings reveal the true essence of nature as it 'really is'. The ontological pictures presented by Descartes *et al.* are every bit as much constructed from a particular point of view, embodying a particular 'way of seeing', utilising certain conventions, and also revolutionising the tradition in which they are situated, as are Monet's paintings.[15]

Wittgenstein does not, then, claim that philosophers' ontological pictures are false—to do so he would need some alternative account of 'the way things *really* are', which is, I am arguing, exactly what he renounces in his later work. These pictures are simply not the kind of things that can be shown to be 'true' or 'false' —they can always be made out to be *in accordance with* the facts in the sense of not directly contradicting them.[16] For example, Wittgenstein (1968:§402) points out that disputes between 'Idealists, Solipsists and Realists' cannot be settled either empirically or rationally—because each side appeals to the very same facts of experience, yet sees them in a completely different way. By their nature, ontological pictures seek to explain the very basis of all facts, and therefore are not amenable to the ways in which factual disputes might be judged in terms of truth or falsity. Such ontological pictures deal with 'the order of *possibilities*', which 'must be *utterly simple*. It is *prior* to all experience, must run through all experience; no empirical cloudiness or uncertainty can be allowed to affect it' (*ibid.:* §97). The problem with these pictures, for Wittgenstein, is that they delude us (as philosophers) into thinking that once we have grasped the picture we thereby understand 'the way things really are'. Wittgenstein's principal objection to philosophical theories is not so much that they are produced, but that their powers are misperceived (a kind of 'fetishism'). One of the main reasons that philosophers believe and project a misleading image of their powers is that they '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 dark-ness' (Wittgenstein 1972:18).

Wittgenstein does not seek the role of Platonic or Kantian legislator; he seeks, rather, to play the role of philosophical 'therapist' (1968:§133). He wants to show philosophers that they are 'held captive' by a certain (quasi-scientific) picture of theory and explanation and that this picture actually prevents them from attaining clarity on the issues that interest them. But he doesn't have a *clear and correct* picture to replace their *cloudy and muddled* pictures. Therapy works—when it does—not by reprogramming the patient with the therapist's correct vision of 'the way things really are', but by enabling the patient to work things out for themselves. The analogy is between the passivity of the patient vis-à-vis their obsessions and neuroses, and the passivity of the philosopher vis-à-vis the 'ontological pictures' and generalised philosophical theories which captivate their intellect. Thus Wittgenstein's aim is not to 'refute' an incorrect philosophical procedure, but to *change* the intellectual sensibility of those who are drawn to philosophical issues. Gaining release from the thrall of philosophical pictures does not mean the development of some special faculty of the intellect which facilitates a picture-free vision of reality as it really is. The point is simply to see ontological pictures for what they are, and see them (I suggest) as more akin to artists' pictures than scientists' explanations.[17]

I should now say just a few words on the mode of criticism that Wittgenstein pursues in his deconstructions of philosophical 'pictures', and which I follow in my deconstructions of critical social theorists' 'ontological pictures'. Because Wittgenstein renounces any claim to superior ontological insight, it is a kind of *immanent* critique that he practises. Immanent critique proceeds by seeking to demonstrate that a proponent's position is inadequate because of contradictions and absurdities that are *internal* to that position. These inadequacies are shown not by comparison to one's own theory of 'the way things really are', but rather as inadequate in the light of the *proponent's* standards and criteria for knowledge. In order to illustrate what I mean, I will look briefly at Wittgenstein's celebrated 'private language' argument in these terms.

The private language argument is (rightly, no doubt) taken to be an argument against Cartesian and empiricist notions of epistemic privacy. However, it is also generally assumed that in the course of his argument Wittgenstein provides a 'correct picture' of mental experience. It should, by now, come as no surprise that I reject this assumption. Instead of looking for the 'correct picture', I suggest that we look at Wittgenstein's argument as an example of immanent critique.

Wittgenstein proceeds in the following way. The would-be private linguist is challenged to give an account of her procedure. She is asked to demonstrate how she manages to identify what she claims to be a pre-linguistic sensation, provide it with a name, and thereby establish a connection between it and its name. The attempt to satisfy these conditions for a 'private language' evinces the following responses: 'I impress on myself the connexion between the sign and the sensation', and 'I can (inwardly) undertake to call THIS "pain" in the future' (Wittgenstein 1968: §§258, 263). Wittgenstein proceeds to show that these claims cannot be fulfilled, hence: if 'whatever is going to seem right to me is right', then 'here we

can't talk about right' (*ibid.*: §258). The upshot is that the 'private linguist' cannot do what she claims to be able to do. Not only has she failed to produce an unambiguous referential act, she has been unable to establish that there is any such entity as a 'private sensation' which she claims to be able to identify directly, prior to linguistic mediation.

Much of the interpretive controversy surrounding Wittgenstein's private language argument concerns whether he concludes that such a language is only *empirically,* or *logically,* impossible. But either of these alternatives entails the assertion of a philosophical thesis on the supposed 'impossibility' of 'private language'. Against this, I suggest that Wittgenstein's argument be seen as an immanent critique, which shows that *if* words are conceived of as 'names' standing for 'objects' (1968:§1), *then* our everyday practices in which we refer to sensations will be incomprehensible. Seen this way, the private language argument is a *reductio ad absurdum,* not an ontological insight.[18]

My critique of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar will also be an immanent one. I shall endeavour to show that their theories of individual and social ontology are incoherent and do not solve the problems and *aporia* of classical epistemology –which is the chief *raison d'être* of the former. But I will not, at the last moment, pull out of the hat my own alternative proposals for a new or reformed 'Wittgensteinian critical social theory'. In the light of the preceding discussion of Wittgenstein's rejection of theory and explanation, I turn now to an examination of an attempt to apply his notion of 'family resemblances' to a contentious issue in political philosophy.

IV Family resemblance and essentialism

If one takes seriously Wittgenstein's critique of the picture of 'language-as-representation',[19] and the craving for generality which underlies it, then it is contradictory to think that this critique implies or entails some alternative, superior theory of 'the' function of language. Wittgenstein was well aware of the potential for 'performative contradiction' here, as can be seen in his effort to pre-empt a predictable misunderstanding of his deployment of the idea of 'family resemblances'.

Having just explained what he means by 'family resemblance' –that there is no essential property shared by everything that is referred to by the term 'game', but instead 'a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing' (1968:§66)[20] –Wittgenstein envisages a response which attempts to reformulate what he has said into a theoretical proposition. The envisaged response runs as follows: '"there is something common to all these constructions–namely the disjunc-tion of all their common properties"' (1968:§67). That is to say, what all games have in common is the sum-total of all their relations of similarity and difference. Wittgenstein's *(ibid.)* rejoinder to this suggestion is: 'now you are only playing with words'. The objector is 'playing with words' in order to force Wittgenstein's 'deconstruction' into a higher-order meta-theory. Wittgenstein's

rejection of theories of language is thereby transmogrified into an alternative 'semantic theory'.

As a vindication of Wittgenstein's fear of misconstrual, I will now examine some of the confusion which arises when the notion of 'family resemblances' is misunderstood in the way that he predicted. I will focus on a recent article by O'Neill (1995) entitled 'Markets and essences', in which the author tries to show that Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblances is perfectly compatible with a metaphysical theory of essentialism.[21]

The stated purpose of O'Neill's article is to provide a defence of essentialism as a general philosophical position against 'post-modernist' critics, and to defend 'market essentialism' in particular, against 'post-Marxist' claims that the very idea of 'the market' is an illegitimate essentialist abstraction (1995:258). According to this 'post-modernist'-inspired view, both liberal celebrations of the virtues of the market (for example Hayek) and traditional Marxist denunciations of its evils are equally mistaken–because there is no such entity as *'the market,'* only a range of diverse practices in differing institutional contexts. The only features that all such practices and settings are said to share, on this view, is that they are all given the name 'market', and 'something is marketed in them' (*ibid.:* 268). If these 'post-Marxist' critics are right about this, then both defenders and critics of 'the market' are radically confused in the claims they make.

The first part of O'Neill's defence consists in arguing that criticisms of essentialism *as such* are based on an inaccurate 'straw person' conception of essentialism to which no serious essentialist actually subscribes. O'Neill notes that Wittgenstein's critique of the 'craving for generality' is often invoked by post-modernist critics of essentialism. However, this is mistaken according to O'Neill, because although Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblances' rightly rejects 'naive' essentialism, it is fully compatible with 'sophisticated' essentialism. Expositing Wittgenstein's reference to a 'complicated network of similarities' between different kinds of game, O'Neill (*ibid.:* 272) explains that 'those similarities are real–there does exist a network of properties that thread together entities that fall under a term'.

The point that O'Neill wants to make is that if it is the case that the instantiations of a certain term have in common only a set of 'family resemblances', then the essence of the phenomenon named by that term is the sum of all those similarities as a whole. Hence it is in the nature of some entities that their essence consists in the 'existence of real family resemblances' *(ibid.)* –and it is this which justifies such entities being referred to by a common name. These 'family resemblance' phenomena contrast with 'natural kind' phenomena, whose 'real essence' does consist in the possession of a common property or properties: for example, in the case of water, a structure comprising of two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen.

Thus 'the proper conclusion that follows from Wittgenstein's discussion' *(ibid.)* is that whether a particular concept 'names' a 'natural kind' phenomenon which possesses an essential property or properties, or whether it 'names' a phenomenon

whose 'essential nature' is constituted only by a set of 'real family resemblances', is an *empirical question* which cannot be decided without scientific investigation.[22] So, if it is found to be the case that markets are like games, in that they share no common properties and are related only by 'family resemblances', nevertheless 'those likenesses are real' *(ibid.)*. That is to say, those likenesses are what makes a particular game 'essentially' a game, and not 'essentially' something else.[23] Moreover, not only are such family resemblances 'real', their existence is

> sufficient for the intelligibility of many of the traditional questions asked about markets in political philosophy. For example questions like 'What effects do markets have on moral character?' like the question 'What effects does engagement in games have on the moral character?' make perfect sense even in the absence of any single essential property shared by all markets or all games.
>
> *(ibid.)*[24]

So it seems that O'Neill's defence of market essentialism consists in the argument that markets may well be 'family resemblance', not 'natural kind' phenomena, but that this is fully compatible with essentialist claims about the effects of 'the market'. I say 'seems' because this is not the end of his argument. He then goes on to say that whether different markets are *really* related by real similarities, or on the contrary not really related at all, is also an empirical question which can only be settled by scientific investigation: 'essentialist claims about the market [might] turn out to be false' (*ibid.:* 273). If they are *not* really related then it is indeed the case that the only real relation between different markets is that they (misleadingly) share the name 'market'. If (what we currently call) markets are not really related by a set of real similarities they must be *essentially* some other kind of phenomenon, or kinds of phenomena–'what looked like one species is in fact many' *(ibid.)*. Should this be so, 'theorists like Marx, Polanyi and Hayek would have failed to distinguish essentially different social orders' *(ibid.)*. And it would then follow that Marx *et al.* are, as charged by their 'post-modernist' critics, seriously mistaken and are merely fighting the shadows cast by their own mistaken linguistic practice.

O'Neill's article starts out with the aim of defending 'questions about the market that have been traditional to political philosophy' (*ibid.:* 259), namely that: 'different markets share some essential nature such that one can engage in a general discussion of the relation of the market to moral character, welfare, justice, freedom, democracy and so on' (*ibid.:* 258). However, by the end of the article this 'defence' appears to have transmuted into something quite different, for O'Neill concludes only that essentialism *might* apply to markets, and that Marx *et al.* are not *necessarily* mistaken, though as a matter *of fact* they very well may be. That is to say, they have been found not guilty of confusion about essentialism *per se,* but they may well be terribly confused about markets. This, surely, is a most equivocal and peculiar 'defence'. If it turns out that different instantiations of the market

are not really related by a set of 'real' family resemblances, then O'Neill has not successfully defended market essentialism—because it *can't* be defended.

O'Neill's argument, and his attempted 'defence' of market essentialism is deeply confused, and it is a confusion which emanates from his metaphysical theory of linguistic meaning. His 'realist' and essentialist re-interpretation of the notion of family resemblances is precisely the kind of misunderstanding that Wittgenstein sought—in vain, evidently—to guard against. O'Neill is bewitched by the 'name-object' picture of linguistic reference in the very act of interpreting Wittgen-stein's deconstruction of it.

The name-object picture of language assumes one, and only one, relation between 'language' and 'reality'. It is a dualistic picture of two distinct domains: 'reality' is on one side, consisting of objects, processes, structures and events; and 'language' is on the other side, a medium of representation which is used to identify and label those 'real' entities on the other side. The influence of this picture is evident in O'Neill's insistence that 'family resemblance' terms, just like 'natural kind' terms, function as 'names'—only in the case of family resemblance terms the name attaches to a set of 'real similarities' between a series of related things.

But Wittgenstein introduced the notion of family resemblances in order to *deconstruct* the assumption that there is one essential function of 'language', one essential way in which 'language' relates to 'reality'. So, given that the idea of family resemblances is a method of challenging the assumption that 'language' is essentially a naming device, it is a gross distortion to see the idea of family resemblances as *itself* a naming relation. It is just this assumption which generates the incoherence in O'Neill's purported 'defence' of market essentialism.

Remember that, according to O'Neill, correctly applied family resemblance terms label a set of 'real similarities' between a series of different but related entities, thereby revealing their essential nature. These 'real similarities' are supposed to exist quite independently of the linguistic practices through which they are labelled. Therefore, whether or not 'market' is really a family resemblance concept—or whether it is a concept mistakenly applied to 'superficially similar' entities which are really 'essentially different' (*ibid.:* 273) from each other—is an empirical question. The essential question for O'Neill, more precisely, is this: are (what we call) 'markets' *really* related by *real* family resemblances, or is it that the things we call 'market' are *essentially* different from one another and hence are *not really* related at all? Stating the question in this explicit manner should make its absurdity plain to see. Would the failure of a family resemblance notion of market essentialism mean that *some, many,* or *all* of the entities that we call 'markets' are essentially different from each other? On what grounds are we to decide that some of the things referred to by the term 'market' are essentially different rather than essentially similar? What are the criteria for similarity and difference? What kind of evidence or discovery might it be that would show incontrovertibly that the kinds of things we currently call 'markets' are not really related in any way, and do not share any similarities at all?

The point of Wittgenstein's discussion of family resemblances between games was to show that any particular instance of a game will be somewhat similar to some other instances, very similar to others, whilst being utterly different to yet others. The notion of 'family resemblance' incorporates both similarity *and difference,* in a 'complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing' (Wittgenstein 1968:§66). But perhaps the most important point is that family resemblance concepts are 'open', and the inclusion of particular instances within the family depends not on inherent similarities (whatever that could mean in practice) but on the purposes of the speaker/writer, the context in which the reference is made, the aspects of a phenomenon that are of interest, and similar such considerations. The membership of a family is not fixed in advance–it grows, diversifies, and spreads out over a wide terrain. O'Neill wants to make inclusion in, or exclusion from, the family a purely 'objective' matter independent of *anyone's* will or judgement.

O'Neill has in fact neglected to distinguish two rather different kinds of market essentialist claim (no pun intended), namely:

1 Everything that we call 'market' justifiably has that name because of its 'real' family resemblances with other kinds of things that we legitimately call 'markets' (as with games); and
2 There exists an institution which we call 'the market', and this institution will produce certain effects on 'moral character' etc.

The first of these is really a question of linguistic classification, and the second is concerned, as O'Neill puts it, with the effects that markets exert on 'moral character', 'justice', 'freedom', etc. Marx *et al.* are primarily concerned with the second question, not the first–they are not really interested in classification as such. (However, O'Neill fails to point out that these theorists are concerned with particular kinds of market, namely modern, capitalistic, 'free' markets–not *everything* that is called 'market', such as bartering markets, or 'markets in ideas', etc.) According to O'Neill, the second kind of market essentialism, like the first, also requires empirical investigation for validation. But questions to do with 'moral character', 'justice', 'freedom', etc. are not *empirical* questions. What kind of empirical investigation could possibly establish, to everyone's satisfaction, that market institutions *really* are (or are not) 'just', and *really* do (or do not) engender genuine 'freedom'? For example, what kind of evidence could decide whether a market in bodily parts or fluids is morally justifiable (irrespective of its 'efficiency')? Put simply, normative moral and political questions such as these belong to different kinds of 'language-games' to those questions which may be pursued through empirical means.

O'Neill's practice is self-defeating: he wants to justify the legitimacy of discourses in which the moral and political consequences of markets are addressed. In order to achieve this aim he tries to justify these discourses first 'metaphysically' and then 'empirically' –but this leads only to abandonment of those moral and political

issues which first interested him. Indeed, it is rather ironic that O'Neill's 'metaphysical realism' causes him to become embroiled in merely verbal disputes about the meaning of words and concepts. O'Neill, like Wittgenstein's objector, stands accused of merely 'playing with words'. Wittgenstein's method aims to facilitate clarity, which should help one to think about the moral and political issues which interest O'Neill–but this clarity does not dictate *how* one should think about such issues, and in this sense it 'leaves everything as it is' (Wittgenstein 1968:§124). In chapter 5 I will return to the idea of 'market essentialism', where I will attempt to deconstruct Giddens's and Hayek's 'epistemological argument against socialism'.

V Conclusion

I have attempted to indicate why Wittgenstein rejected theory and explanation, but I should reiterate that this can only really be 'shown' (if at all), not 'said'. In the forthcoming chapters I will enter into more of the detail of his critique of the dominant philosophical paradigms. This will be done through critical analysis and 'deconstruction' of the ontological pictures propounded by critical social theorists. Critical social theory is constituted by just that mode of (essentialist, transcendentalist, metaphysical) mode of theorising to which Wittgenstein was most implacably opposed. One of the central aims of critical social theory consists in attempting to improve on the traditional philosophical pictures of Hume, Kant and Descartes. This 'improvement' is instigated via attempting to synthesise 'abstract' philosophical perspectives with sociological and political theories–the result being what I call an 'ontological picture'.

I have argued that Wittgenstein's banishment of theory and explanation applies to generalised philosophical theories which masquerade as quasi-empirical scientific explanation–not to theoretical explanation *as such and in general*. This rules out any idea of a 'Wittgensteinian critical social theory', or a 'Wittgensteinian foundation for the social sciences'. A number of theorists have attempted to produce this kind of hybrid, but it can only be done either by ignoring Wittgenstein's stated views on philosophy, theory and explanation, or by embracing the performative contradiction that Rorty tries, but fails, to avoid. Wittgenstein's critique of traditional philosophy, and my critique of critical social theory, make no claim to superior ontological insight, and are therefore best characterised as immanent critiques.

3
WINCH, WITTGENSTEIN AND CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

> Any worthwhile study of society must be philosophical in character and any worthwhile philosophy must be concerned with the nature of human society.
>
> (Winch 1990:3)

I Introduction

As I said in chapter 1, each of the critical social theorists upon whom I focus in this book (Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar) have been significantly influenced by Wittgenstein and post-Wittgensteinian philosophy. They all espouse essentially the same interpretation of Wittgenstein's significance for critical social theory. This interpretation stresses the need for social and political theory to recognise the centrality of rules, practices, meaning, knowledge, action and agency in the constitution and reproduction of social life. However, their understanding of Wittgenstein is not a direct one–it is heavily mediated through the writings of Peter Winch (1990, 1964), who was the first to bring Wittgenstein to the attention of social scientists and social/political theorists.

The main objectives of this chapter are, firstly, to document the extent of Winch's influence on the reception of Wittgenstein's philosophy and, secondly, to argue that Winch's rendition of Wittgenstein is much more compatible with the programme of critical social theory than it is with Wittgenstein himself. It is not controversial to claim that Winch has had a big impact on social theory, but I will claim–much more tendentiously–that the nature of this influence is typically misrecognised. Whereas Winch is usually known for his anti-explanatory and anti-social-scientific doctrines, I will argue that his most significant and enduring legacy is the provision of (1) a set of abstract, universalistic, transcendental theoretical perspectives on the nature of individual action and social life *per se;* and (2) the 'idea' of such a perspective (this idea is *not,* as is invariably assumed, Wittgenstein's). In terms of the distinction that I established in chapter 1, Winch's attitude towards Wittgenstein's philosophy is

the one that regards it as a source of 'ontological' insight into the nature of certain phenomena.

I will argue that, far from being an authentic extension of Wittgenstein's ideas to social science, Winch's mode of theorising can be seen to be a precursor to the theoretical practice of critical social theory. My account of Winch's 'hermeneutical' social theory will show him to be a programmatic and systematic social theorist who provided a theory of social ontology. It is Winch, I believe, who is largely responsible (no doubt unintentionally) for the deeply entrenched image of Wittgenstein as a social theorist *manqué*.

I will provide an account of the way in which Winch prepared the ground for a social-theoretical assimilation of Wittgenstein's philosophy. I will argue that critical social theorists are correct in situating Winch within the tradition of hermeneutical theory, but wrong to suppose that Wittgenstein, by association with Winch, also operates within this tradition. My strategy is to identify some surprising, and previously unnoticed or unremarked, 'elective affinities' between Winch and critical social theory, and at the same time to indicate where and how Winch diverges from Wittgenstein's philosophical practice. Stated simply, I want to show that Wittgenstein does not really belong to the theoretical tradition in which he has been cast.

My purpose in this chapter is not to criticise Winch's ideas as such, but to show that his use of Wittgenstein's philosophy is not a straightforward extension– on the contrary, it is a much more creative application than he is usually given credit for. Similarly, my criticism of critical social theorists in this chapter is directed at their (misunderstanding of the relationship between Wittgenstein's philosophy and Winch's application of it to social science. Detailed critical analysis of their theoretical systems will begin in chapter 4.

II Wittgenstein, Winch and the idea of a social science

Winch was indisputably the first to attempt to work out the significance and implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy for the social sciences and social theory. In his seminal *The Idea of a Social Science* ([1958] 1990), which Habermas (1991:111) describes as having made a 'spectacular impression', Winch presents a negative and a positive thesis regarding the nature and study of social life. The negative thesis consists in an attack on positivistic conceptions of social science, in which the social sciences are to be modelled on natural science in an attempt to discover principles of social organisation and laws of social development. The positive thesis provides a new picture of the nature of social reality, and the relationship between philosophy and social science, based on an elaboration and extension of Wittgenstein's discussion of 'rule-following' and 'meaning'. Winch (1990: 52) argued that individual meaning, action and social interaction is inherently rule-governed: 'all behaviour which is meaningful (therefore all specifically human behaviour) is *ipso facto* rule-governed'. On the basis of this characterisation of social life and meaningful action, Winch went on to claim, in opposition to the

classical social theory of Marx and Durkheim, that social relations simply do not exist independently of the 'ideas' and conceptions that people hold about what they're doing and why they're doing it (*ibid.:* 23–4). Thus Winch's negative thesis–that social life cannot be studied 'scientifically' like natural phenomena – is derived from the positive thesis on the nature of individual action and social phenomena.

Winch provided the service of translating Wittgenstein's rather enigmatic philosophical remarks into the conventional discursive analytic medium, formulating a number of propositions and theses regarding the subject matter and practice of social science. Many social theorists have been highly critical of Wittgenstein's supposed implications for the theory and practice of social inquiry, but their understanding of these implications is clearly derived from Winch's reading of Wittgenstein. Very few of these, and none of my critical social theorists, have attempted to question the adequacy of Winch's interpretation and application of Wittgenstein's ideas.[1] In the main, both supporters and critics of Winch have accepted that he accurately developed Wittgenstein's ideas and their implications for social and political inquiry.

In his *Idea of a Social Science,* Winch sought to extend Wittgenstein's philosophy of language to the study of social life in general. This exercise was quite new at the time. Not only was Winch the first to try to make Wittgenstein's work relevant to the social sciences, but Wittgenstein himself showed little interest in these disciplines–apart from scattered remarks on psychology, and a critical commentary on the nineteenth-century positivistic anthropology presented in Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (Wittgenstein 1979a). Wittgenstein's critique of Frazer inspired Winch's (1964) (in)famous critique of 'scientific' anthropology, which exemplified the implications for social science of the philosophical stance formulated in *The Idea of a Social Science.*

Obviously it is difficult to speculate on how Wittgenstein's influence on social theory might have differed if Winch's writings had not appeared. However, it is clear that Winch did in fact set the parameters for subsequent social-theoretical readings and uses of Wittgenstein–to such an extent that Wittgenstein is almost automatically identified with Winch's interpretation. Even where Wittgenstein and Winch are seen as distinct thinkers by social theorists (often they are not–see note 13), it is usually just assumed that Winch accurately renders explicit what is implicit in Wittgenstein's philosophy.

I do not wish to suggest that Winch's rendition of Wittgenstein was wholly untenable. On the contrary, it was an extremely innovative and 'productive' reading,[2] in that it enabled Winch to make some highly pertinent and telling critical points on the practices and assumptions of the then prevailing social science and social theory. However, I do claim that Winch's conception of philosophy, and the way that he applies it to the concerns of social theory, is ultimately quite alien to Wittgenstein's approach, and in fact is, in important respects, more compatible with critical social theory than with Wittgenstein.

Responses to Winch (and through him, supposedly to Wittgenstein) polarised around two groups of contemporaneous theorists: philosophers of social science who were mainly dismissive and hostile, and critical social theorists who were much more positive and welcoming–though with some critical provisos. The philosophers attempted to defend the explanatory power and critical function of social science, as traditionally conceived, against Winch's 'relativist' attack. Many of their critical arguments against Winch can be found in two collections of essays centred around the themes of 'rationality and relativism' (Wilson 1970; Hollis and Lukes 1982). In these essays, MacIntyre, Gellner, Lukes and Hollis, amongst others, variously objected to Winch's main ideas, the substance of the latter being:

1 All meaningful human action results from individuals following rules; it is not, therefore, amenable to causal analysis, and there are no 'laws' governing social behaviour.
2 Instead of causal analysis, social students[3] should pursue a mode of understanding which aims to see 'the *point* or *meaning* of what is being said or done' in social life (Winch 1990:115).
3 When studying social groups or societies–'modes of social life' (*ibid.:* 100) – which differ from ones with which the observer is familiar, the criteria of relevance and evaluation (rules) must be those which are operative in the way of life being studied. These criteria cannot be assumed to be the same as the observer's. In view of this, Winch contends that the *Weltanschauung* of the social student will often be incommensurable, to various degrees, with that of the mode of life that she studies.
4 Because of 1–3, social students should beware of the urge to criticise what they study: 'it is not open to [the social student] arbitrarily to impose his own standards from without' (*ibid.:* 108). Students of social life should therefore adopt the stance of '*uncommitted* enquiry' (*ibid.:* 102).

The aforementioned critics took Winch to be arguing against the very idea of social science as a critical-explanatory programme. This attack on social science was understood to be predicated on an unacceptably extreme moral and epistemic relativism–a relativism which seemed to rank both the natural and the social sciences no higher than witchcraft, astrology or any other *de facto* belief system (see Winch 1964).[4]

However, critical social theorists (Habermas [1967] 1988; Giddens 1976; Bhaskar [1979] 1989a) were more sympathetic, and instigated a positive response to Winch's proposals. Whilst they agreed with Winch's critics on the importance of critical standards of evaluation and the explanatory power of natural and social science, critical social theorists saw value in most, if not all, of Winch's anti-positivist criticisms. And they welcomed the basic outline of his theory of social ontology, which they incorporated into their own theoretical programmes. This was effected largely through situating Winch within the tradition of hermeneutical theory.

The first critical social theorist to take Winch and (derivatively) Wittgenstein seriously was Apel ([1966] 1980), whose interpretation exercised considerable influence on Habermas.[5] Apel claimed that Winch's use of the concepts 'language-game', 'rule-following' and 'forms of life', was a significant *sociological* advancement on the 'psychologism' of nineteenth-century German hermeneutical theory (Schleiermacher, Droysen and Dilthey). Apel was impressed by Winch's reconceptualisation of the notion of *Verstehen,* which nineteenth-century hermeneutical theorists had depicted as a state of empathy to be created in the observer's mind. In place of this psychologistic conception, Winch is credited for providing a thoroughly sociological account of *Verstehen* which pictured meaning as necessarily 'publicly' embodied in the rules and actions of the 'language-games' constituting social life. Apel saw this as a great improvement upon the requirement of psychological re-enactment propounded by traditional hermeneutical theorists. And he argued that Winch's 'idea' of social study was an important step towards formulating a hermeneutically sensitive, critical-explanatory framework for the social sciences.

Apel perceived that Winch was not just supplying methodological rules or philosophical foundations for the social sciences. Rather, he was attempting to specify the 'conditions of possibility' of 'meaning', 'understanding' and 'interpretation'. In this respect, Winch's project was similar to (though more modest than) Gadamer's (1977:19) conception of 'the universality of hermeneutics' as fundamental to any process of reaching an understanding, encompassing 'all human experience of the world and human living' (Gadamer 1975:xxx). Winch, like Gadamer, maintained that 'understanding' is not just a methodological 'problem' for professional social studies, it is a necessary condition of there being any recognisably human social life at all. Thus Winch's *Idea of a Social Science* is quite properly characterised as presenting a 'hermeneutical social theory' (Giddens 1982a:7).

However, although Winch does—as Apel and other critical theorists have discerned—share a basic affinity with Gadamer and other 'continental' hermeneuticists, I contend that Wittgenstein does not properly fit into the hermeneutical tradition.[6]

Gadamer's conception of the role of social science is very similar to that of Winch, and he has been highly critical of critical social theorists' attempts to assimilate hermeneutics into their 'scientific' programmes. He also rejects critical social theorists' claims that hermeneutical understanding on its own is a-critical and thus incomplete unless and until it is incorporated into a wider explanatory-critical framework. Responding to Habermas's critique of *Truth and Method,* Gadamer (1977:27) complains that 'many social scientists are more interested in using the sedimented truisms inherent in linguisticality (so as to grasp "scientifically" the "real" structures, as they define them, of society) than in really understanding social life.' This stance is clearly very similar to Winch's critique of objectivist social science.

Yet despite his repudiation of the claim to objective knowledge in social theory and social science, Gadamer refrains neither from essentialism, metaphysics, nor

theoretical generalisation. Gadamer denies the possibility of achieving definitive, 'scientifically objective' interpretation; but at a 'deeper' level, he offers a transcendental theory of 'being' and 'understanding' which aims at explaining *why* the quest for this kind of objectivity is chimerical. For Gadamer (1991:220), hermeneutics is not a method or methodological requirement–'interpretation doesn't *occur* as an activity in the course of life, but *is* the *form* of human life'. Hence Gadamer's hermeneutical theory universalises and essentialises such notions as 'being' and 'understanding': 'language is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the world' (Gadamer 1977:3).

But from the perspective of Wittgenstein's deconstruction of theories of language-reality relations (see previous chapter), Gadamer's 'ontologisation' of language implies a vision of an essential function of language which is just as transcendental as the 'name-object' picture that Wittgenstein deconstructs. And the assertion that everyone is constantly engaged in 'the game of interpretation' (Gadamer 1977:32) is based upon an ontological picture that Wittgenstein would also want to deconstruct, not endorse. It is in fact a picture which critical social theorists happily adopt from hermeneutical theory and ethnomethodology (see chapter 7).

Although there are indeed some similarities between Wittgenstein's and hermeneuticists' approach to language,[7] the latter nevertheless betray their captivity to the name-object picture in their own linguistic practice. Consider the following account of Gadamer's conception of 'reason':

> Reason is not a faculty or capacity that can free itself from its historical context and horizons. Reason is historical or situated reason which gains its distinctive power always within a living tradition. For Gadamer this is not a limitation or deficiency of reason, but rather the essence of reason rooted in human finitude.
>
> (Bernstein 1983:37)

In this passage Bernstein presents a picture of 'reason' as a certain kind of 'object'. It is a 'faculty or capacity' with a 'distinctive power'–albeit one which is inextricably 'situated'. Thus, ironically, in attempting to distinguish the hermeneutical conception of reason from Cartesian and Kantian, 'objectivist' pictures, Bernstein ends up with something equally thing-like, possessing similarly transcendental powers. From Wittgenstein's perspective, this picture follows from the (unexamined) assumption that 'reason' is (must be) the 'name' of a determinate entity: 'one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: a substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it' (Wittgenstein 1972:1).

Although, as we shall see later, critical social theorists accepted much of Winch's theory of 'social ontology', they emphatically rejected the anti-explanatory and a-critical prescriptions that he derived from it. They attempted to resolve the inadequacies that they perceived in Winch's Idea of social studies by 'dialectically'

synthesising it and continental hermeneutical theory with 'objectivist' social theory. But in so doing they have not managed to synthesise Wittgenstein's philosophy, because it is no more at home in the hermeneutical than the objectivist tradition.

III Winch's theory of social ontology

Winch is widely known amongst social theorists and social scientists for his attack on the 'idea of a social *science*', in particular his claim that social studies should seek a non-explanatory and a-critical mode of 'hermeneutical' understanding. Hence Winch is typically seen to be a relativist who is opposed to explanatory generalisation and systematic theory. Such a view is somewhat superficial and incomplete. As a corrective to this view, I contend that he is *also* a pioneering social theorist, and possibly the first to produce a theory of social ontology–in the modern transcendentalist and universalist sense, that is.

It is widely assumed, and implied by Winch, that *The Idea of a Social Science* extends Wittgenstein's critique of orthodox philosophy to the social sciences.[8] But in my view, Winch's hermeneutical project is primarily animated by a *Kantian,* not Wittgensteinian, conception of philosophy (as is critical social theory). Winch begins his enquiry into 'the general nature of a human society' (Winch 1990:23) with the Kantian question: how is (any) understanding possible? (*ibid.:* 22). As Winch (*ibid.:* 8) points out, the most suitable way of addressing this kind of highly abstract question is through '*a priori* philosophising' ('of a sort which is quite legitimate'[9]). Winch clearly does not renounce *philosophical* theory –as did Wittgenstein–he merely renounces *illegitimate* 'pseudo-scientific' philosophical theory, that is, positivistic or Hegelian theory.

Winch's understanding of the proper task of philosophy, and its relationship to science, is in fact pretty much identical to that which was later formulated for social theory and social science by the critical social theorists. Thus Winch explains that 'the scientist investigates the nature, causes and effects of *particular* real things and processes', whilst 'the philosopher is concerned with the nature of reality as such and in general' *(ibid.)*. Bhaskar similarly distinguishes between 'scientific' and 'philosophical' ontology. 'Scientific ontology' refers to 'the particular entities and processes postulated by some substantive scientific theory' (Bhaskar 1978:29–30), whilst 'philosophical ontology' consists in 'reflection upon what must be the case for science to be possible; and this is independent of any actual scientific knowledge' (*ibid.:* 39). Likewise, Giddens and Habermas both seek theoretical knowledge of the general structure of universal features of subjectivity and social constitution. Of course, there are differences between Winch's conception of 'the nature of reality as such and in general' and that of critical social theorists (as there are differences amongst the critical social theorists themselves), but the common ground that they share is a broadly similar conception of theoretical *method.* This method consists of *a priori* theorising on *transcendental* conditions that are deemed to hold *universally*. And it is precisely this method and conception of philosophy that Wittgenstein sought to subvert.

Winch does not actually use the term 'ontology', but an examination of his theoretical practice will show that his primary aim, just like that of critical social theorists, is to formulate a theory of social ontology–an account of the general features and conditions of possibility of meaningful social action. Winch (1990: 41) actually uses the term 'epistemology' to describe his programme: 'epistemology will try to elucidate what is involved in the notion of a form of life as such'. But such usage is rather confusing. A more appropriate name for this task would surely be 'ontology', for Winch is quite explicit in saying that he seeks an account of *being*–'the nature of reality as such and in general'–not an account of the means by which we can justifiably claim to *know* what exists.[10] Some of the confusion is caused by Winch alternating between claiming to elucidate the *'nature'* of a phenomenon, and on other occasions saying that he seeks to elucidate the *'concept',* or *'notion'* of a phenomenon (for example, compare the two quotations above). These are two quite different exercises, but he is predominantly occupied with the former. (Of course, ontological and epistemological questions are never entirely separate, and this applies as much to critical social theory as to Winch.)

Winch's theoretical intentions are evident in his statement that social studies cannot avoid 'discussion of the nature of social phenomena in general' (*ibid.:* 41). This is just the same discourse as that in which critical social theorists are engaged; for example, Bhaskar (1989a:51) seeks a theoretical representation of 'the essence of social phenomena as such and in general'. Likewise, there is really very little difference between Winch's theoretical aims and those of Habermas (1989:119), who claims to reveal the 'structures of the lifeworld in general'. This being so, I regard Winch's *Idea of a Social Science* as decidedly *programmatic,* his anti-social-scientific and relativist proclivities notwithstanding.

Based upon his reading of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations,* Winch (1990:12) argues that the age-old problem of the relationship between thought and reality can be resolved through 'the solution of confusions about the nature of language in general'. He goes on to argue that resolving these confusions requires an analysis of 'the *general concept* of following a rule' (*ibid.:* 33–original emphasis). Finally, establishing the case for a close correspondence between social studies and 'epistemology' (theory of social ontology), Winch (*ibid.:* 126) claims that the philosophy of logic and language necessarily entails social analysis, because language and logic are 'only possible in virtue of the sort of agreement between men and their actions which is discussed by Wittgenstein'. This line of argument culminates in his (in)famous assertion that 'all behaviour which is meaningful (therefore all specifically human behaviour) is *ipso facto* rule-governed' (*ibid.:* 52). The effects of this 'ontological picture' of the rule-governed form of human action will be considered at length in chapters 4 and 5.

Winch's own account of what he is trying to do in *The Idea of a Social Science* shows that he regards Wittgenstein's philosophy as an implicit, prototypical form of social theory, containing an embryonic theory of social phenomena, language, rule-following, meaning, etc. –which he endeavours to explicate and develop. His extension, and conversion, of Wittgenstein's ideas into theses about the basic

nature (ontology) of language, rule-following, meaning, a form of life –social phenomena 'as such and in general' –prefigured what was to become the central programme in critical social theory. The critical social theory of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar, which is centrally concerned with theoretical models of subjectivity, action, agency, and social organisation, is a continuation of the kind of social theory set in motion by Winch. Critical social theorists accept (after their own modifications and refinements) Winch's theory of social ontology, but they attempt to derive 'critical' imperatives from it.

This account of Winch's conception of philosophy, and his theory of social ontology, shows how sharply he diverged from Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy. Winch's repeated emphasis on the *generality* of his enquiry is directly opposed to Wittgenstein's critique of the 'craving for generality' (1972:17). This craving for generality results in the theorist trying to cram all possible instances of some phenomenon into their 'metaphysical picture' of its essential nature– 'a preconceived idea to which reality *must* correspond' (Wittgenstein 1968:§131).

In addition to his critique of theoretical generality, Wittgenstein was also, I believe, implacably opposed to Kantian *a priorist* philosophising–of precisely the kind recommended by Winch. It is this kind of philosophical analysis that Wittgenstein is objecting to on those numerous occasions in his later writings when he warns the philosopher against the temptation to assert that things *'must'* be this way or that (as dictated by the philosopher's *a priori* metaphysical picture): '"must": that means we are going to apply this picture come what may' (Wittgenstein 1976:411, see also 1968: §§66, 81, 101, 131, 437). This urge to assert what *must* be the case is, of course, the basic form of a Kantian transcendental argument–that is, a statement of the conditions which (allegedly) must pertain in order for such-and-such an experiential phenomenon to be possible. This form is exemplified in Winch's (1990:21) statement that his task is to 'describe the conditions which must be satisfied if there are to *be* any criteria of understanding at all'. In arguing against the Kantian, *a priorist,* transcendental mode of philosophical analysis, Wittgenstein is also arguing against his own earlier Tractarian philosophy. In chapters 4 and 5 I will argue that the 'rule-governed' model of human action propounded by Winch, and later adopted by critical social theorists, is of Kantian inspiration, and it was the object of Wittgenstein's critique, not his invention.

IV Elective affinities

I have now reviewed enough of Winch's theoretical strategy to be able to offer an account of his influence on, and relationship to, critical social theory. I suggest that there are underlying 'elective affinities' between Winch's hermeneutical social theory and critical social theory. These affinities have been obscured by portrayals of Winch as an anti-explanatory and anti-universalist philosopher. I will consider three main factors: (1) Winch persuasively claimed Wittgenstein's authority and has become an indispensable prism through which critical social theorists view

Wittgenstein. (2) Many of Winch's criticisms of social-scientific orthodoxy were both timely and telling. (3) His Kantian *a priori* and transcendental mode of theoretical practice fitted in well with the theoretical interests of critical social theorists. I will now elaborate on each of these factors.

Firstly, the claim to Wittgenstein's authority. Winch recommends that those engaged in 'social studies' should throw off their obsession with scientific method and become more philosophically aware: 'if Wittgenstein's arguments are sound', then 'epistemology' (social ontology) is what the student of social life 'must sooner or later concern himself with' (Winch 1990:42). Winch suggests, then, that understanding Wittgenstein's arguments inevitably leads the social student to reflect upon the nature and conditions of 'social phenomena as such and in general'. Of course, it is not unusual, and it is perfectly reasonable, to invoke the support of an acclaimed authority figure. However, the way this appeal is made, and the way Wittgenstein is brought into Winch's text at various other junctures, gives a misleading impression of non-controversy on what exactly it is that Wittgenstein's arguments portend.

At the time of Winch's writing it was not apparent just how enigmatic Wittgenstein's arguments would subsequently prove to be. Virtually all later philosophers of social science and social theorists have unquestioningly accepted that Winch authoritatively brought out all the relevant implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy for social theory and social science.[11] Hence Winch has provided social theorists the service of making Wittgenstein readily accessible. And on that basis they have either rejected Wittgenstein because of (what they see as) the undesirable consequences of Winch's prescriptions for social science; or those who have found merit in Winch's ideas have failed to find anything extra in Wittgenstein's philosophy and have not noticed any serious deficiencies in Winch's use of it.[12]

I do not mean to say that Winch has somehow dictatorially set himself up as the sole legitimate interpreter of Wittgenstein for social theory. Winch's authority on Wittgenstein depends not just on his own rhetorical skills, but equally upon the collusion of his readers—that is, the readiness with which social theorists have accepted and then further promulgated the view that Winch is the 'official translator' of Wittgenstein's philosophy for the social sciences. This is now so much an orthodoxy that many writers automatically identify Winch with Wittgenstein —with no attempt at explanation or justification.[13] Thus Winch's authority functions, and is sustained, in much the same way as Weber's explanation of charisma: charismatic individuals are, to a significant extent, accorded their authority through the projections of their followers.

Secondly, Winch's critique of 'the orthodox consensus' (Giddens 1984:xv) in social science/theory—which includes functionalist and structuralist systems theories, Marxism, behaviourism, and applied social research of either positivist or more pragmatic inspiration. This critique was extremely effective and well received, regardless of how closely it was actually based on Wittgenstein's philosophy. Applying the notions of rule-following and meaningfulness to social

life, and invoking the idea of incommensurability between different 'modes of social life', Winch was able to challenge the 'grand narratives' of positivist, objectivist, and determinist social science. Above all, Winch portrayed a picture of individuals and their relationship to institutional social structure which portrayed them as active agents who knowledgeably participate in the reproduction and development of their own culture and social system.

This 'ontological picture' reversed the priorities assumed by the 'orthodox' social-scientific approach to social explanation, in which individuals were deemed to be the passive subjects of 'external' social and historical laws and forces. In contrast, Winch's theory of social and individual ontology required that social students should endeavour to identify and understand the meanings of the rules constituting different modes of social life, and to see these meanings from 'the actor's point of view', rather than impose their 'scientific' critical-explanatory models onto actors' consciousness and culture.

Winch's critique of positivist social science, and his 'rule-following' theory of social ontology, coalesced with a variety of 'interpretive', 'micro-sociological' programmes of social enquiry. These approaches also emphasised 'the actor's point of view', so as to reveal the meanings and 'skilful accomplishments' of 'locally constructed' and maintained social order (see chapter 7). Prominent amongst these approaches are symbolic interactionism, Goffman's 'dramaturgical' sociology, and ethnomethodology. Although the founders of these 'interpretive' programmes did not rank Wittgenstein amongst their intellectual forebears, critical social theorists regard Winch, Wittgenstein and micro-sociologies as manifestations of the same philosophical tendencies (which Habermas [1989:119–52] calls 'hermeneutic idealism'). Thus Winch combines with micro-sociology to form a compelling amalgam of perspectives on the 'agency' side of the structure–agency dichotomy which critical social theorists diagnose and seek to transcend (see section VI below). Winch provides a Kantian *a priori* argument for a 'hermeneutical' theory of social ontology which complements the micro-sociologists' empirically grounded 'hermeneutical' analysis of social practices.

The third factor which I suggest helps to account for Winch's positive influence on critical social theory is his *programmatic* approach. Winch is scathing in his attack on the explanatory pretensions of orthodox (positivist) social science, prescribing in its place a methodological stance which is open to the diver-sity and complexity of different modes of social life and systems of meaning. Yet, notwithstanding this, at the level of meta-theory, or second-order enquiry (ontology), he too engages in some very abstract, generalising and universalistic theory-construction. It is this level of meta-theory that exhibits the strongest elective affinity with critical social theory. Although Winch has frequently been criticised for trying to turn the social sciences into philosophy, or else of elevating the role of philosophy to that of a kind of master-social science,[14] it is quite clear from his stated aim of revealing the essential nature of rule-following, social phenomena, language, meaning etc. 'as such and in general', that he helped prepare the ground for a new kind of social theory, or perhaps the idea of social theory itself. This

new discipline, critical social theory–the 'new consensus' as I called it in chapter 1 –stands between philosophy and social science, and is preoccupied with the construction of theories of individual and social ontology.

Whilst rejecting Winch's negative appraisal of the epistemological status of social science, Habermas, Giddens and Bhaskar have generally accepted, and incorporated, his positive prescriptions for social studies into their critical social theory. In fact they have succeeded in propagating the rule-following picture of meaningful action as a new orthodoxy (see chapters 4 and 5). Critical social theory largely owes its identity to its (purported) transcendence of two opposed tradi-tions–on the one side, positivist social science, and on the other, Winch's anti-positivist theory of social ontology, along with other 'micro-sociologies' (see section VI below).

In spite of their distance from Winch's views on the critical and explanatory powers of social science, critical social theorists do in fact concur with Winch's 'idea' of social studies: that the main task of critical social theory is to develop an account of the general nature of individual meaning, understanding, action, agency, rationality, knowledgeability, and its interrelation with social and institutional organisation. Wittgenstein's work has only been of interest to critical social theorists in terms of its capacity to be translated into substantive theses on the nature of social life and individual action 'as such and in general'. And Winch was the first to demonstrate how this could be done. That Wittgensteinian philosophy should aspire to theories of social phenomena *as such and in general* has never been seriously questioned by critical social theorists–nor indeed, as I have shown, by Winch himself.

Although there are a number of points on which critical social theorists have seriously misinterpreted or misrepresented Winch (for example his position on the criticisability of practices and modes of social life–see note 4), there remains a deep continuity in their overall theoretical approaches to 'social phenomena'. The basic point is that Winch actually practises that which he explicitly denounces, namely explanatory generalisation (and thereby is involved in 'performative contradiction'). The explicit message of *The Idea of a Social Science* is that 'objective' explanation should give way to 'hermeneutical' understanding of a practice or way of life in terms of the rules governing the activities internal to it–'grasping the *point* or *meaning* of what is being said or done' (Winch 1990: 115). This message is argued via, as Winch (1990:41) puts it, the elucidation of 'the notion of a form of life as such'. This elucidation issues in the claims that all meaningful action is rule-governed, that 'social relations between men exist only in and through their ideas' (*ibid.:* 123), and that the logical form of social life–the regularities manifested in it–is rule-governed, not law-determined.

The explicit message asserts that only localised understanding is possible, and that radically differing ways of life generate their own (relatively autonomous) criteria of intelligibility and 'rationality'. But this explicit message is predicated on an underlying claim to generality and universality (as in 'continental' hermeneutical theory). Thus the 'relativist' prescription for social studies is founded

upon an *ontological theory* of the essential nature of meaning and social reality. Winch claims to offer a deeper, more accurate, more faithful representation ('ontological picture'), of the fundamental nature of social reality *as such* than that presented by 'objectivist' social scientists/theorists. He thereby plays basically the same traditional philosophical 'language-game' as the latter–and more to the point for present purposes, much the same 'language-game' as critical social theorists.

Although I have drawn attention to Winch's transcendental theorising tendencies, his interpretation of Wittgenstein is not an aberration. To take one other–particularly stark–example: a recent book devoted specifically to Wittgenstein's mode of philosophising, his 'way of seeing' (Genova 1995), exhibits just the same tendencies as Winch.[15] The author of this book professes a strong anti-theoretical line of interpretation, claiming that Wittgenstein introduced a new 'way of seeing' in place of conventional philosophical theory. In a manner reminiscent of Winch's idea of 'social studies', Genova (*ibid.:* 114) claims that Wittgenstein wanted philosophy merely to 'map forms of life instead of construct concepts'–because 'mapping concepts is less aggressive and intrusive than constructing them', and 'theory conceals differences and overgeneralises'. Yet, just like Winch, in the course of her exposition on Wittgenstein's anti-theoreticism, Genova constructs a 'Wittgensteinian' account of 'how things stand',[16] at the highest level of generality. Thus we are told that 'forms of life constrain the world'; 'language is not a representational structure, but a presentational act'; and that 'language, logic and the world meet and interact in practice' (*ibid.:* 19, 117, 158). Clearly, Genova's real goal, like Winch, is not to abandon theory, but rather to provide a *more accurate* 'ontological picture' of 'the way things really are'.

Having drawn attention to these 'elective affinities' between Winch and critical social theory, I will now provide a brief account of the transition from Winch's somewhat prototypical theory of social ontology to the fully developed, 'theoretically refined' ontology of critical social theory.

V Winch and 'linguistic idealism'

Although, as I have said, Winch paved the way for the fully developed theories of social ontology propounded by critical social theorists, there is some metaphysical ambiguity in his own social theory. It will be recalled that Winch's (1990: 52) major and innovative thesis is that all human behaviour is rule-governed. The reasoning behind this thesis can be reconstructed thus:

1 'All specifically human behaviour' is inherently meaningful–in contrast to other, non-human behaviour, which is not meaningful in itself, but only meaningful in relation to a human context: 'it is only the dog's relation to human beings which makes it intelligible to speak of his having mastered a trick' (Winch 1990:60).
2 Human behaviour 'can be meaningful only if governed by rules' (*ibid.:* 116).

3 The account of following a rule 'as such', which (according to Winch) Wittgenstein works out through 'elucidating the nature of language', is extended by Winch so as to 'shed light on other forms of human interaction besides speech' (*ibid.:* 45).

Winch argues that the ability to speak a language and act intentionally entails that people must act in the future in a way which recognisably conforms to those principles that are symbolically embodied in their past behaviour of the same kind: 'it is only because human actions exemplify rules that we can speak of past experience as relevant to our current behaviour' *(ibid.)*. Thus the correctness/appropriateness of an action is judged in terms of its exemplification of a rule (or rules), and for this to occur 'it must be in principle possible for other people to grasp [the] rule' (*ibid.:* 73).

However, Winch's thesis that *all* human action is rule-governed is not quite so straightforward as it appears at first sight. Winch proposes a criterion of rule-following which does not depend on the individual actually being *aware* of following, or being able *to formulate,* the rule(s) which inform their activity. The criterion is simply 'whether it makes sense to distinguish between a right way and a wrong way of doing things in connection with what [the individual] does' (*ibid.:* 58).[17] So Winch's thesis does not actually say that all human action is always literally generated through individuals *consciously* following rules;[18] rather, the criterion for ascribing rule-following behaviour to an individual in a given case ultimately depends on *the judgement of the observer* (who will, presumably, usually– but not necessarily–be a theorist of some kind).

Winch's analysis of rule-following has been criticised by critical social theorists for being 'idealist', and for over-extending the role of language in constituting social reality. However, there is also evidence in Winch's text of the kind of 'ontological realism' later to be embraced by critical social theorists. The prime example of this is Winch's (*ibid.:* 127–8) criticism of Karl Popper's *lack* of realism. Winch objects to Popper's claim that social-scientific explanations refer only to the theorist's own theoretical construction or model. Popper believes (quite rightly, in my view) that social scientists are prone to projecting their theoretical constructions onto their subject matter: 'we are liable to believe that we see [the theoretical model] either within or behind the changing observable events, as a kind of observable ghost or essence' (quoted by Winch *ibid.:* 127).

Taking issue with Popper, Winch *(ibid.)* claims that, on the contrary, the 'social institutions' in social scientists' theoretical models are not mere inventions 'introduced by the social scientist for his own purposes'; rather they are built into the structure and tissue of social life itself. Pre-empting the post-empiricist critique of empiricism which is so central to critical social theory, Winch argues that it is a mistake to restrict attributions of reality to directly observable phenomena– that is, to particular individuals in Popper's 'methodological individualism'. Winch's critique of Popper seems not to have been noticed by critical social theorists, yet it expresses exactly the same sentiment as Giddens's (1979:63)

injunction that an adequate theory of 'social structure' cannot consist merely of 'models invented by sociological or anthropological observers'.

So the metaphysical ambiguity in Winch's theory of social ontology is that his analysis of rule-following and social relations mixes an 'idealist' epistemology with a 'realist' ontology. His critique of Popper would seem to apply to his own criterion for rule-following activity. That is, making the reality of rule-following contingent upon 'whether it makes sense to distinguish between a right way and a wrong way of doing things in connection with what [the individual] does', is effectively to commit Popper's 'mistake' of seeing rule-following attributions as merely the observer's schema of interpretation. Critical social theorists reject Winch's 'idealist' epistemology, but they fail to see or acknowledge the 'realist' ontology.

A significant corollary of Winch's 'linguistic idealism' (Habermas 1988:174; Bhaskar 1989a:141; Giddens 1979:265 n.59) is that his central concepts–'mode of social life', 'rules' and 'rule-following' action–are seen by critical social theorists as sociologically naive and theoretically underdeveloped. Winch's concept of 'rule' is criticised for being modelled too closely on linguistic action and for not distinguishing different kinds of rule (Giddens 1984:18; Bhaskar 1989a:143). Because of his emphasis on language and 'meaningful action', Winch is castigated for ignoring, or even denying, the '*material* (or outer) aspect' of social life (Bhaskar 1989a:136), the 'material being of life-practice' (Habermas 1988:173) and 'the unanticipated conditions, and unintended consequences of action' (Giddens 1982a:7). And further, as a consequence of his 'linguistic' conception of rules and rule-following, Winch is said to be blind to the social and political power through which the observation of rules is sanctioned, and therefore also fails to 'pose the question, *whose* rules?' (Giddens 1976:48), and does not think to ask where the operative rules come from and how they are produced (*ibid.:* 51; Bhaskar 1989a:144). In addition to this alleged sociological naivety, it is claimed that another manifestation of Winch's 'linguistic idealism' is that 'he is unconcerned with history' (Giddens 1982a:5). And most culpably of all, Winch (and Wittgenstein) are condemned for the supposed conservatism which follows from the explicit rejection of explanatory theory in favour of 'hermeneutical' description.

It is this lack of 'realism' in Winch's social theory which critical social theorists attempted to rectify by extracting the useful features of his account of meaningful action from its 'idealist' setting (in *The Idea of a Social Science*) and implanting it in their own rigorous, theoretically refined and sociologically sophisticated, explanatory framework. By this means, Winch's ideas (and again by association, Wittgenstein's) were transformed from the mere 'negativity' of reactionary opposition to social science, into components of a quasi-scientific critical social theory.

Although it is not the main purpose of this chapter to criticise critical social theorists as such, I should say a little about the validity of their criticisms of Winch. Although they object to Winch's claim that all meaningful action is rule-governed, the notion of 'transcendental rules' is absolutely central to Giddens's

theory of structuration and Habermas's theories of communicative action and argumentation (see chapter 4). They object to Winch's 'linguistification' of social reality, and yet Giddens's concept of social structure–a 'virtual order of differences'–is drawn from structuralist linguistics, and his key notion of the 'duality of structure' is built upon an analogy with language and speech (see chapter 4). Likewise, according to Habermas (1990:100), 'there is no form of sociocultural life that is not at least implicitly geared to maintaining communicative action by means of argumentation'. It is ironic, then, that Winch (in a new preface to the second edition of *The Idea of a Social Science*) has had second thoughts about his identification of meaningful action with rule-governedness, and his earlier 'linguistic' conception of social life–whilst the theories of Giddens and Habermas have become ever more 'linguistic' and 'idealist'. Finally, the most im-passioned objection against Winch's Wittgensteinian philosophy is that it is a-critical and thus 'leaves the world as it is' (Habermas 1990:11). But it can hardly be said of the theories of structuration, communicative action, or discourse ethics, that they have anything much to say about *changing the social world*. Indeed, a major theme of this book will be that critical social theory is utterly devoid of the serious critical content that it claims to possess. This will be discussed in more detail later.

Having examined critical social theorists' 'realist' appropriation of Winch's 'idealist' theory of social ontology, it is now time to consider their response to his characterisation of the epistemological status of 'social studies'.

VI The *Aufhebung* of hermeneutic and positivist social theory

Winch's 'Wittgensteinian' idea of social studies readily fits in with the traditional hermeneutical distinction between 'explanation' *(Erklären)* in the natural sciences, and 'understanding' *(Verstehen)* in the humanities. Critical social theorists agree with Winch that social action is inherently 'meaningful', and that social structure is not an alien and external set of forces: 'social relations are expressions of ideas about reality' (Winch 1990:23).[19] They also agree with Winch on the consequence of this for the logic of social and political enquiry. Thus the practice of both natural and social science (social studies) is governed by a set of rules which structure their conditions of enquiry, but social scientists/students are confronted by an additional different order of rules: those which constitute the mode of social life comprising their domain of enquiry. This is what Giddens (1976:158) later christened the 'double hermeneutic', a notion subsequently endorsed by Bhaskar (1989a:155) and Habermas (1991:110). However, as we saw in the previous section, critical social theorists maintain, in opposition to Winch, that although social reality *depends* on meaningful action, it is not *identical* with it. And they disagree with Winch over what the 'hermeneutical' nature of social life and social inquiry entails for the epistemic status and critical-explanatory potential of social science.

Winch is adamant that the rule-governed nature of social life renders it impervious to 'scientific' critical-explanatory analysis. This view is reflected in his redescription of the social sciences as 'social studies'. The terminology is indicative of Winch's assessment of the difference in epistemic authority between those who study natural, and those who study social, phenomena. Thus the natural scientist authoritatively reports on the 'facts' of the natural world;[20] but the 'student of society, or of a particular mode of social life' (*ibid.:* 89) is more like an apprentice trying to learn the methods and procedures of their discipline than they are a fully trained professional who is authorised to pronounce on the nature of things. This way of viewing the situation of enquiry exemplifies Gadamer's hermeneutical principle, which states that the interpreter must allow the text (or text-analogue, for example a social practice) to speak. Hence Winch locates epistemic authority with the *observer* in the natural sciences (because natural phenomena, unlike social phenomena, are not inherently meaningful), but for social studies it is the social *object* that has epistemic authority.

Critical social theorists reject Winch's assessment of the epistemic status of social science. They argue that Winch's restriction on the epistemic possibilities for social science is predicated on an untenable dichotomy between a positivistically conceived natural science (see note 20) versus a hermeneutically conceived social science. They point out that empiricist philosophy of science presented an erroneous account of the logic and methods of natural science, and is now almost universally rejected. Appealing to some of the lessons of the post-empiricist critique of traditional philosophy of science (see Pleasants 1997), critical social theorists argue that (1) traditional criteria of scientificity–universal laws, prediction and control, special scientific method, 'theory-neutral' observation language–have been shown to be an empiricist illusion rather than a description of the actual procedures and achievements of the natural sciences; (2) empiricist philosophy adhered to an untenably rigid distinction between fact and value, and between theory and observation, which manifested in a utopian celebration of the 'objectivity', 'certainty' and 'neutrality' of scientific theories.

Critical social theorists welcome the implications (as they see them) of the post-empiricist demonstration of the inherently 'hermeneutical' nature of scientific theory.[21] Natural science is no longer believed to provide indubitable knowledge, nor formulate universal laws from which its explanatory and predictive powers supposedly derive; and its success is seen to depend more on its social and institutional organisation than conformity to a special methodological logic. In a nutshell, empiricist criteria of scientificity were ideals which the natural sciences did not –and could not–live up to. Thus the old hermeneutical objection to the scientific status of the social sciences is swept away at a stroke: *all* sciences are now seen to be irredeemably embroiled in interpretive work.

This is a fortuitous 'discovery' for critical social theorists wishing to defend the explanatory status of the social sciences, because they can now argue that criteria of scientificity no longer need to be seen to preclude these disciplines. Although positivism is undoubtedly dead and buried (according to official

proclamation), the aspiration for scientific unity remains. In order to satisfy this aspiration, critical social theorists resurrect the positivist belief in the fundamental unity of the sciences and repackage it into a new 'hermeneutical' form. Critical social theorists argue that rather than seeing natural science as a normative model for social science, the priority should be reversed, and natural science should be seen to be 'always already' like social science in essential respects. Hence critical social theorists maintain, contra Winch, that the epistemological status of social and natural science is essentially the same;[22] it is their respective subject matters which differ, and this is an *ontological,* not an *epistemological,* difference.[23]

Giddens, Bhaskar and Habermas each pursue basically the same theoretical strategy, which consists in synthesising, 'dialectically', the apparent contradictions that they detect in their contrast between hermeneutical (Wittgensteinian, ethnomethodological, dramaturgical, Gadamerian) versus positivist (Marxist, Durkheimian, Parsonian) social/political theory. This transcendence, or *Aufhebung* (Bhaskar 1989a:123), is accomplished in Hegelian fashion. Thus critical social theorists endeavour to demonstrate that what appears to be (from the limited perspective of hermeneutical and positivist theorists) a fundamental conflict between two diametrically opposed theoretical orientations, is shown to be in fact a set of equally necessary elements which, when brought together in the new theoretical synthesis, retains the achievements of both hermeneutical and positivist theory whilst rejecting their negative connotations and consequences. With this new synthesis, it is claimed that critical, explanatory and hermeneutical insights are generated which neither positivist nor hermeneutical approaches are able to cognise within their own partial and limited perspectives.

From critical social theorists' 'dialectical' viewpoint, hermeneutical theorists are exclusively preoccupied with action, agency, meaning, the idiographic and local context ('forms of life', the 'lifeworld', etc.). Positivist theorists, on the other hand, are seen to be equally exclusively preoccupied with the antonyms of the hermeneuticists' interests, namely structure, system, causal forces, behaviour, the nomothetic and universality. Exclusive preoccupation with just one side of these dichotomies is said to prevent both hermeneutical and positivist theorists from attaining adequate conceptions of the very phenomena they are concerned with. Positivists and hermeneuticists operate in a Manichean world in which individual meaningful action and social structure/system are ontologically opposed; critical social theorists seek to bring them out into the Panglossian light of their new theoretical synthesis.

The main 'achievement' claimed by critical social theorists is the demonstration that these theoretical interests and perspectives are not ineradicably contradictory but are, on the contrary, necessary parts of a more comprehensive theoretical system. For example, individual action and social structure are now no longer seen to entail two mutually exclusive metaphysical world-views–'indi-vidual agency' versus 'objective determination' –but to be intimately interlinked. Critical social theorists argue that social 'structure', or 'system', is the knowledgeably produced outcome of individuals' actions; and conversely, individuals' actions

necessarily draw upon individual-transcendent structures and systems. This is the principle of the 'duality of structure' which is central to Giddens's (1984) 'structuration' theory and Bhaskar's (1989a) 'transformational model of social activity'. Likewise, Habermas's notions of 'system' and 'lifeworld' are basically synonymous with Giddens's and Bhaskar's 'structure' and 'agency'. Habermas's (1989:151) suggestion that 'the fundamental problem of social theory is how to connect…the notions of "system" and "lifeworld"', expresses the same sentiment that Giddens and Bhaskar aim to address with their social theories.

Thus critical social theory claims to provide a new theoretical synthesis of hermeneutical and positivist social theory/science–'explanatory power', combined with 'hermeneutical understanding' and 'emancipatory critique'. Much of the remainder of this book will be directed towards subverting this preten-sion (as I see it) to a quasi-scientific normative theory of social and political life.

VII Conclusion

Despite their attempts to criticise Winch, critical social theorists are in fact very close to him in core respects. Their strategy is to create an impression of considerable distance between themselves and Winch, but in my view this gap is much narrower than they imply. This strategy is connected with their avowed dissatisfaction with Winch's relativism and his opposition to 'scientific' criticism. Yet their-own 'rule-generated' ontological picture of social life is very similar to Winch's. Moreover, their theoretical practice, far from being 'critical' as they claim, is, so I shall go on to argue, idealist, conservative and impotent –just those tendencies for which they berate Winch. Again, critical social theorists claim to object to Winch's 'philosophisation' (idealisation) of social science–but this is one of the most distinctive features of their own theoretical practice.

The main aim of this chapter has been to problematise that which is usually taken for granted in social-theoretical perspectives on Wittgenstein: that Wittgenstein's importance to social theory resides in the extent to which certain of his ideas can be incorporated into a theoretical system depicting the essential features of knowledge, action, social structure, etc. Winch was the first to attempt this task, setting the agenda for subsequent encounters between social/political theory and Wittgenstein. I have sought to show how Winch, by portraying Wittgenstein as a proto-social theorist, offered an interpretation that was particularly useful to critical social theorists, both in their quest to transcend the posi-tivist-hermeneutical dichotomy in social/political theory and as a resource in the formation of their discipline. On the one hand, Winch's 'Wittgensteinian' social theory anticipated and helped in the formation of critical social theory. Conversely, on the other hand, critical social theory is more Winchian in its basic theoretical practice than its practitioners have acknowledged.

Although Winch has been heavily criticised over the years, few, if any, have questioned the basic compatibility of his focus on 'the nature of social phenomena in general' (Winch 1990:41) with Wittgenstein's philosophy. Winch has been

heavily criticised on the details of his account of 'language in general', 'the notion of a form of life as such', and 'the *general concept* of following a rule' (*ibid.*: 12, 41, 33). But whether or not this theoretical interest in such high-level generalities is authentically Wittgensteinian is a question that has not really been considered. I have claimed that in fact this interest in generality is fundamentally alien to Wittgenstein's philosophy, and I have argued that it is an interest which derives from a Kantian conception of philosophy which is shared by Winch and critical social theorists.

4

WITTGENSTEIN'S RULE-FOLLOWING REMARKS AND CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

Deconstructing tacit knowledge and transcendental rules

We know more than we can tell.

(Polanyi 1967:4)

If you use a rule to give a description you yourself do not know more than you say.

(Wittgenstein 1978:IV §8)

I Introduction

As I said in the previous chapter, a leading theoretical objective of critical social theorists has been to effect a 'dialectical' synthesis of (what they perceive as) two opposed traditions in social and political theory. They have sought to construct theoretical systems in which both the positivist/objectivist preoccupation with social structure, and the contrasting hermeneuticist/subjectivist fixation on individual agency, are accommodated in a new synthesis. Giddens's 'theory of structuration', Bhaskar's 'transformational model of social activity' (TMSA) and Haber-mas's 'theory of communicative action' (TCA) try to provide the desiderata for a unified theory (ontology) of individual subjectivity and social structure. Their aim is to provide a perspective which shows that individuals are not preconstituted subjects dualistically related to an 'external' world of social structures and relations. The new perspectives are designed to depict individuals as 'always already'[1] social beings, and the social system as a recursively reproduced product of individual action.

The theoretical systems of Bhaskar and Giddens, though developed independently of one another (Bhaskar 1982:275; Giddens 1982a:vii), are very similar, whereas Habermas's is somewhat different. However, the central components of each system are composed of essentially the same concepts: tacit

knowledge and transcendental rules. These concepts owe much to the social-theoretical appropriation of Wittgenstein and post-Wittgensteinian philosophy, which was the subject of the previous chapter. In this chapter I focus primarily on Giddens's incorporation of tacit knowledge and rule-following into his 'theory of structuration', as the latter is the most theoretically developed and sophisticated account of tacit knowledge and rules to be advanced in social theory. Bhaskar's TMSA, and Habermas's TCA, will be subjected to critical scrutiny in chapters 6 and 8 respectively.

The 'ontological pictures' of tacit knowledge and transcendental rules are central to what Giddens (1979:38; compare Bhaskar 1989a:112) calls the 'de-centring of subjectivity',[2] which he relates to innovations in theories of subjectivity that were initiated by structuralism and developed by post-structuralism. The theory of structuration, with its model of the 'knowledgeable agent', is intended to correct some of the structuralist excesses, whilst retaining key features of the 'de-centred' perspective.

I should emphasise that whilst I am going to be sharply critical of Giddens's interpretation of Wittgenstein, I do not consider his understanding to be an aberration–much of the scholarly commentary and exegesis of Wittgenstein presents a similar view. Giddens attempts to extend Wittgenstein's philosophy into the concerns of social and political theory, but this extension is reasonably well grounded in much of the philosophical commentary on Wittgenstein, from Winch onwards.

II Origins of the rule-following model of human action

Since the publication in 1958 of Winch's *Idea of a Social Science,* the regularity and coherence of social action has increasingly come to be seen as *rule-generated* rather than *law-governed*.[3] However, although this is invariably presented as a quite recent, 'hermeneutical' innovation, theoretical interest in rules is not a new development. Parsons's 'action frame of reference' was also centrally concerned with rules. Building on Durkheim's notion of the omnipresent normative background to contractual action, Parsons (1937:312) emphasised the 'social' nature of rules, against individualistic conceptions of rules functioning 'quite automatically without "social" interference'. Similarly, Parsons stressed the importance of Durkheim's distinction between action guided by 'normative rules' and behaviour determined by 'naturalistic causation' (*ibid.:* 314).

In an early paper on 'Trust', Garfinkel (1963) outlined a theory of action which is quite similar to Winch's (1990:52) identification of 'behaviour which is meaningful' with the property of being 'rule-governed'. Drawing upon Schutz rather than Wittgenstein, Garfinkel (1963:198) suggests that not just games, but '*all* actions' have a 'constitutive structure' and a 'normative order'. The 'constitutive phenomenology of situations of everyday life' is made up of 'basic and preference rules', which in turn are conditioned by a background of assumptions and

expectancies (*ibid.:* 209, 192). Garfinkel and ethnomethodology will be discussed in depth in chapter 7.

But the significance of the concept of rules for theories of human action considerably pre-dates these more recent developments. The concept of rules and rule-following activity is a fundamental feature of Immanuel Kant's 'Copernican revolution', which changed the meaning of 'autonomy' for social and political theory. The ancient meaning of autonomy was the ability of a city to formulate and adhere to its own laws, free from external interference (O'Neill 1992:213). With Kant, autonomy becomes a property of the individual, and denotes the 'noumenally' grounded freedom which enables people to follow the principles of reason, in freedom from alien, heteronomous causal forces. In Kant's system, most of human action–that is, action which does not spring from purely moral (non-empirical) motivation–is rooted in subjective experience, has empirical grounds and is governed by 'practical rules' (Kant 1947:57). But although moral principles carry the obligatoriness and universality of law *(ibid.),* they too are *rules* in that they are implemented autonomously, and are not subject to naturalistic causation as are empirical laws.[4]

And consciousness itself–that is, the categories of the understanding–is constituted by rules, according to Kant. Kant describes the powers of judgement, the synthetic act of unifying manifold sensory phenomena into a perception, and the subsumption of particulars under a universal term, all as being the product of the mind acting in accordance with (transcendental) rules which are the very condition of conscious experience. These rules can be known only through transcendental analysis. 'The understanding', says Kant, may be defined as *'the faculty of rules'* (1964:147–original emphasis). Anyone who assumed that the rule-following perspective was a recent, Wittgensteinian creation, might be surprised to know that Kant (1963:1) held that

> everything in nature, whether in the animate or inanimate world, takes place *according to rules,* although we do not always know these rules… All nature, indeed, is nothing but a combination of phenomena which follow rules; and *nowhere* is there *any irregularity*.

For Kant, the crucial species-characteristic of human beings is that we have the ability to follow rules 'rationally' and autonomously, whereas the rest of nature is merely subject to rules as a natural order of regularity.

If the rule-following model of human action marks a categorially different form of order to that of externally observed regularity and natural causation, then the means by which rules are *followed* assumes central importance. The 'hermeneutical turn' of Winch, Schutz and Garfinkel did not *create* the rule-following model. What they did was to direct social theorists' attention to the idea of interpretive, reflexive skills and powers of agency exercised by individuals *qua* followers of rules. The fundamental point to the new pictures of action presented by Winch, Schutz and Garfinkel is laconically summarised by Harré

(1993:182): 'people use rules, rules do not use people'. Thus the innovation of Winch, Schutz and Garfinkel regarding rule-following in social theory re-enacts Kant's reconceptualisation of autonomy, and thereby provided social theorists with the concept and theory of tacit knowledge and transcendental rules. For contemporary post-empiricist theorists, rules and tacit knowledge have become symbiotically related concepts, and these concepts are now so well established that their validity is rarely questioned.

III The concept of tacit knowledge

'Tacit', 'implicit' or 'practical' knowledge, or 'know-how',[5] seems to be an ideal conceptual replacement for the space created by 'post-foundationalist' efforts to 'de-centre' subjectivity from philosophy and social/political theory. This concept engenders the de-centring of subjectivity, but not at the cost of denying–as the more radical 'post-structuralists' have done–the reality of individual consciousness and knowledgeability. The concept of tacit knowledge seems so intuitively sound to the modern philosophical mind because of the evident inadequacies of both rationalist and empiricist 'subject-centred' philosophy.[6] Arising out of the observations that knowledge is never indubitable, and is often not available to individual conscious awareness, the 'ontological picture' of tacit knowledge has become the natural replacement for what Habermas (1991:387) refers to as 'the philosophy of consciousness' shared by both rationalist and empiricist philosophers.

These developments have issued in a kind of 'democratisation' of the criteria for knowledge, from 'theory' to 'practice': on the one hand, the actual practice of scientific work (not just theory, the end product) is now accorded the status of knowledge, and on the other hand, the practice of non-scientific activity also qualifies as knowledge. A consequence of this shift of emphasis from theory to practice is that, rather than identifying knowledge with theory as an intellectual product or state of mind, knowledge is seen primarily as process and activity: individuals are knowledgeable in virtue of what they can *do*–not (only) what they can theorise.

A major influence on the theory of tacit knowledge is 'ordinary language philosophy', particularly Ryle's (1945–6) seminal distinction between 'knowing how' and 'knowing that'.[7] A cursory consideration of linguistic use quickly reveals that we often say of someone that they 'know how to' ride a bicycle, drive a car, tie shoelaces, etc. –even though most people could neither provide an explicit discursive description of the detail of what they are able to do, nor understand the laws of physics to which their activities conform.[8] This is encapsulated by Polanyi's (1967:4) much quoted epigram: *'we know more than we can tell'*. Linguistic reflection, then, suggests that the term 'know', or 'knowledge', often does not entail or imply the discursive or propositional ability to say exactly what it is that one knows. An individual's stock of 'knowledge that' (i.e. their 'theoretical knowledge') is smaller than, and underpinned by, their stock of 'knowledge how'–

'every instance of problem solving and every interpretation depend on a web of myriad presuppositions' (Habermas 1990:10).

IV Critics of tacit knowledge

The concept of tacit knowledge is now so firmly entrenched in epistemological discourse that it is frequently treated as an obvious 'fact' rather than a theoretical concept. Such epistemically privileged status makes the notion a prime example of what I mean by an 'ontological picture'.

There are very few critics of the concept of tacit knowledge, apart from the following notable exceptions. Baker and Hacker (1984b:275) criticise the incoherence of modern linguists' attribution of '*tacit knowledge* of grammar or of a theory of meaning for a natural language' to ordinary language-users. Similarly, Dreyfus (1992) maintains that the research programme in 'artificial intelligence' will never be able to translate skilful practices into the explicit procedures and algorithms that the programme requires. In the philosophy of science, Popper and Lakatos have raised concerns about the consequences, for science, of granting privileged status to 'tacit knowledge'. But Lakatos and Popper criticise the notion for substantive and methodological, rather than logical, reasons. Although they do not deny the existence of something like 'tacit knowledge', they regard emphasis on the 'tacit powers' of scientists as dangerously subjectivist, mystical and obfuscatory. Popper's (1972:23) denunciation of the 'obscurantist faith in the expert's special skill, and in his personal knowledge and authority', is a thinly veiled attack on Polanyi's philosophy of science. Lakatos (1970:163 n.2, 178) criticises Polanyi's doctrines directly.

Popper and Lakatos insist that the logic of scientific discovery is an objective, publicly structured process, which must be sharply differentiated from the 'private' psychology (tacit knowledge) of individual scientists. Hence they are not concerned with the epistemic status of tacit knowledge as such; rather, they insist that scientific knowledge transcends individual subjectivity. Popper (1972:73) acknowledges the existence of what he calls 'subjective' or 'organismic' know-ledge–which is possessed by humans and animals alike–but he equivocates on whether this is not strictly *knowledge* at all, or whether it is just knowledge at a lower (evolutionary) level than 'objective knowledge'. The latter is suggested by his remark that ordinary language 'unfortunately has no separate terms' for 'subjective' knowledge claims and *knowledge* in the 'objective' sense (*ibid.:* 110). More recently, Fuller (1992), from the standpoint of 'social epistemology', has drawn attention to the way in which deployment of the notion 'tacit knowledge' by sociologists of science may serve to protect science and scientists from public scrutiny and democratic control.

The above critics focus their attention on the explanatory usefulness of appeals to tacit knowledge in particular research programmes (linguistics, artificial intelligence, philosophy of science and sociology of knowledge). However, Turner's (1994) critique, entitled *The Social Theory of Practices: Tradition, Tacit Knowledge and Presuppositions,* is much more wide-ranging, seeking to address a line of theorists

which includes almost every philosopher from Hume to Quine, Kripke and Elster, and most social theorists from Marx, Durkheim and Weber to Gadamer, Foucault and MacIntyre–all of whom are supposed to commit the same kinds of error associated with 'tacit knowledge' and cognate concepts. Yet, surprisingly, Turner makes no reference to Giddens, Habermas or Bhaskar. Turner's technique is to treat the concepts of 'practice', 'tacit knowledge', 'presupposition', 'paradigm', 'form of life', as synonymous, and then construct an 'ideal type' into which these concepts are amalgamated. The concepts making up the 'ideal type' are then characterised as 'object-like shared entities' (Turner 1994:13) with mysterious causal properties and an equally mysterious mode of 'transmission' and 'reproduction'. But the ideal type that Turner constructs bears little resemblance to the theories of *any* of the theorists to which he 'collectively' attributes it.[9] In fact, as will be discussed below, Giddens insists on 'ontological' distinctions between 'tacit knowledge', 'tacit rule', 'formulated rule' and 'practices'. My critique is similar to Turner's in that I too seek to question the coherence of the concept 'tacit knowledge' and 'tacit rule'–but my critique focuses on the detail of what is actually said by particular theorists.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned critics, contemporary social and political theorists, post-empiricist philosophers of science, many in the 'social studies of science' movement, and critical social theorists, all make use of the concept 'tacit knowledge' in their explanatory schemes. Many of these theorists regard Wittgenstein as a significant influence on their work, and they see tacit knowledge as the central component of a rule-following model of action which Wittgenstein is supposed to have advanced (Giddens 1984; Collins 1985; Habermas 1991).[10] The notion of 'tacit' or 'practical' knowledge is frequently understood to be the means by which Wittgenstein solves the 'rule-following paradox' in his discussion of rules in *Philosophical Investigations*. This interpretation, so I shall argue in section VII, is wholly mistaken.

V Tacit knowledge, transcendental rules and the theory of structuration

Tacit knowledge, or 'practical consciousness' (Giddens's preferred term for tacit knowledge[11]), is 'fundamental to structuration theory' (Giddens 1984:6), and it 'conforms generally to the Wittgensteinian notion of "knowing a rule" or "knowing how to go on"' (Giddens 1982a:31). I will assess the validity of the latter claim in the next section, and will now proceed with a (somewhat critical) outline of the central features of Giddens's theory of structuration.

Incorporating Ryle's and Polanyi's point that individuals 'know' vastly more than they are able to articulate, Giddens maintains, against 'objectivist' social and political theories, that all individuals 'know' (tacitly) a great deal about the conditions of their own and others' action, and about their social and political institutions. This knowledge is an essential property of the constitution of those institutions. One of the main features of structuration theory is the idea that the

institutional and structural framework of society does not operate externally, 'behind the backs' of individuals (Giddens 1979:71; Bhaskar 1989a:39–40). On the contrary, the existence of these 'objective' structural phenomena depends ultimately on the totality of individuals' knowledgeable actions. Similarly, Habermas (1991:279), appealing to 'analyses of background knowledge stimulated by Wittgenstein', also seeks, like Giddens, to connect 'action theory to the basic concepts of social theory' (i.e. 'lifeworld' and 'system'). Thus for Habermas (*ibid.:* 335–6), 'the fundamental background knowledge that must tacitly supplement' explicit knowledge practices, constitutes the necessary background, in the lifeworld, for communicative action to take place (see chapter 8).

For Giddens, *everything* that an individual does is knowledgeable under some description. His 'stratification model of the agent' (Giddens 1984:3–8) postulates three different modes of consciousness and types of knowledge, under which actions may be described, namely:[12]

1 *Discursive consciousness*. This is the domain of 'prepositional', 'theoretical' knowledge, or 'knowledge-that'–knowledge which is cognisable 'explicitly'. Only a small proportion of action comes under this description, and this knowledge/consciousness is grounded in, and underpinned by, level 2.
2 *Practical consciousness*. This is the domain of 'tacit', 'practical' knowledge, or 'know-how'–knowledge which is cognised 'implicitly', and is continuously (but 'routinely') 'reflexively monitored' by the individual. By far the largest proportion of action emanates from this domain, as knowledge of how to 'go on' in social life–that is, how to follow the relevant 'rules of social life' (*ibid.:* 20) appropriately and correctly. Levels 1 and 2 are both separated from, but influenced by, level 3.

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3 *The unconscious*. This is the domain of symbolically encoded emotional experience and motivational affects upon discursive and practical consciousness. The unconscious is a 'form[] of cognition' (*ibid.:* 4), but its contents, because they are mediated by 'the bar of repression' (*ibid.:* 375), can only appear to consciousness in 'distorted form' (*ibid.:* 5).

This model clearly embodies the metaphor of 'depth': 'discursive knowledge' appears on the surface, 'tacit knowledge' underlies the surface, and 'the unconscious' is buried deep, below the surface of consciousness, under the 'bar of repression'. Most individuals have no access to the contents of the unconscious–these can only be discerned by the psycho-analyst or social theorist (see Giddens's [*ibid.:* ch. 2] discussion of 'ontological security'). However, individuals can, in principle, and occasionally in fact, access some of their 'tacit knowledge'. But in the main, the translation of 'tacit' into 'explicit' knowledge is a 'hermeneutical' endeavour requiring the theoretical and interpretive skills of a professional social theorist. Thus, for example, Giddens's (*ibid.:* 79) analysis of 'the exhibiting of presence' (management of body and self-presentation), and Habermas's (1990:75)

'reconstruction' of 'the pragmatic presuppositions of argumentation as such', provide a translation of mundane 'tacit knowledge' into the 'knowledge-that' of professional social theory. Although this 'tacit knowledge' is said to be universally possessed by all 'competent social actors' (Giddens 1984:18), nevertheless it is, it seems, generally only accessible to the highly trained professional social theorist.[13] (This point will be developed further in chapter 8.)

Just as Freud's notion of the unconscious extended the concept of intentional action to include *all* human behaviour, so Giddens's notion of practical consciousness enables all human action to be seen as 'knowledgeable' –'under some description or another' (Giddens 1984:340). Knowledge is thereby depicted as *belonging* to all (competent) individuals themselves in some form or other–even though most do not *know* that they have it; knowledge is not to be seen as the privileged possession of an elite group of social scientists. Critical social theory proclaims that this propriety should be respected, and indeed celebrated, by professional theorists. For Giddens (1979:71), one central way in which social theory can legitimately discharge its 'critical' function is to deploy this picture of knowledgeability as a counter to the *'derogation of the lay actor'* allegedly perpetrated by objectivist and determinist social and political theories. Bhaskar's and Habermas's conception of critical social theory as critical theory follows essentially the same strategy as that of Giddens, and will be examined in depth in chapters 6 and 8 respectively.

In Giddens's theory of structuration, the use of language, the day-to-day management of self-presentation, and interactive negotiation in settings of 'co-presence', are prime examples of the operation of practical consciousness. Although all individuals continuously monitor, 'reflexively', their own and others' conduct in 'the ongoing flow of social life' (Giddens 1984:3), this monitoring generally takes place in the mode of 'practical consciousness' (*ibid.:* 44).[14] This means that individuals monitor their conduct without being consciously aware that they are doing so. In the course of acting 'knowledgeably', individuals are, necessarily, drawing upon, and applying, a multitude of rules from an omnipresent transcendental order of 'tacit' rules which shape and inform their activities. The rules are tacit in that individuals do not realise that they are 'following rules' in doing what they do, and could not discursively formulate them. These rules are described by Giddens (*ibid.:* 22) as 'formulae that are constantly invoked in the course of day-to-day activities', and which 'enter into the structuring of much of the texture of everyday life'. This transcendental order of tacit rules (along with the 'resources' enabling their application[15]) is what 'social structure' consists of (*ibid.:* 16–17). Correlatively, the 'tacit knowledge' and 'practical consciousness' of which rules to select, and how to apply them, constitutes individuals' 'agency'. Thus 'social structure' is constituted both by rules and the individual agency (tacit knowledge) through which the rules are followed.

It is through this inherent 'recursive' symbiosis between 'rule' and 'knowledge of how to apply the rule' that Giddens claims to overcome the traditional dualism between 'structure' and 'agency' that has divided 'scientific'/objectivist from

'hermeneutical'/subjectivist approaches to social and political theory. Thus in place of a *dualism* between 'rule' and 'knowledge of how to apply the rule', and between 'agency' and 'structure', Giddens (*ibid.:* 25–9) proposes a *'duality'* of structure and agency. According to Giddens, social and political theory has hitherto presented an inaccurate picture of a dualism between preconstituted individual subjects possessing powers of agency and consciousness, confronted and constrained by an 'external' order of objective structural determination. Giddens seeks to replace this picture with a new 'structurationist' one, in which 'agency' only exists in virtue of structures of rules informing and generating meaningful conduct; equally, these structures of rules only persist through the reproductive and transformative use of them by individual agents. The new picture of 'duality' is illustrated via the example of language: one can only speak or write meaningfully (thus exercising one's power of agency) through the utilisation of objective, socially established rules of semantics, syntax and grammar; but this very act of speaking/writing has the (unintended) consequence of simultaneously contributing to the reproduction or transformation of the rules of language as a whole (*ibid.:* 8). The notion of duality supposedly reveals that there are not two separate phenomena here (the act of speaking/writing and the extant rules of language) but, rather, two distinct sides of the same phenomenon, each side simultaneously entailing the other.

Although Giddens (1976:47) objects that 'Winch's treatment of "meaningful action" as equivalent to "rule-governed" conduct will not do', his own position is in fact the same as Winch's, in that like Winch, he too stipulates *a priori* that all human behaviour is generated by rules.[16] This equivalence follows from his insistence that all human acts are done 'knowledgeably', and that there is an essential duality between tacit knowledge and rules. This really does mean *all* human behaviour; for example, Giddens (1984:81) suggests that the main difference between 'competent social actors' and the 'mentally ill' is that the latter follow a deviant set of rules: 'many apparently bizarre elements of encounters between the sane and the mad seem to represent "experiments" which the latter carry out upon the usual frameworks of encounters'. Thus even 'mad' people possess agency and act knowledgeably and coherently. The most mundane of human phenomena are seen by Giddens (*ibid.:* 22) as the product of individuals knowledgeably following rules—that is, 'formulae that are constantly invoked in the course of day-to-day activities'. Even the spontaneous ejaculation 'oops!' is seen by Giddens (*ibid.:* 79–81) as a knowledgeable, rule-guided act, and not merely a behavioural response. Giddens thereby collapses the traditional philosophical distinction (deriving from Aristotle) between 'action' and 'behaviour'. Whilst he acknowledges—indeed emphasises—that individuals' acts have unintended consequences over which they have no control or awareness, he rejects the behavioural category in which people simply *do* what they do, 'unknowledgeably'.

Giddens (1979:65) maintains that 'practices are brought into being in the context of overlapping and connected sets of rules' (practices themselves are 'situated', 'regularised acts' [*ibid.:* 54, 56]). In order to avoid empiricist and behaviourist

'reductionism', rules must not be *identified* with the practices they bring into being. Hence, whilst rules 'impinge upon numerous aspects of routine practice', nevertheless 'a routine practice is not as such a rule' (Giddens 1984:19). The assumption of knowledgeability effectively *demands* a separation of rules from practices. Rules, and (tacit) knowledge of how to apply them, generate—are the 'condition of possibility' for—situated practices. This ontological separation of rules and practices is also needed so as to accommodate the reality of both *social* structure ('rules and resources') and *individual* agency (meaningful action and knowledgeability), whilst demonstrating their symbiotic interconnection; this is the central tenet of the theory of structuration.

The 'ontological' separation of rules from the practices they bring into being gives rise to the need for some new existential classifications. Structuration theory postulates that 'structure exists, as time-space presence, only in its instantiations in [social] practices and as memory traces orienting the conduct of knowledgeable human agents' (*ibid.:* 17). Many critics and commentators have, in my view, misinterpreted Giddens as saying that 'structure' (rules) only exists in individual consciousness, and is therefore 'subjective'. But Giddens only says that tacit knowledge (that is, *the ability to follow rules*) exists in individual consciousness—ultimately as 'organic' 'memory traces' (*ibid.:* 377). The *rules* themselves inhabit timespace only through their instances of use, as 'generating moments of [the] constitution' of social practices (Giddens 1979:5). But an instance of use is not the rule itself; it is, rather, an *application* of the rule—the application being generated, guided, or informed by the rule. The real (as it were) existence of rules inheres not in time-space but in a '*virtual* order of differences'. The relation between applications of rules (instantiations in social practices) and the rules *as such* (in virtual order—wherever that might be) is explained by Giddens (1979:71) as 'a dialectic of presences and absences'. Thus both tacit knowledge and the tacit rules of social structure are, ontologically, *transcendental.* They are transcendental in two senses: firstly, they transcend the awareness of individual consciousness, and, secondly, their existence is inferred through Kantian reasoning; that is, their existence is deemed to be necessary to explain the observed regularity, coherence and meaningfulness of social life. Whereas tacit knowledge is embedded in individuals' (practical) consciousness, tacit rules (structure) transcend individual consciousness, and are essentially social. The relationship (duality) between rules and their application, and between individual agency and social structure (rules) is modelled on the *langue/parôle* distinction in structuralist linguistics (Giddens 1979: chapter 1).

VI Giddens versus Wittgenstein on rules and practices

Giddens (1979:67) claims that 'to know a rule, as Wittgenstein says, is to "know how to go on"… This is vital, because it connects rules and practices.' But in my view, Giddens's conception of rules, knowledge and practices is radically, indeed incommensurably, different from Wittgenstein's. I contend that Giddens's position

is actually closer to Descartes and Kant than to Wittgenstein. I do not mean this necessarily as a criticism in itself. It is, rather, offered as an 'immanent' critique, on the basis that Giddens (1979:39) himself considers 'Cartesianism' to be a serious charge–evidenced in his objection that structuralists and post-structuralists 'tended to retain elements of the Cartesianism they have sought to reject'. Moreover, the central purpose of structuration theory (and Bhaskar's TMSA and Habermas's TCA) is to exorcise the *aporia* intrinsic to the Cartesian/Kantian 'philosophy of the subject'.

Giddens's Cartesianism is most evident in his efforts to redefine traditional dualism as 'duality'. Giddens postulates two dualities (or perhaps one 'triality'?) – between rules and practices, and between rules and knowledge of how to apply the rules. The manner in which the rules of 'virtual order' are supposed to interact with individuals' tacit knowledge is surely at least as mysterious as the relation between Descartes's dichotomous 'mental substance' and 'physical substance'. Moreover, the 'virtual order' in which rules supposedly exist outside of time and space looks equally as ethereal and 'ghostly' as Cartesian *res cogitans* is held to be. And there is a further dualism between rules and practices; this *is* a dualism, not a duality, because rules exist outside time and space, whereas practices (generated by the rules) are 'ordered across space and time' (Giddens 1984:2). It is reasonable to talk of a 'duality', in Giddens's sense, between, say, two sides of the same coin, but when the two phenomena are said to exist in ontologically distinct domains, the natural description for their interaction is 'dualism'. Rules and practices, as conceptualised by Giddens, clearly are ontologically distinct phenomena–hence the dualism, not duality. At the very least, Giddens's 'duality' is no less a *dualism* than Descartes's dualism (see also chapter 6, section V, for a critique of Bhaskar's TMSA along similar lines).

Giddens's notion of 'reflexive monitoring' also has a distinctly Cartesian heritage: 'actors' routinely 'maintain a continuing "theoretical understanding" of the grounds of their activity' (*ibid.:* 5). Giddens has not *transcended* the Cartesian 'paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness'; he has *extended,* and *radicalised* it. Whereas Descartes recommended that the *philosopher* should carefully examine the contents of his consciousness in order to arrive at secure theoretical knowledge, Giddens now claims that all individuals (all 'competent social actors') are intimately acquainted with their own (practical) consciousness routinely and chronically, as an inherent condition of their everyday conduct. According to Giddens we are all continuously and intimately acquainted with the conditions of, and reasons for, what we are doing–but in *tacit,* not (as with Descartes) *explicit* mode. Whereas for Descartes this 'reflexivity' concerned what is *thought,* for Giddens it pertains to what is *done.* Hence Giddens radicalises Descartes's concept of reflexivity (a highly specialised intellectual investigation) by making it an ordinary 'ontological' condition of social and personal being *as such.* For Descartes, 'reflexivity' meant *thinking* critically (i.e. by 'methodological doubt') in order to gain reliable knowledge; for Giddens, 'reflexivity' means that everyone, all the time, must *know* (i.e. tacitly/practically) in order to do anything meaningful at all.

Giddens's Cartesian 'dualism' and 'reflexivity' is combined, or synthesised, with Kantian transcendentalism. I noted above that Kant defines 'the understanding' as 'the faculty of rules'; but, like Giddens, he also recognised that rules cannot reach 'all the way down' into individuals' subjectivity (rules cannot apply themselves). The 'faculty of rules' ultimately depends upon an irredeemably practical ability (which Kant calls 'judgement') through which rules are applied (Kant 1964: 177). This practical ability, the 'schematism of our understanding', is 'an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover' (*ibid.:* 183). The only discernible change from Kant to Giddens is that the latter replaces Kant's old-fashioned talk of 'the soul' with the currently fashionable discourse of 'cognitive powers' and 'capacities', and neuro-physiological 'memory traces'. The Kantian heritage to tacit knowledge was in fact well known to Polanyi (1969:156), who remarked that 'Kant's categories…reappear with me in the active knower, participating in all live knowledge'. The ontological picture of tacit knowledge and transcendental rules is firmly rooted in 'the philosophy of the subject', from which we are supposed to be liberated by the theory of structuration.

In his early philosophy, Wittgenstein also, like Giddens, operated within a Kantian problematic of cognitive powers and transcendental philosophy. At this time Wittgenstein held that rules are intrinsic to language and thought, and stated that 'the tacit conventions on which the understanding of everyday language depends are enormously complicated' (Wittgenstein 1988:4.002). However, as is well known, *Philosophical Investigations* is primarily a critique and repudiation of what Wittgenstein (1968:viii) later called the 'grave mistakes' contained 'in that first book'. Thus when Giddens (1987:13) describes 'the discovery that Wittgenstein made' as the idea that 'the apparent vagueness of ordinary language is expressive of the fact that it is geared to social practices, our tacit knowledge of the conventions that order these practices being the grounds of its meaningfulness', he is actually endorsing the views of the early (Kantian-transcendental), but not the mature, Wittgenstein. A major theme of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is that meaning is not *'hidden from us',* and 'vagueness' is not a cloud of unclarity hiding 'the essence of language', the reality of which is 'something that lies *beneath* the surface' and which analysis 'digs out' (Wittgenstein 1968:§92–original emphasis). It is, I submit, precisely the Kantian-Tractarian problematic, with its quasi-scientific postulation of subterranean orders of mental powers, mechanisms and states, and nebulous realms of transcendental rules, against which Wittgenstein pitches his later discussion of rules and rule-following. Giddens (along with many others) misperceives the Kantian rule-following model of action and understanding which Wittgenstein argues *against* as the view that he commends.

In his later work, Wittgenstein tries to show that transcendental inference to hypothetical cognitive powers and tacit rules–as entities which *must* exist in order to account for the meaningfulness of human action and experience–gives a wholly delusory sense of adequate explanation. Such explanations are generated not so much by 'logic' but by the utopian psychological need of the theorist to produce

true, exceptionless, generalisations. On the question of a theoretical account of the reasons for, and explanations of, how people do what they do in characteristic human practices, Wittgenstein says such things as: 'explanations come to an end somewhere'; 'my reasons will soon give out. And then I shall act, without reasons'; '"this is simply what I do"' (Wittgenstein 1968: §§1, 211, 217); 'there is no why…This is how I act' (Wittgenstein 1975:§148). Thus 'it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our acting which lies at the bottom [of our practices]' (*ibid.:* §204). From Giddens's perspective, this response to the demand for theoretical explanation will look irredeemably behaviouristic and objectivistic. But for Wittgenstein, 'social practices' are not, as they are in structuration theory, a 'mediating moment[]' between 'the dualism of the individual and society, or subject and object' (Giddens 1979:4). Wittgenstein (1968:§217) describes this kind of explanatory strategy as an 'architectural' 'requirement'–that is, explanations 'for the sake not of their content, but of their form'. In other words, the need for explanation is a requirement brought about by the theoretical system itself, not the reality to which it allegedly refers.

It is important to notice that Wittgenstein does not use the notion of practice as a superior kind of theoretical explanation, or indeed as any kind of explanation at all, but, rather, as a means to bring explanation to an end. Nor are practices, for Wittgenstein, 'object-like shared entities', as Turner (1994:13) describes them. Wittgenstein does not use the term 'practice' as a 'name' for *any* kind of 'object'– whether shared, social, hidden, private, causal, or whatever; nor is it the name of a 'theoretical object'. Turner just assumes that if the word 'practice' is to have any meaning it must refer to some kind of 'object', or 'quasi-object'. Equally, when Wittgenstein talks of just acting, without reasons, this 'acting' is not meant to be the product of some special cognitive power (tacit knowledge) 'hidden in the medium of the understanding' (Wittgenstein 1968:§102). Wittgenstein is typically understood (by Giddens and many others) to be offering a *superior* explanation of meaningful action, which identifies previously unrecognised powers in the individual (tacit knowledge), and supra-individual conditions (transcendental rules). But Wittgenstein's remarks do not propose a new theoretical explanation; their purpose is 'performative', not 'theoretical' –that is, they aim to *do* rather than to *explain*. What they seek to do is what they say, namely to convince the reader that the quest for explanation at this level is chimerical– a 'grammatical illusion' (*ibid.:* §110) generated by the will to theorise and to construct theoretical systems.

Giddens and Wittgenstein differ fundamentally in their conceptions of human action. As we have seen, Giddens's theoretical account is driven by the *a priori* premises that all human activity is 'knowledgeable' and *must* connect up with either discursive or tacit rules. By contrast, Wittgenstein's approach is both empirical and 'grammatical'. That is to say, the purpose of his inquiries is to *investigate,* rather than presuppose, the applicability of the idea that in doing what they do in personal and social life, individuals *must* be following rules. In so doing, I suggest, Wittgenstein is challenging the Kantian picture of

knowledgeability and rules 'hidden in the medium of the understanding' (*ibid.:* §102).

Despite his claim to have successfully 'de-centred' 'the subject' and subjectivity from social theory, from the perspective of Wittgenstein's investigations Giddens has not really 'de-centred' Cartesian and Kantian pictures of consciousness at all. The only 'de-centring' that Giddens effects is a shift from conscious (discursive) self-awareness to the non-conscious (tacit) cognitive powers and reflexivity of individuals. This is a shift from the 'philosophy of consciousness' to the social theory of *tacit consciousness*–and it is, moreover, a shift from Cartesianism that Kant had already introduced.

The essential difference between Giddens's and Wittgenstein's way of looking at meaningful action can be expressed as follows. Imagine that Giddens and Wittgenstein are both observing the same practice, say, a linguistic utterance, or a person riding a bicycle. Giddens maintains that the 'condition of possibility' for these practices is the individual's possession of tacit knowledge of how to apply the transcendental rules necessary for their production. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, insists that our understanding is not enhanced by appeals to transcendental phenomena, and that all we need to do is to describe the practices themselves. Our basic way of acting, Wittgenstein (1975:§559) says, 'is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there–like our life.' 'Our mistake', says Wittgenstein (1968:§654), 'is to look for an explanation where we should see the facts as "primary phenomena".'[17] However, Wittgenstein does not mean that 'merely' acknowledging a practice, and describing it adequately (a 'perspicuous presentation' [*ibid.:* §122]), is always an easy, obvious, straightforward matter (see, for example, his [*ibid.:* §156] discussion of 'reading' –an activity which, he says 'would be difficult to describe even in rough outline').

VII The rule-following paradox and tacit rules

Giddens, and many other commentators, claim that the notion of 'tacit knowledge' is Wittgenstein's proposed 'solution' to the problem that he sets up as the 'paradox' of rules and rule-following: 'this was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule' (Wittgenstein 1968:§201). Wittgenstein *(ibid.)* goes on to point out that the apparent paradox embodies a 'misunderstanding', and that 'what this shows is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation,* but which is exhibited in what we call "obeying the rule" and "going against it" in actual cases'. Giddens understands Wittgenstein to be saying that individuals usually follow rules without doing so consciously and without being able to say what the 'rules' that they follow are (because they do not know the rules 'discursively'). According to Giddens, the greatest proportion of rule-following is done 'tacitly', through 'practical consciousness'.

But Giddens is wrong in his assumption that Wittgenstein is referring to 'tacit rules', and that he provides an explanatory account of 'rule-following' *as such.*

Wittgenstein's argument is actually the opposite of that attributed to him by Giddens, as can be shown by reference to an important (but neglected) distinction that Wittgenstein made in *The Blue Book,* and which is, I believe, presupposed by his later discussion of rule-following in *Philosophical Investigations.* The distinction is 'between what one might call "a process being *in accordance with a rule*", and, "a process involving a rule"' (Wittgenstein 1972:13–original emphasis). The latter usage of 'rule' refers to an explicit, discursively-formulable rule, wherein 'the symbol of the rule forms part of the calculation', and is, thereby, a rule 'which we actually make use of in understanding, obeying, etc.' *(ibid.)*. Wittgenstein distinguishes actions which are generated through actually *following* such explicit, discursive rules–rules which play an intrinsic role in the generation of the activity in question–from courses of action which are (merely) said to be *'in accordance with a rule'*. Giddens confuses rules with which people's actions might be said to be in accordance, with 'rules' that people somehow follow tacitly. And he fails to notice that this usage of rules (being in accordance with actions) depends on the explanatory work of the observer, who is usually an observing theorist.

Wittgenstein goes on to note that, in the case of an action which is said to be '"in accordance with a rule"', the act in question will be 'also in accordance with any number of other rules; and amongst these it is not more in accordance with one than with another' *(ibid.)*. This makes clear that the 'paradox' of rules and rule-following in *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1968:§201) concerns 'rules' with which actions are (merely) said to be in accordance; that is, *not* rules actually, explicitly, followed in the performance of the action. But Wittgenstein now points out that for an action (merely) deemed to be in accordance with a rule, 'in the sense in which before we talked about a rule being involved in a process, *no* rule was involved in this' (Wittgenstein 1972:13–original emphasis). And when Wittgenstein proceeds in *Philosophical Investigations,* after stating the 'paradox', to talk of 'a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*' (1968: §201), he is not now talking about 'rules' with which actions may or may not be said to be in accordance, but rules which are integrally, explicitly, implicated in the production of actions. Thus, far from being an advocate of 'tacit' rule-following, Wittgenstein provides a 'sceptical argument' (Kripke 1982) against the idea.

According to Giddens (1984:20), Wittgenstein's (1968: §§151ff.) discussion of the number-series 'language-game' shows social theory 'the most germane' way of 'conceptualising "rule"…in relation to "structure"'. Along with many other commentators, Giddens assumes that Wittgenstein's (1968: §§143–242) celebrated 'rule-following' sections provide a general account of rule-following *as such,* and that this account covers all instances of meaningful action, which are generated through following the 'rules of social life' (Giddens 1984:20). Giddens takes for granted that Wittgenstein's remarks in the 'rule-following' sections of *Philosophical Investigations* are designed to show how all meaningful action is generated. Thus he assumes, like Lynch (1993:166–7), that the number-series language-game is 'to be understood as a paradigm for actions in accord with rules, not only in arithmetic, but also in other rule-ordered activities like playing chess and speaking

a natural language'. But in the light of Wittgenstein's *Blue Book* distinction, activities which might be said to be *in accordance with* a rule are not necessarily generated by *following* any particular rule, in the sense of a rule 'which we actually make use of in understanding, obeying, etc.' (Wittgenstein 1972: 13). For example, chess is learnt via a conscious, intentional process of grasping (quite 'mechanically') the explicitly formulated 'constitutive' rules governing the movement of the pieces.[18] But once a certain level of competence is acquired, playing chess is not '"a process involving a rule"' in Wittgenstein's (1972:13) sense of 'following a rule'. In the case of an individual's *natural* (first) language, linguistic ability is neither acquired through learning its grammatical, syntactical and semantic 'rules' (as the 'constitutive' rules of chess are learnt), nor practised through *following* these 'rules'.

In fact, Wittgenstein's early references to rules in *Philosophical Investigations* (long before the so-called 'rule-following sections' of §§143–242) are to do with what Kant calls operations of the understanding and synthetic processes of perception (see section II above). Wittgenstein's aim with these early examples is to show that for much of everyday practice no rules need be involved at all (for example §§3, 31, 53). He suggests that it is an over-generalised extrapolation from exceptional cases which produces the idea that all meaningful action is necessarily rule-generated. Another source of the assumption is the inference that action which is rational, coherent and regular, *must* be executed via rule-following procedures (§§66, 81). He suggests that, in the main, only quite rarely, for a relatively small class of cases, or at critical junctures, are rules actually followed.[19] Rules are usually only involved in the learning and transmission of practices, and as a 'court of appeal' in disputed, marginal or new cases. For example, in the early stages of learning to play chess the novice makes a concerted effort to learn, and 'follow', the rules governing the movement of the pieces. When the player has achieved competence at the game, she does not, and does not need to, 'follow' the rules –she just moves the pieces strategically without thinking of the rules (though her movements do of course *accord with* the rules). In fact, not having to 'follow' the rules partly constitutes what counts as competence in the game (see Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1990:242–3).

When he does discuss rule-*following* (as opposed to actions described as being 'in accordance with' rules), Wittgenstein only countenances explicitly formulated, or formulable, rules–that is, simple mathematical rules, rules of games, etc. Wittgenstein (1968:§53) cites, as a paradigm example of a rule that is *followed,* a scenario in which the request: '"bring me a red flower"' is accomplished 'by looking up the colour red in a table of colours and then bringing a flower of the colour that we find in the table'. (This would, of course, be a highly unusual and unnecessary way of performing such an action because we clearly would normally execute such a task without *following* any rule at all.) Such rules that are *followed* are in no sense 'hidden' or transcendental, and are stateable by all who follow them.

The difference between *explicit* rules (which an individual may or may not *follow* in order to perform a certain activity) and *implicit* 'rules' (with which an

activity might be said to be in accordance) can be brought out as follows. One can speak or write grammatically and meaningfully without being able to state or recognise 'the rules'–without, for example, knowing that one is 'conjugating verbs' or whatever. However, one cannot perform mathematical calculations without knowing that one is 'adding', 'multiplying', 'dividing', etc., nor–except in the case of simple arithmetic–without consciously working through a series of procedures which lead to the answer. But numerical competence, it should be noted, is akin to competence in chess, in that one learns to do basic arithmetic through conscious, explicit attention to the formulated rules, but once one achieves competence, one is able to perform these operations 'automatically' other hand, complex arithmetical problems involving large numbers will usually (Wittgenstein 1972:14) without *following* the rules in Wittgenstein's sense. On the require even the most competent to pay careful, conscious attention to *following* the rules, by taking up pen and paper and methodically working through a series of steps in order to arrive at an answer. As an illustration of the way rule *following* enters into the process of performing complex arithmetical operations, consider this 'phenomenological' account of a problem in long division:

> PROBLEM: 512 ÷ 46 (with the help of pen and paper, of course).
> PROCEDURE: 46 into 51 goes once, remainder 5, so the first digit of the answer will be 1.
> Next to the remainder 5, bring down the next digit, in this case 2. This gives 52.
> 46 into 52 goes once, remainder 6.
> So, the answer will be 11 point something.
> Bring down the next digit to make 60.
> 46 into 60 goes once, remainder…So the answer will be 11.1…[20]

Grammatical, semantic and syntactical rules, by contrast, are a codification of linguistic usage; they are a way of *describing* what is done, not an inherent resource for *learning* what to do and *producing* what is done–though they can be invoked as an aid to teaching or to make a normative point about 'correct usage' (but see section IX below). As Wittgenstein (1968:§104) warns, there is a seductive temptation to 'predicate of the thing what lies in the method of representing it'. Wittgenstein also warned against the temptations of the 'rule-ubiquity' picture *before* his so-called 'rule-following' arguments, asking, rhetorically: 'what do I call "the rule by which he proceeds"', when the individual in question is unable to state any rule? Wittgenstein continues:

> how am I to determine the rule according to which he is playing? He does not know it himself. –Or, to ask a better question: What meaning is the expression 'the rule by which he proceeds' supposed to have left here?
>
> (Wittgenstein 1968:§82)

Giddens not only claims that 'most of the rules implicated in the production and reproduction of social practices are only tacitly grasped by social actors'; he also claims that *'the discursive formulation of a rule is already an interpretation of it'* (Giddens 1984:22–3—original emphasis). Thus all 'discursively formulated' rules are ontologically subordinate to 'tacit rules' which underlie them. This is deeply paradoxical: if all formulable rules are only ever 'interpretations', we never *know* 'rules as such' (*ibid.:* 21) at all—we can only infer, transcendentally, that they *must* exist in some unknowable realm. But then how do we even manage interpretations of entities that we can never know? Perhaps Giddens attaches some special meaning to 'interpretation', but if so he has not said what it is. This dichotomy between the empirical formulation of a rule and the 'real' tacit rule underlying it, is reminiscent of Kant's *phenomenal/noumenal* ontology. It is precisely this kind of ontological picture that Wittgenstein sought to deconstruct in his later work –it implies that (tacit) mental interpretive processes are required each time a rule is applied. And this is why Wittgenstein (1968:§201—original emphasis) maintained that 'there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*'.

It is difficult to make sense of Giddens's claim that discursively formulated rules are always interpretations of 'rules as such'—that is, transcendental, tacit rules. Consider the following two statements involving a rule: (1) 'the product of 68 + 57 is determined by the plus function'; (2) 'treason is a capital offence'. Both are 'discursive formulations' of rules, but it would be very odd to call them 'interpretations of rules'. Wittgenstein's point is simply that in many (most?) cases, where people are competently familiar with a practice in which rules are routinely involved, no 'interpretation' need take place. Interpretation is only required where there is some doubt about how to 'go on' in a problematic case. With respect to example (1), successful mastery of the rules of addition *entails* that there is *no* interpretation as to what the rules 'mean' or how they are to be applied—it is precisely this unequivocality that guarantees mathematics its certainty: 'mathematicians do not in general quarrel over the result of a calculation' (*ibid.:* 225). With example (2) on the other hand, considerable interpretation may be required in some, perhaps most, cases—for example, what is to count as 'treason'; was the offender of sound enough mind to be guilty of this offence?, etc. Although (2) might be considered to exemplify a higher-order principle (for example the sanctity of the State), and hence be a kind of interpretation—an 'operationalisation'—of this principle, it is difficult to see what (1) could be an interpretation *of*. Thus although *some* rules may 'embody' an interpretation of a higher-order principle as part of the process through which they come into being, this does not make such a rule literally an 'interpretation'; nor does it make the higher-order principle itself a 'tacit rule'.

The idea of tacitly following a rule, or following a tacit rule, seems to me to be quite incoherent. How does one tacitly follow a rule—or follow a tacit rule? What is it to follow a rule neither consciously nor unconsciously? What is this intermediate mode? And what should be said of someone who makes a mistake?

Have they selected the *wrong* tacit rule; *misapplied* the correct tacit rule; or followed *no* rule at all? By what criterion or criteria is it to be judged that a tacit rule has been applied correctly? Presumably Giddens's answer to this question would be: the criterion for whether a tacit rule has been applied correctly is simply that the individual acts in a normal, appropriate manner according to her circumstances and setting. But if this is all there is to it (and remember neither the 'actor' nor the observer–unless he happens to be a professional theorist– knows anything about 'tacit rules'), then there is no *need* for the metaphysical extravagance of tacit knowledge and tacit rules. Such entities cannot (or rather, do not) play the role of criteria; but the latter is performed perfectly well by publicly observable behaviour in its context.

Let me now just summarise what I take to be Wittgenstein's view on rules and rule-following. Only rules which are 'explicit' and formulated or formulable can be *followed;* one cannot *follow* a rule 'tacitly'. 'Tacit rules' are not involved in the process of producing or generating actions; they are a theoretical device invoked by an observing theorist as a means of 'explaining', or representing, actions (for example theoretical linguistics). The notion of a 'tacit rule' corresponds in part to what Wittgenstein meant when he referred to 'rules' with which actions might be said to be in *accordance* (but such an action will be 'also in accordance with any number of other rules; and amongst these it is not more in accordance with one than with another' [Wittgenstein 1972:13]). But it would be better not to talk of 'tacit rules' at all. At a certain level of competence, even the 'explicit', formulated rules of a practice will not (usually) actually be *followed* by the practitioner–though his actions will be *in accordance with* the explicit rules.

VIII Tacit knowledge and the skilful creation of social order

> All competent members of society are vastly skilled in the practical accomplishments of social activities and are expert 'sociologists'.
>
> (Giddens 1984:26)

> The reproduction and/or transformation of society, though for the most part unconsciously achieved, is nevertheless still an *achievement,* a skilled accomplishment of active subjects.
>
> (Bhaskar 1989a:46)

The primary way in which Giddens's structuration theory, Bhaskar's TMSA and Habermas's TCA function as 'critical' theory is by seeking to show, through the invocation of 'tacit knowledge', that–contrary to objectivist social and political theories–the individual is centrally, actively and knowledgeably implicated in the production of social order. My aim here is to unravel some of the incoherence in this notion of 'skilful accomplishment'.

Social activity is said to be a skilful, knowledgeable product, like any other skilful performance–such as playing football or riding a bicycle, for example. The production and maintenance of social order is, perhaps, like a game of football in the minimal sense that both centrally involve 'teams' of human persons–it is an undeniable truism that if there were no individual people at all there would be neither football nor social order. But there is a crucial difference: learning a skilful activity *presupposes* a certain level and degree of social sophistication and interaction. Of course, 'social skills' *can* be learnt, and those lacking in them can make a conscious effort to do so; and some people certainly can and do use language in a skilful and creative way. But this is not what Giddens and Bhaskar mean when they describe social life as a 'skilful accomplishment' on the part of its constituent individuals. They mean that each and every social act is a 'skilful accomplishment', no matter how ordinary and unsophisticated it is, simply in virtue of being produced by a human being. This is an extremely odd use of the concept 'skilful accomplishment'. What is the point of describing an ordinary, routine conversation as a 'skilful accomplishment'–especially if it should be, say, an unintelligent, bigoted outpouring of prejudice? Should we describe such an event as 'a knowledgeable expression of unintelligence'?

Giddens's and Bhaskar's 'ontological picture' of social activity as 'skilful achievement' is part of a much wider intellectual enthralment with the *Weltanschauung* of 'cognitive science'. The idea that social activity as such is a skilful achievement is the sociological version of a perspective long held by cognitive psychologists, who have similarly presented pictures of consciousness and perception as highly skilled processes. For example, in a collection of essays on cognitive psychology Franks (1974:232) asserts that 'everyday examples demonstrate that tacit knowledge relations must underlie our overt responding, our imaginal experience and our language use'.

The notion of cognitive 'interpretation' and 'information-processing' is a staple theme of post-behaviourist cognitive psychology. From this perspective, a mundane perceptual experience, such as seeing an apple, entails that 'one must "recognise" an apple *as* an apple every time one sees an apple' (Button *et al.* 1995: 46).[21] However, as these (ethnomethodological) authors point out, this is a perversion of the ordinary concept 'recognition'. If every perceptual experience were to be redescribed as an act of 'recognition' there would be no way of picking out *genuine* cases of recognition: 'to "recognise" something *as* something is a distinctive achievement, not at all characteristic of ordinary, unremarkable instances of merely seeing something' *(ibid.)*.

This point also applies to the concept of 'skilful accomplishment' as used by Giddens and Bhaskar: using this term to describe mundane, everyday social and psychological activities such as speaking, seeing and interacting, risks forfeiting the ability to discern genuine instances of skilful performance and accomplishment. If *all* human acts are knowledgeable, skilful accomplishments, then *nobody* ever *acts* skilfully and knowledgeably–because there is no alternative. More seriously,

such (mis)use of language gives a distorted and misleading impression of the extent to which people are *able* to develop and exercise creative and skilful powers in social life. Despite the good 'liberal' intentions, it is actually rather patronising to call the life-situation of the homeless, the unemployed and the poor a 'skilful accomplishment'–because *they,* at least, would not regard it as such. Ironically, then, this way of speaking implies the *'derogation of the lay actor'* that Giddens (1979:71) clamours to avoid.

IX Tacit knowledge and tacit rules: fact or (theoretical) fiction?

The notion of tacit knowledge serves two interlinked theoretical objectives in critical social theory. Firstly, it is an explanatory concept, which is supposed to *explain* how individuals do what they do. And secondly, the concept is used *evaluatively* in an attempt to derive normative implications from the mode in which human action is explained. I first want to focus on the 'explanatory power' claimed for the concept, and then examine its normative role in critical social theory.

The classic example of tacit knowledge and tacit rules is Polanyi's (1958:49–50) account of riding a bicycle:

> the rule observed by the cyclist is this. When he starts falling to the right he turns the handlebars to the right, so that the course of the bicycle is deflected along a curve towards the right…he counteracts by turning the handlebars to the left; and so he continues to keep himself in balance, by winding along a series of appropriate curvatures…

According to Giddens, the production of social order involves similar tacit knowledge of tacit rules and procedures. The 'rules' of cycling described by Polanyi make for interesting reading, though significantly, the predominant reaction is more one of amusement than a sense of revelation. The reaction is somewhat similar to that evinced by Garfinkel's famous 'breaching experiments', in which his 'subjects' experienced anger and outrage rather than explanatory enlightenment on the conditions of their action (see chapter 7). Polanyi (1958:49) though, seems to regard 'tacit knowledge' and 'tacit rules' as a kind of empirical *discovery.*[22] Thus he reports that he came to 'the conclusion' that the 'rules' of cycle-riding are 'not generally known', through his 'interrogations of physicists, engineers and bicycle manufacturers'. But did he really need to interview these experts to reach his conclusion? Isn't this akin to sending a questionnaire to a sample of bachelors asking them if they are married? Confounding empirical with conceptual issues, as displayed by Polanyi and critical social theorists, is a prime example of what Wittgenstein (1972:18) meant when he said that 'philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does'.

The notion of tacit knowledge is supposed to offer more than just an entertaining redescription of an act; it is reputed to *explain* the means by which that phenomenon is produced. Yet the attribution of tacit knowledge does not really *explain* anything at all. Individuals are said to have a (tacit) grasp of the tacit rules of social interaction, cycling, etc. But in what sense does this differ from the following example: 'consider the planets. They are not solving differential equations as they swing around the sun. They are not *following* any rules at all; but their behaviour is nonetheless lawful' (Dreyfus 1992:189). Similarly, people do not have to solve differential equations in order to ride a bicycle; on the contrary, engagement in such an intellectual exercise whilst riding a bicycle may well end up jeopardising the success and safety of the activity. Consider the way in which rules might be involved (in Wittgenstein's sense of 'a process involving a rule') in learning to ride a bicycle. Apart from some very vague injunctions to 'stay upright' and 'keep pedalling', not much can be offered by way of rules. Cycling is taught by example and practice, perhaps by pointing to a competent cyclist and instructing the learner to 'go on' in the same way.

In terms of actually 'following a rule', is there any difference between the procedures and principles exhibited in a cyclist's performance and those exhibited in, say, a bird's nest-building skills? Why shouldn't the bird be described as possessing 'tacit knowledge' of the 'tacit rules' of nest construction? Perhaps critical social theorists would not dispute such a description–but then their notion of knowledgeability would reduce to a kind of behaviourism. However, I would suggest that it is more accurate to say that neither birds nor cyclists *follow* rules as a means to the execution of their performances; but the activities of both can reasonably be described as being 'in accordance with' certain principles. This is not to say that there are no differences between birds and cyclists. There are, of course, very many crucial differences (as well as similarities). For example, cyclists *can* follow rules, even though they do not do so all the time; birds, on the other hand, *cannot* follow rules, at any time. And cyclists, if asked, could say *something,* offer some account of what they are doing; what the cyclist does fits into a wider context of projects and purposes. These differences are what Wittgenstein calls 'grammatical' remarks, or 'reminders' (not theoretical observations); they do not say anything that most people do not already know pre-theoretically–they are merely 'remarks on the natural history of human beings' (Wittgenstein 1968:§415).

As we saw above, the primary analogical vehicle through which Giddens attempts to elucidate his notion of 'the duality of structure' is the everyday use of language. The key idea is that in my use of language I necessarily draw upon an objective order of transcendental rules–an 'absent corpus of syntactical rules that constitute the language as a totality' (Giddens 1982b:185) –and, through this usage, contribute (unintentionally) to the reproduction of these rules and thereby 'the language as a totality'.

It is apposite here that I write in the first person. I, like many native speakers of English, was not taught, and have never learnt, the rules of grammar. For

example, I have no idea how to conjugate a verb, nor do I know what 'conjugation' means (I have just consulted my dictionary in order to ascertain its meaning, but did not understand it because it was couched in other grammatical terms that I do not know…). Nevertheless, I can speak and write grammatically– generally, with as much competence as someone who does (explicitly) know the rules of grammar. How do I achieve this? According to Giddens I achieve it in virtue of my possession of tacit knowledge of the (tacit) rules of grammar. A similar view was propounded by Kant (1963:1): 'one may speak…without knowing grammar, and he who speaks without knowing it has really a grammar, and he speaks according to rules of which, however, he is not aware'. But what does all this mean? How exactly can I be said to draw on the 'absent corpus of syntactical rules' given that I do not know how, or that, I do so? It is hard to see how the mere postulation of tacit knowledge explains my linguistic abilities. I cannot sensibly be said to *know* the rules of grammar because, as a matter of fact, I *do not* know (most of) them.

I am not denying that language can be described structurally, in terms of grammatical, syntactical and semantic rules–*langue,* in structuralist idiom. Nor do I have any reason to doubt that I *could* learn the rules of grammar were I to devote sufficient effort to the task. But the problem remains: how do I select and apply these rules, given that, as a matter of fact, I have no awareness of either the ability or the rules? The work of linguists, who formulate and systematise the rules of grammar, certainly *is* a 'skilful activity'; but it is another matter to attribute this degree of knowledge and skill (albeit tacitly) to non-linguists such as myself.

The crux of the issue is that the *a priori* postulation of tacit knowledge is explanatorily empty, for it merely redescribes, in theoretical language, the phenomenon to be explained–like Molière's doctor, who 'explained' that opium induces sleepiness through its 'sleep-inducing faculty' (Nietzsche 1990:42). Such theoretical redescription is, as Nietzsche *(ibid.)* puts it, 'merely a repetition of the question'.[23] That redescription in terms of tacit knowledge is *no more than* redescription is quite clear in the case of a non-human ability: to proffer as an *explanation* of the swallow's navigational ability that it has 'tacit knowledge of geometry' would not pass for an explanation in natural science. When a critical social theorist (or Kant) says that a person using language does so through their tacit knowledge of its constituent tacit rules, are they saying anything other than 'this person is able to use language'? If not, I can agree, but then the invocation of tacit rules is empty, though it evidently conveys an air of profundity when expressed in the context of structuration theory or the TMSA, as a feature of the 'duality of structure'. Such theoretical profundity is not uncommon; Drury (1973:5) cites a similar example from a manual of surgery: 'by a fracture is meant "the dissolution of continuity in a bone"'.

Many disputes in the natural sciences hinge on whether a controversial phenomenon is a 'real' discovery, or just an 'artefact' of the scientist's theoretical expectations and experimental configuration.[24] Although 'tacit knowledge' generally enjoys the epistemic status of an uncontroversial fact amongst

philosophers and social and political theorists, I contend that it is more accurately described as an *artefact* of the theorist's own practice. Inverting Garfinkel's (1984:68) question, I want to ask: 'how is a critical social theorist *doing* it when he makes out the member of society to be a knowledgeable agent?'[25] In the light of this question, tacit knowledge and tacit rules can be seen to be an artefactual product of critical social theorists' main theoretical objective, which is to transcend the 'objectivist'/'subjectivist' dichotomy in social and political theory. The core objective of Giddens's structuration theory, Bhaskar's TMSA and Habermas's TCA is to synthesise the 'objectivist' penchant for reducing the explanation of individual action to unconscious motivations and external forces, with the 'subjectivist' commitment to individual meaning, agency and intentionality. With respect to this objective, Wittgenstein's (1968:§401) rebuttal of the metaphysical claims of his interlocutor applies equally well to critical social theorists' theoretical practice: 'you interpret a grammatical movement made by yourself as a quasi-physical phenomenon which you are observing'. I can think of no more fitting epitaph for the concepts 'tacit knowledge' and 'tacit rule'.

The concept of tacit knowledge is designed to fulfil the oxymoronic objective of depicting everything that individuals do as the outcome of knowledge of which they have no awareness, but which is nevertheless not unconscious. However, some 'grammatical' reflections will show (remind) us that 'tacit knowledge' does not have to be a substance or a location term, and need not play the role of a 'name' for an 'object' (a 'quasi-physical phenomenon'). When there is 'tacit' agreement on something, this does not entail that the respective parties possess a peculiar non-conscious knowledge of their agreement. It simply means that there was no need to, nor any possibility of, formulating explicitly all the potentially infinite aspects and ramifications of their agreement–formulations which might be a tedious, impractical or impossible requirement. In this, and other kindred contexts, 'tacit'–or even 'tacit knowledge'–may well be a useful term. But if that term is to be philosophically redescribed so as to apply to all situations in which an individual acts without explicit conscious awareness of what they are doing, the terminology becomes either explanatorily empty, or merely expressive of the theorist's desire to make a normative point about human action as such. In the case of the latter, I diagnose a form of 'emotivism' animating critical social theory: describing mundane human activities as the product of knowledgeable agents following tacit rules is doing no more than describing that action, as it were, in a certain tone of voice (see Wittgenstein 1975:§30), or 'with the addition of some special exclamation marks' (Ayer 1970:107). Such descriptions express the speaker's/writer's *attitude* to what they describe.

When mundane activities such as conducting a conversation, or the everyday presentation of self, are described by critical social theorists as skilful performances produced by agents accessing tacit rules, they are not 'objectively' describing how these things are done, but evincing their attitudes towards theoretical systems for representing human action. Whereas emotivist analysis claims that any apparent objectivity exhibited by everyday moral utterances merely serves to

obscure their true function, I am suggesting that the advertised social-scientific objectivity of critical social theorists' theories of individual action and social order owes more to the theorist's normative stance than it does to the nature of the phenomena as such. The nature of this normative stance will be examined further in forthcoming chapters.

X Behaviourism

My critique of the idea that practices are underlain by a hidden order of transcendental, 'tacit' rules, and that individuals possess 'tacit knowledge' of these 'rules', is very likely to look, from a post-empiricist 'realist' standpoint, like a defence of behaviourism and empiricist epistemology. From this standpoint my critique may seem to be predicated on an antediluvian refusal to acknowledge the 'reality' of unobservable entities. As such, my argument will be seen to entail a reactionary and retrogressive stance which restricts social and political theory to a pre-'cognitive revolution' perspective on mind and action. In some ways this charge would be justified, and in other ways, it would not. It is true that I regard the so-called 'cognitive revolution' which informs much contemporary philosophy, psychology and social theory, as no real advance on empiricist epistemology. Not that I wish to defend empiricism; rather, I maintain that Wittgenstein's views are equidistant from both behaviouristic empiricism and the rule-following cognitivism of critical social theory.

Critical social theorists' postulation of hidden cognitive structures constituting tacit knowledge, and systems of transcendental rules, is mediated by a repudiation of empiricist epistemology and behaviouristic models of mind and action. Their post-empiricist critique of behaviourism diagnoses behaviourists' antipathy towards mental states and processes as the consequence of an untenable ontology which excludes unobservable entities. Behaviourists' scepticism towards the reality of unobservable mechanisms and structures is blamed on an outdated Humean conception of constant-conjunction causality. But although Wittgenstein shares behaviourists' scepticism with respect to the explanatory power of theoretically postulated hidden mental mechanisms and processes, there remains a crucial difference. Whilst behaviourism is predicated on a (positivist) philosophy of science and a (empiricist) theory of causation, Wittgenstein's scepticism has nothing to do with any alternative *theory* or *explanation* (see chapters 1 and 2).

Wittgenstein does not, as do behaviourists, replace the role played by mental processes with an alternative theory of mind and action. Faced with the choice between a pseudo-explanation and no explanation at all, Wittgenstein (1968:§1) takes the latter option–'I assume that he *acts* as I have described. Explanations come to an end somewhere.' As I argued in chapter 2, Wittgenstein is not necessarily opposed to 'theory' and 'explanation' *as such;* but he does regard the cognitive and transcendental phenomena postulated in philosophical theories as artefacts of the theorist's own practice, which are brought about by their mode of representation. Wittgenstein's (1979b:39–40–original emphasis) comment on

Freud applies equally well to cognitive science and critical social theory: 'what Freud says about the subconscious sounds like science, but in fact it is just a *means of representation*'.[26] Wittgenstein's scepticism is quite different from the behaviourist's claim that all references to conscious or mental phenomena can be 'scientifically' redescribed exclusively in terms of observable behaviour. Whereas behaviourists repudiate the reality of conscious experience as such, Wittgenstein only doubts the reality that is supposed to correspond to philosophical constructions.

Rather than offering an alternative theory, Wittgenstein implores us (contra Polanyi) not to try to say more than we know: 'the difficulty in philosophy is to say no more than we know' (Wittgenstein 1972:45). Wittgenstein does not propose a more accurate picture of human action couched in terms of the language of 'practice'. He just says that neither the postulation of such transcendental entities as tacit knowledge and tacit rules, nor 'pure' behavioural redescription, takes us any closer to 'reality' as such. Both of these strategies are no more—nor less —than ways of representing certain social and psychological phenomena. The mode of representation chosen is intimately bound up with epistemological positions on scientific method and, in the case of critical social theory, intermingled with normative commitments (see chapters 5, 6 and 8). Since Wittgenstein rejects 'scientific' philosophising and *philosophical* explanation, he also rejects both behaviourist and cognitivist/transcendental modes of representation. But this rejection is not, in turn, grounded upon some superior vision of 'the way things really are'—not even 'commonsense'—because such a quest is captive to one of the most insidious 'pictures' that Wittgenstein wants to deconstruct: the picture of the philosopher as someone whose vision penetrates deeper than others', beneath mere phenomena ('whether what actually happens is this or that'), to 'the basis, or essence, of everything empirical' (Wittgenstein 1968:§89).

XI Conclusion

In addition to the suspicion of 'behaviourism' (which I hope to have allayed) it may also be assumed that I advocate an a-critical, description-only social theory which restricts itself to '*uncommitted* enquiry' (Winch 1990:102). This kind of 'Wittgensteinian' social theory is often condemned for its 'conservative' renunciation of explanatory theory and critical purpose.

But I have not said, nor do I believe, that social and political theorists, sociologists and other 'social scientists' should restrict themselves only to describing/ understanding what people do, according to people's own local criteria of relevance (see chapter 7, section VI). However, I do contend that the presentation of a new 'ontological picture', consisting of universally possessed tacit knowledge and a transcendental order of rules, does not *ipso facto* constitute a critical perspective on, nor an emancipatory intervention in, social life itself. Again, I suggest that this procedure is a kind of emotivism, whereby the theorist presents their normative attitudes as 'objective facts' of individual and social ontology.

Both critical social theorists' ontological pictures of tacit knowledge and orders of transcendental rules, *and* my own attempts to 'deconstruct' these pictures, belong to a 'language-game' which is quite different from the 'language-game(s)' of social and political critique. Critical social theorists conflate these different 'language-games'. Arguments about tacit knowledge and transcendental rules belong to the abstract 'language-game' of social description/explanation. Thus, in retaliation to the charge of 'conservatism', I would turn the accusation round and ask: why should the postulation of hidden cognitive powers (tacit knowledge) and an external, transcendental order of rules, in itself, count as a critical perspective on, or intervention in, social life? Moreover, in addition to not being 'critical' in itself, the new 'ontological picture'–as we shall see in chapters 5 and 6 –has been used both in defence of the irreplaceability of the capitalist free-market economy *and* as justification for a socialist transformation (by Giddens and Hayek, and Bhaskar respectively).

Finally, I wish to clarify the nature of my critique of tacit knowledge and tacit rules. It should be evident that I have no affinity with these concepts, and I may well be understood to be denouncing them as sheer *nonsense*. But in fact this is not my intention. The charge of 'nonsense' is very often a fundamental category of criticism for Wittgensteinian philosophers. For example, the works of Baker and Hacker abound with such critical locutions as the following: '*nothing* lies beyond the bounds of sense but nonsense'; '[grammar] delimits the bounds of sense'; 'sceptical doubt about whether what is laid down in grammar as grounds for a proposition are really adequate grounds is…literally senseless' (Baker and Hacker 1984a:99). But this notion of 'sense' and 'nonsense' as objective fields of reality, and the philosopher mapping out 'the bounds of sense', is a regression to logical positivism and Wittgenstein's Tractarian philosophy.[27] Apart from Wittgenstein's auto-critique of his early linguistic-Kantian philosophy of 'the bounds of sense', Popper also issued a definitive objection to the logical positivists' idea of demarcating meaning from nonsense. His objection simply asks: How do you know that statement X is not meaningful? Have you understood it? If you have it can hardly be meaningless; and if you haven't, perhaps you have simply failed to understand it. Who is to say, and according to which criterion, what makes sense and what does not?

According to Baker and Hacker, sense is 'laid down in grammar' or 'determined by grammar'; 'the harmony between thought and reality is orchestrated in grammar'–and the task of the ('Wittgensteinian') philosopher is to arrive at 'a correct conception' of what makes sense through an analysis of 'grammar' (*ibid.:* 110, 111, 131, 132). This is not the path I wish to follow. Apart from the rather numinous, metaphysical idea of 'grammar' as the determinant of 'sense', I do not claim to be in possession of some superior ('Wittgensteinian') insight into 'the way things really are', or 'what really makes sense'. My objection to the concepts of tacit knowledge and transcendental rules is not that they are senseless because they violate the rules of 'grammar'. After all, they evidently *do* make sense to a lot of people (theorists).[28] Indeed, if

I did not understand these concepts (the way that they are used) I would hardly be in any position to criticise them.

On what basis, then, do I criticise 'tacit knowledge' and 'transcendental rules'? To reiterate one of my main criticisms: these concepts are explanatorily empty – they do not explain anything, they just redescribe in theoretical language the phenomenon of interest. The new 'ontological picture' does not achieve the central aim of its proponents, namely to provide an account of human mind and action which transcends the problems that are integral to its predecessor, which Giddens and Habermas call 'the philosophy of the subject'. The best that can be said of the new ontological picture is that it does not solve any of the problems, puzzles and paradoxes thrown up by the old Cartesian-Kantian 'paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness'. These problems are not solved by converting the old paradigm into 'the philosophy of the *knowledgeable* subject' and 'the philosophy of *tacit* consciousness'. Whilst I do not claim that the concepts 'tacit knowledge' and 'transcendental rules' are inherently nonsensical, I do claim that they are no more plausible than the ideas they are supposed to supersede. And this is a serious criticism of theories such as Giddens's theory of structuration, the stated *raison d'être* of which is to solve the problems of classical epistemology and social theory. Thus the basic orientation of my criticism is that of 'immanent' critique–I draw upon objectives and desiderata that are internal to the paradigm I criticise.

5

HAYEK'S AND GIDDENS'S EPISTEMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT AGAINST SOCIALISM

A myth of symbolism?

> One is in constant danger of producing a myth of symbolism or of mental processes.
>
> (Wittgenstein 1981:§211)

I Introduction

In the conclusion to the previous chapter I said that arguments concerning tacit knowledge and rule-following belong to the 'language-game' of social description/explanation, not social critique. However, critical social theorists take the opposite view. One of my overall aims in this book is to expose the conflation of theoretical representation and social critique that this conception of social explanation entails. In so doing I also want to lay to rest the idea that Wittgenstein's philosophy is inherently 'conservative' and necessarily a-critical. Whereas the previous chapter focused on the epistemological status of the 'rule-following' model of human action espoused by critical social theorists, this chapter examines the 'critical' (ideological) application of that model by Giddens and F.A.Hayek. The 'critical realism' of Bhaskar and the 'critical theory' of Habermas will then be examined in chapters 6 and 8 respectively.

Hayek and Giddens use their social theory of the 'rule-following' model of action to develop an 'epistemological' argument against the possibility of socialism which originated in the Austrian political economy of the 1920s and 1930s. The breakdown of 'actually existing socialism' in Eastern Europe and other parts of the world, and the concomitant apotheosisation of the free market, has created a climate in which that argument, which claims to demonstrate the impossibility of rational economic planning, has evoked renewed interest and influence. Ludwig Mises (1935) was the first to formulate this argument against socialism, but its prominence in recent years owes much to Hayek's cultivation of the original idea, which was enhanced by his comprehensive social theory. More recently still, Giddens (1994b) has added his sociological support to Mises' and Hayek's arguments.[1]

Hayek's refinement of Mises' original argument consists of an anti-positivist and anti-rationalist theory of knowledge, combined with a model of the individual –an 'ontological picture' –which depicts people as essentially (tacitly) 'knowledgeable' rule-followers, embedded in evolving systems of transcendental rules. Although Hayek's intellectual background and influences are rather different from those of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar (he is known primarily as an economist, not a social theorist), the social theory that he expounds is strikingly similar to their critical social theory. A number of writers, whilst rejecting Hayek's extreme right-wing politics, have drawn attention to the similarity and congruences between Hayek's social theory and Bhaskar's 'critical realism' (for example Peacock 1993; Lawson 1994; Fleetwood 1995).

Hayek and Giddens believe that normative prescriptions follow from a 'correct' theoretical representation of individual and social ontology. This is the central feature of critical social theory *qua* critical theory. Hayek (1988:7) insists that the 'conflict' between socialists and free-market liberals 'must be settled by scientific study'. Whilst Giddens (1982a:7) does not use quite such scientistic language, he does insist that the 'objectivist' concern for 'the unanticipated conditions, and unintended consequences, of action' remains central to a 'hermeneutically informed' critical social theory. For Giddens, it is this commitment to 'objective' conditions transcending individuals' awareness which sets critical social theory apart from the merely 'subjectivist' concerns of 'hermeneutic social theory'. The epistemological argument is centrally concerned with the significance of unacknowledged conditions and unintended consequences of action for the constitution of economic order.

My argument in this chapter continues with the application of 'immanent' critique, in the sense outlined in chapter 2. Because Hayek's and Giddens's epistemological argument is premised on an 'ontological picture' of the essential nature of social order, individual consciousness and knowledge, I contend that the 'deconstruction' of that picture *ipso facto* nullifies their argument against socialism. In adopting this strategy I am meeting Giddens and Hayek on their own ground, for their argument depends not on the desirability or practicability of socialism *per se,* but on the aforementioned picture of knowledgeability. I want to emphasise that whilst Giddens and Hayek present the 'impossibility' of socialism as a conclusion which follows directly from their theory of knowledge and social order, I do not attempt to extract from Wittgenstein a positive justification for the likelihood or desirability of socialism. A central claim of my argument is that such normative prescriptions do not follow logically from supposedly 'objective' theories of individual and social ontology, and must be argued for or against in the 'language-games' of moral and political disputation.

In what follows I present a *résumé* of the Austrian critique of socialist planning, highlighting the similarities between Hayek's and Giddens's theories of ontology and knowledge. Drawing upon Wittgenstein's critique of 'private language', I argue that the epistemological argument against socialism can be seen to be closely

analogous to classical scepticism regarding 'other minds'. I go on to argue that the ontological picture of an omnipresent infrastructure of transcendental rules, and inalienable tacit knowledge of how to apply those rules, is a 'myth of symbolism' (Wittgenstein 1981:§211). Finally, I seek to expose the ideological presuppositions of Hayek's and Giddens's 'rule-generating' model of action and the rhetorical force that comes from their presentation of tacit knowledge and transcendental rules as epistemic 'facts'.

II The argument against socialist economic planning

In a footnote to his exposition of Wittgenstein's 'rule-following' remarks, Kripke (1982:112 n.89) suggests that 'there is perhaps a certain analogy between Wittgenstein's private language argument and Ludwig Von Mises' celebrated argument concerning economic calculation under socialism'. This speculation accords with the conventional wisdom in social and political theory (and with critical social theory), which holds that Wittgenstein's later philosophy preaches a profoundly conservative and a-critical attitude towards social organisation. This view is shared by both conservatives and liberals, and followers and critics of Wittgenstein. Nyíri (1982:59) is an example of the former, claiming that 'Wittgenstein's conceptual analyses can…be regarded as a kind of foundation of conservatism'. Reaching the same conclusion, but from a different political standpoint, Dunn (1985:175) notes that the charge that the implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy are 'inadvertently and ludicrously conservative has been pressed from an early date by Ernest Gellner', and claims that this charge has 'never received a cogent answer'. These attributions of conservatism to Wittgenstein are predicated on the same kind of social-theoretical, 'ontological' (mis)readings as the ones generated by Winch and critical social theorists. I regard Kripke's suggested analogy as entirely spurious, but will concentrate on Mises', and later Hayek's and Giddens's, argument here.

Mises' original argument is seductively simple. Productive efficiency, he claimed, depends upon the calculability of the value of commodities and factors of production. In a capitalist economy these values are determined through the price mechanism–a process which functions automatically via the interactions of buyers and sellers in the marketplace for commodities and labour. Private ownership of property and the means of production, free-market exchange of goods and services, and the price mechanism, together, uniquely solve the economic 'problem of order'. The essence of efficient production and resource allocation is 'rational calculability'. As Mises (1935:111) puts it: 'where there is no free market, there is no pricing mechanism; without a pricing mechanism, there is no economic calculation'. On the one hand, prices tell producers what kinds and qualities of commodities are demanded, and on the other hand, prices tell consumers what choices (if any) are available to them.

The crux of Mises' argument is that in a socialist economy the conditions of 'rational calculability' would be short-circuited by the governmental planning board, whose task it would be (in place of the 'anarchic' price mechanism) to assign values and allocate resources. Kripke's analogy points to an alleged similarity between the individual in Wittgenstein's (1968:§258) private language argument, vainly trying to define a sensation 'privately' without the use of a 'public' language, and the 'planning board' of a socialist economy arbitrarily deciding the prices of commodities and factors of production. If the planning board alone are to assign values they will be bereft of any standard of correctness (like the private linguist), because 'whatever is going to seem right' to the board will *be* 'right'; hence there can be no such thing as (genuine) correctness at all here (Kripke 1982:112 n.89). The planning board, like the individual in Wittgenstein's private language argument, is engaged in a useless ceremony.

Mises' account of rational accountability was challenged by a number of mathematically sophisticated socialist economists (see Roemer 1994: ch. 4). These economists maintained that, given suitably powerful mathematical tools, and with the guidance of modern economic theory, a socialist government would have at their disposal the means to perform the necessary calculations. Whether or not these economists are judged to have formulated a convincing theoretical response to Mises is still controversial. In any case, the question is now only really of historical interest because Hayek moved the calculation debate on to a level beyond the problematic shared by Mises and his opponents. Hayek's reformulation of the problem for socialism identifies not calculability *per se,* but rather the nature and form of *knowledge* as that which sets strict limits to the scope and kind of planning that is compatible with a tolerably efficient and sustainable economy. Hence Hayek's argument came to be known as the 'epistemological', or 'epistemic', argument against socialism.

The epistemological argument states that the 'knowledge' necessary for successful coordination in a complex modern economy is irredeemably dispersed amongst the entire population, and is possessed only 'tacitly', and 'practically' by individuals. In Hayek's theory of individual and social ontology, human beings are essentially 'rule-following animals' (1982, vol. 1:11). He identifies various types of rule, the most important being: (1) general rules constituting the legal, political and economic structure of society; (2) rules of conduct and action which guide modes of behaviour according to situational contingencies; and (3) 'metaconscious' cognitive rules of thought and perception. Hayek insists, like Giddens, that whilst some of these rules can be known consciously and formulated explicitly, most cannot–they are known tacitly and exist transcendentally. Hayek's 'ontological picture' of the individual and social order is, therefore, very similar to the one depicted by Giddens's structuration theory.

The system of general rules of which the market economy is composed–'the rules of the law of property, tort and contract' (Hayek 1982, vol. 2:109) –and the networks of rules of individual conduct, facilitate the generation and use of

knowledge which is widely dispersed and only tacitly known by the individuals whose knowledge it is. This knowledge can neither be produced nor utilised by a centrally controlled, consciously planned, economic system. The knowledge could not be gathered and used for planning because, *ex hypothesi,* it simply does not and cannot exist in an explicit format. Invoking Ryle's (1945–6) distinction between 'knowing how' and 'knowing that', and Polanyi's (1967) theory of tacit knowledge,[2] Hayek claims that such knowledge is essentially non-propositional and is therefore necessarily inseparable from its individual owners.

Like Giddens, Hayek also holds that even those rules which are explicitly formulable are, for the most part, in practice, known and followed only tacitly. Moreover, these rules depend upon an omnipresent infrastructure of inherently tacit rules: individuals 'make constant use of formulas, symbols, and rules whose meaning [they] do not understand' (Hayek 1949:88; compare Giddens 1984: 22). For Hayek, then, calculation is not the real issue because he maintains that the necessary informational input to economic order is inextricably tied to tacit knowledge of 'the particular circumstances of time and place' (Hayek 1949:81). With regard to economic order, tacit knowledge plays two vital, irreplaceable roles: one on the side of consumption and the other on the side of production. Firstly, it expresses the consumption needs/desires of individuals–'knowledge' which is spontaneously manifested in their revealed preferences. And secondly, tacit knowledge underpins the entrepreneurial skills of innovation and perception of opportunity. Thus the 'information' which constitutes economic order is dispersed across the entire population of interacting individuals, inalienably possessed as the tacit knowledge of each one of them. On the basis of this theory of individual and social ontology, Hayek (1988:59) offers the following respecification of the traditional socialist principle of distributive justice: 'prices …tell the individual how best to contribute to the pool from which we all draw in proportion to our contribution'.[3]

It should be noticed, however, that Hayek's defence of free-market capitalism is not predicated on any idea of 'egoism' or 'self-interest' intrinsic to human nature. On the contrary, he claims that acting in accordance with the 'abstract rules' which structure the market economy, often militates *against* individuals' natural inclination to be 'guided in action by perceived needs' (Hayek 1982, vol. 2:146). Hayek conjectures that this 'natural inclination' is a hangover from tribal times, when individuals acted deliberately in response to the needs of known others–in the way that most individuals still are oriented in the family context. But Hayek insists –along with Rawls and Habermas–that justice and social morality can only pertain to those 'abstract rules' of social life which are capable of meeting the Kantian criterion of 'universalisation' (see chapter 8 below). And the rule structure of free-market capitalism is uniquely and exclusively able to meet this criterion. According to Hayek's version of this universalist conception of justice, it is 'no longer the end pursued but the rules observed [which] make the action good or bad' (Hayek 1988:81).

III Giddens and Hayek on social order and the 'impossibility' of economic planning

The central contention of the epistemological argument is that the 'spontaneous', 'extended' order of the modern industrial economy, and individuals' creativity, efficiency and rationality of action would break down with any attempt to translate their 'tacit knowledge' into the explicit, discursive knowledge supposedly necessary for a planned economy. At issue here is what Giddens (1994b:66) describes as 'the impossibility of turning essentially practical knowledge into a matter of economic calculation; many decisions…have to be made "on the ground" through the use of tacit knowledge and practical skill'. There are two different kinds of claim here: (1) an empirical claim that tacit knowledge is an epistemic fact and is vital for a healthy economic order, and (2) a logical claim that because tacit knowledge is 'essentially practical' it is impossible to convert it into the discursive knowledge said to be necessary for a planned economy (see section VIII, below).

According to Hayek, the 'impossibility' of economic planning is both an empirical and a logical impossibility. Once we understand 'how knowledge of …resources is and can be generated and utilised' (Hayek 1988:7), we should see that the ideals and aspirations of socialists are not obnoxious 'ultimate values' but, simply, 'an intellectual error' (Hayek 1982, vol. 2:136). Thus it is not a value judgement, or a moral/political argument, but an objective truth that 'socialist aims and programmes are factually impossible to achieve or execute; and they also happen…to be logically impossible' (Hayek 1988:7). If we wish to retain anything like our level of civilisation and well-being, individual producers and consumers need a structure of rules (given by the market economy) which allows them the freedom to display and act upon the tacit knowledge which is their inalienable possession.

Giddens (1994b:68) agrees with Hayek that even 'market socialism isn't a realistic possibility'. 'There is no third way of this sort', announces Giddens (*ibid.:* 69), and he adds apocalyptically: 'with this realisation the history of socialism as the avant-garde of political theory comes to a close'.[4] Giddens's and Hayek's objection to socialism is predicated on what they claim to be epistemic 'facts'; they do not (explicitly, at least) invoke *moral* premises, as does Nozick, for example. Thus the rhetorical power of the epistemological argument draws upon the ontological 'objectivity' of social-scientific authority, not 'subjective' moral or political philosophy.

There are some differences between Giddens's and Hayek's social theories, but there are also striking similarities, the most pronounced of which is that their respective social theories are both centrally concerned with *knowledge* and *rules*.[5] In both Hayek's theory of 'spontaneous order' and Giddens's theory of structuration, the production and reproduction of social life assumes analytical priority over concerns with the nation-state and government (Hayek 1988:44; Giddens 1990:14). Their theories of social development differ in that Hayek's account is evolutionary (1988:21–3), whereas Giddens's is 'discontinuist' (1990:

3–5). Another difference is that Giddens grounds his 'rule-generating' ontological picture in his interpretation of Wittgenstein's philosophy, whereas Hayek's picture, although essentially the same, is derived from the philosophy of Hume and Kant.[6] But in both cases, the 'rule-generating' picture is presented in the light of Ryle's and Polanyi's conception of practical/tacit knowledge.

For Hayek and Giddens, 'tacit knowledge' provides the linkage whereby they connect ('subjective') individual agency and meaningfulness with 'objective' social structure. Tacit knowledge is ultimately grounded in the individual's cognitive-neural apparatus, and social structure consists of networks of transcendental rules. Giddens and Hayek both posit an 'ontological' distinction between rules and the action that they generate. Giddens requires this distinction because the *raison d'être* of his theory of structuration is to preserve the reality of both individual agency and social structure (see previous chapter). For Hayek, the distinction serves to differentiate his own version of evolutionism from 'social Darwinism', on the grounds that *systems of rules,* not the selection of individuals or innate behaviour, constitute the vehicle of evolutionary development (Hayek 1982, vol. 1:23; compare Harré's [1993:244–8] model of 'socio-evolution', which conceptualises rules as analogues of genes).

Rules are said to be a social phenomenon, constituting the social structure of what Giddens (1984:17) calls 'virtual' order, and the 'extended order' described by Hayek (1988:72–3) as a 'purely transcendent ordering'. For both Hayek and Giddens, rules exist independently of any given individual, but the ability to follow rules is grounded in individuals' tacit knowledge and powers of action. Autonomy is equated with individual choice: 'active choice surely produces, or is, autonomy' (Giddens 1994a:75). But individuals exercise their autonomy in a largely non-conscious, *tacit* manner. As Giddens (1982a:9) explains, agency is ontologically more basic than conscious decision processes: 'the possibility of "doing otherwise", is generally exercised as a routine, tacit feature of everyday behaviour' (this conception of agency will be criticised in the next chapter). It is this connection between tacit knowledge and agency which gives the epistemological argument its normative force. By making tacit knowledge an exclusive, inalienable possession of individuals, Hayek and Giddens are able to claim that its manifestation is also simultaneously an expression of individual freedom. Civilisation, according to Hayek (1988:74), was brought about by, and is sustained through, 'a framework of general rules and individual freedom'.

Despite considerable overlap between the social theories and political analysis of Giddens and Hayek, Giddens does not accept Hayek's categorisation of the 'impossibility' of economic planning as 'logically impossible'. Giddens (1994b: 42) contends that the epistemological argument applies specifically to what he calls 'late' or 'reflexive modernity'—that is, basically, a social order permeated by globalisation and the de-traditionalisation of everyday life. Dissenting from Hayek, Giddens claims that because of the pervasiveness of custom and tradition in Soviet planned and Keynesian managed economies ('simple modernity'), economic planning achieved some measure of success in these societies. According to

Giddens, Hayek's (alleged) conflation of tacit knowledge with custom and tradition (*ibid.:* 67)[7] serves as an accurate characterisation of the condition of erstwhile simple modernity, where individuals were 'submerged' in tradition. In this type of social order planning functioned tolerably well because of the stability of individuals' preferences and lifestyle habits *(ibid.)*. It is only with the onset of late modernity that planning is no longer 'a realistic possibility', due to the 'acceleration of the reflexivity of lay populations' (*ibid.:* 67–8) and the dissolution of tradition-bound lifestyles.

The Cartesian connotations of Giddens's term 'reflexivity', especially as in his that in 'late modernity' individuals have become increasingly self-conscious and phrase 'the reflexive individual' (*ibid.:* 67), gives the impression that he is claiming knowledgeable. However, despite the considerable ambiguity of Giddens's multifarious predication of 'reflexive', this is not what he means by 'reflexive modernity'. Giddens understands reflexivity as both an ontological property of individuals and as a social phenomenon. As a property of individuals, 'reflexivity' signifies a universal, invariant component of human nature: 'reflexivity is a defining characteristic of all human action. All human beings routinely "keep in touch" with the grounds of what they do as an integral element of doing it' (Giddens 1990: 36). But this 'reflexive monitoring' is conducted largely through 'practical consciousness', tacitly (see previous chapter), and is therefore basically synonymous with Hayek's conceptualisation of action.

The reflexivity peculiar to Giddens's notion of 'reflexive modernity' is an *institutional,* not an individual, phenomenon. This mode of reflexivity concerns the relation of individuals to bodies of 'expert knowledge'. Individuals' reflexive relation to this knowledge is of a kind such that the knowledge is not just 'about' them as distinct objects of knowledge; rather, expert knowledge feeds into, and conditions, individuals' action and self-identity.[8] In reflexive modernity, knowledge increasingly feeds into the *constitution,* and reconstitution, of social life; whereas previously, in 'simple modernity', knowledge had more of an external, *regulative* relation to social behaviour. However, Giddens's theory of 'institutional reflexivity' does not alter his conception of 'individual reflexivity', and is in fact dependent upon it. Access to the expert knowledge of reflexive modernity, just like access to 'traditional knowledge', is essentially dependent on the 'know how' of practical consciousness.[9] On this central point Giddens and Hayek are in complete agreement. Giddens's theory of institutional reflexivity is underlain by the same ontological picture as Hayek's theory of socio-evolution–that is, a picture of individuals as tacitly-knowledgeable-rule-followers.

In claiming that the epistemological argument only really applies to 'reflexive modernity', Giddens seeks to respecify the modality of the former from a 'logical impossibility' (as Hayek portrays it) into an empirical, sociologically grounded, 'realistic' or 'practical impossibility'. But this does not amount to a particularly significant difference; it relates mainly to the way in which Soviet planned and Keynesian managed societies are to be conceptualised. For Hayek, these societies managed to function *despite,* not *because* of, the degree of planning involved–and

the degree of planning reflected degrees of tyranny; but it was precisely the attempt to plan consciously and centrally that (eventually) brought about the downfall of these systems. Giddens, on the other hand, accepts that planning was intrinsic to, and functional for, these social conditions, and claims that they broke down not because of the intrinsic impossibility of planning, but 'as a result of the twin and interconnected influences of intensified globalisation and the transformation of everyday life' (Giddens 1994b:42). Nevertheless, in spite of these different diagnoses, Giddens agrees with Hayek that economic planning is not a possibility for modern economies in 'late modernity', for exactly the reasons specified in Hayek's original formulation of the epistemological argument.

IV Tacit knowledge, epistemic privacy and scepticism

I will now proceed to argue that, despite the intentions of its philosophical manufacturers, the concept of tacit knowledge is implicated in a long tradition of epistemological scepticism. The theory of tacit knowledge is an attempt to correct traditional rationalist and empiricist conceptions of knowledge and agency. Giddens and Hayek claim that the nature of tacit knowledge renders it *inherently* unamenable to rational scrutiny and planning. No matter how sophisticated and powerful the technology, the kind of knowledge necessary for economic planning could not be collected, collated and acted upon for this purpose. Such knowledge is inalienable from the individuals whose knowledge it is.

This picture of the 'non-alienability' of tacit knowledge (Gissurarson 1987:57) entails that such 'knowledge' is 'privately' owned by individuals, and for this reason is not publicly accessible. Tacit knowledge is channelled into informational input through the 'public' (social) rules of the market, and is manifest in aggregated (consumptive and productive) economic behaviour—but it is not knowable publicly as *knowledge*. However, not only is tacit knowledge 'privately owned' by individuals, it also cannot, unlike other objects of ownership, be alienated (as knowledge) from individual owners; any attempt to do so, according to Hayek and Giddens, would inevitably destroy its 'conditions of possibility'. Tacit knowledge is, therefore, private in two senses: (1) it cannot be 'observed' and is therefore a transcendental inference (see previous chapter); and (2) it belongs exclusively to its owner.

The notion of epistemic privacy, such as that contained in Giddens's and Hayek's picture of tacit knowledge, was one of the prominent ontological pictures that Wittgenstein sought to deconstruct. In this picture, meaning, understanding, knowledge and conscious experience are depicted as inherently 'inner' states, processes, or objects to which the individual 'owner' enjoys epistemically privileged access. This access is supposed to be immediate and incorrigible for the owner, whilst others can only surmise and hypothesise what might be going on in another's mind, through analogical inference from what they know about their own private experience and the observable behaviour of the other. By way of an antidote to this complex picture of phenomenal experience as an exclusive possession of the individual, Wittgenstein (1968:§275) suggests the following practical exercise:

'Look at the blue of the sky and say to yourself "How blue the sky is!" –When you do it spontaneously–without philosophical intentions–the idea never crosses your mind that this impression of colour belongs only to *you*.' Wittgenstein's suggestion is that the feeling of unknowability associated with the idea of 'private experience' or 'private knowledge' is an unknowability which is built into the philosophical 'explanation' of plain facts of everyday experience.

The non-alienability claimed for tacit knowledge in the epistemological argument can be seen to involve a kind of scepticism that is related to traditional sceptical doubt about the knowability of other minds. Whereas the 'problem of other minds' concerned the knowability of others' *conscious* states, the epistemological argument denies the public knowability of others' *non-conscious* states–that is, their tacit knowledge. In both cases (conscious and non-conscious states) a transcendental inference from observable behaviour to the underlying mental condition is required.[10] Giddens's and Hayek's notion of the 'private ownership' of tacit knowledge is very similar to the contention of Wittgenstein's sceptical interlocutor, who maintains that an individual's subjective experience is known, and belongs exclusively to, herself: '"when I imagine something, or even actually see objects, I have *got* something which my neighbour has not"' (Wittgenstein 1968: §398). Wittgenstein suggests in his reply that this assertion is based upon a spurious analogy with the institution of private property: 'in what sense have you got what you are talking about and saying that only you have got it?' Wittgenstein continues: 'if as a matter of logic you exclude other people's having something, it loses its sense to say that you have it' *(ibid.)*.

Wittgenstein's argument here is an interesting complement to Marx's and Engels's (1974:100–3) critique of Destutt de Tracy and Stirner in *The German Ideology*. These 'ideologists] of private property' (*ibid.*: 102) attempt to 'refute' the possibility of communism by claiming that even after the abolition of private property individuals would still 'own' themselves and their personal experiences. The argument of the 'ideologists' follows the opposite direction to that of Wittgenstein's interlocutor. Whereas the latter makes claims about personal experience by analogy with private property, the former infer 'truths' about the nature of private property from 'facts' about personhood. Thus, according to the 'ideologists', the ownership of property is a natural right grounded in individual 'self-ownership', which, they claim, is a fact of human nature. Wittgenstein, and Marx and Engels, maintain that their antagonists conflate thinghood and personhood with the *ownership* of things. The ownership of things (but not the things themselves) is a social institution: 'actual forms of existence of private property are *social relations*' (*ibid.* –original emphasis). On this view, 'private ownership' is criterially tied to a social context–it is not an inherent 'ontological' feature of individual persons.

Giddens and Hayek seek to transcend the paradigm of classical epistemology (rationalist and empiricist), which pictures individuals as transparently aware of their own mental worlds (even though rationalists disagree with empiricists on the nature of mental content; see note 6, chapter 4). The theory of tacit knowledge

is a Kantian-inspired attempt to synthesise rationalist and empiricist epistemology: individuals are not, and cannot be, (consciously) aware of all that they know; nevertheless, all that they 'tacitly' know *belongs* to them, transcendentally, and hence inalienably. Wittgenstein offers a very different perspective on knowledge. He argues, in *On Certainty,* that many of the taken-for-granted facts and states of affairs in which individuals are immersed are not *known* by that individual ('Moore does not *know* what he asserts he knows' [Wittgenstein 1975:§151]).[11] For example, an individual cannot be said to, and does not, *know* that they have a pain, their own name, that their hands exist, etc. That these states of affairs are not *known,* in the epistemological sense, can be seen by reflecting on the absurdity of conducting an investigation (in normal circumstances) to find out whether or not one is *really* in pain, or attempting to prove to oneself that one's hands *really* exist.

Wittgenstein resists the (Kantian) temptation to say that the above phenomena must be known 'tacitly'. His critique of the paradigm shared by both Cartesian and Humean scepticism, and 'commonsense realism', rejects the assumption that 'knowledge' and 'doubt' are 'names' for states of, or processes in, individuals: 'what do we do with a statement "I know…"? For it is not a question of mental processes or mental states' (*ibid.:* §230). He suggests instead that knowing and doubting are *practices* in which people engage. Wittgenstein regards as idle the bare claim (of the philosopher) that one knows, but does not know how or what one knows. An essential feature of knowledge, says Wittgenstein, is that it is always potentially open to challenge (this is a 'grammatical' remark, not an 'ontological' insight). It is incumbent upon a knower to offer reasons, evidence, procedures, etc., for the justification of a knowledge-claim; the claimant might have to demonstrate how the claim to knowledge may be deduced from well-established knowledge; an explanation may be required for how the claimant is in a position to know what they claim to know; and the knowledge-claim must be about something which could, conceivably, be doubted. These are 'public' practices in which people assert, or defend, knowledge-claims; knowledge-claims cannot be justified merely by asserting that an individual is in possession of the appropriate mental state (tacit knowledge).

I do not want to suggest that Wittgenstein's critique of classical epistemology replaces an inaccurate ontological picture with a 'correct' theoretical conception of knowledge. He does not claim to provide any new 'ontological' insight into the essential nature of knowledge. His aim is simply to show, by pointing to wellknown everyday practices, that mental states (whether introspectable or merely hypothetical) are irrelevant when it comes to justifying knowledge-claims. And my purpose in reviewing Wittgenstein's critique of epistemology is to contend that, at the very least, 'tacit knowledge' should not be assumed to be an epistemic 'fact' with which a rationally planned economy could not possibly live. To put my case no stronger: the notion of 'tacit knowledge' is subject to the same sceptical puzzles as classical epistemology ('the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness'), and is therefore hardly a solid base on which to erect an argument against the possibility of a planned economy.

V The 'conjuring trick' of representation

I have argued in this, and the previous chapter, that the picture of the individual as the private owner of inherently inalienable tacit knowledge should be recognised for what it is: a theoretical representation. This 'ontological picture' is not simply a reflection of epistemic reality *as such;* it is but one possible mode of representation– a 'grammatical movement' made by Hayek and Giddens, amongst others. Giddens's and Hayek's social and political theories are presented as resolutely anti-positivist, but I contend that their theoretical strategy is, nonetheless, significantly positivistic in its form. Giddens (1984:xviii) claims that the positivist doctrine of 'deductively related laws or generalisations' is 'far removed from anything to which I hold that social theory could or should aspire'. Yet the epistemological argument is structured in just this form: a law-like conclusion, stating the impossibility of socialism, is *deduced* from universal, theoretical *generalisations* which express the *essential* nature of social order and individual knowledge and action.

I cannot, and do not wish to, claim to have 'refuted' the ontological picture of tacit knowledge as an inalienable private possession. I have simply tried to show, through 'immanent' critique, that this conception of mind, action and knowledge is subject to the same kind of theoretical problems that bedevilled its predecessor 'paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness'. The epistemological argument is presented as a value-neutral depiction of certain necessary and inescapable epistemic facts. Thus Hayek (1988:7) claims that socialism is based on 'a factual error…about how knowledge of…resources is and can be generated'. Likewise, Giddens's (1994b:68–9) rejection of the possibility of even a 'Third Way' 'market socialism' is also presented not as the expression of a political value, but a conclusion which follows from correct theoretical insight into the nature of knowledge and social order in 'reflexive modernity'.

If Giddens is right about there being an inherently reflexive relation between 'expert knowledge' (which presumably includes his own discourse) and the lay population, then the epistemological argument could have a powerful political effect quite regardless of the 'truth' or theoretical adequacy of its central propositions on the nature of knowledge.[12] If this is so, Hayek's and Giddens's argument against socialism is not just a theory of epistemic 'facts' but also, and at the same time, an *ideological* representation. The very act of presenting the epistemological argument as a law-like conclusion deduced from an 'objective' theoretical insight into the nature of knowledge and social order *as such,* masks its tacit normative premises.[13] Hayek's and Giddens's purportedly 'objective' theoretical representation of the epistemic 'facts' of tacit knowledge and transcendental rules already contains their basic political values. Borrowing Wittgenstein's (1968:§308) words: 'the decisive movement in the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one we thought quite innocent'.

The special inalienable 'knowledge' to which the epistemological argument refers consists primarily of the spontaneously expressed preferences of consumer

choice and the skills of entrepreneurial innovation and 'discovery' of opportunity. It is important to see that by 'valorising' these common-or-garden everyday phenomena as *knowledge* which can only be accessed and utilised by the rules of the 'spontaneous order' of a competitive market economy, Giddens and Hayek create what Wittgenstein (1981:§211) calls 'a myth of symbolism'. My aim, like Wittgenstein's with respect to the philosophy of mind, is to 'deconstruct' this symbolism. Giddens and Hayek do not simply identify a hitherto unnoticed epistemic phenomenon–they place a moral premium on not subjecting the spontaneously expressed preferences of consumers, and entrepreneurs' freedom to exploit economic opportunity, to any kind of regulation. Thus 'tacit knowledge' is not just *epistemically* privileged, it is also, at the same time, granted *normative* sovereignty. However, if this 'tacit knowledge' is represented not as individuals' special inalienable possession but (on the one side) as externally induced and manipulated desires, and (on the other) as a licence to exploit cynically the chance to make quick and easy money, then the case for non-intervention has little moral purchase. Looked at in this way, the tacit knowledge celebrated by the epistemological argument signifies *heteronomy,* not *autonomy*. Whether one represents consumer desire and entrepreneurial power in this way, or as epistemically privileged autonomy, depends upon one's social and political values.

VI Liberal individualism

The ontological picture of the individual as an active, knowledgeable, autonomous agent, as portrayed by Hayek and Giddens, is deeply ingrained in our individualist intellectual and political culture. This picture epitomises the liberalist conception of the human subject: a freely choosing, epistemically sovereign individual–who must be protected from oppressive social structures.

The manner in which liberal theorists (including, increasingly, left-wing liberals and erstwhile socialists) equate the manifestation of individuals' preferences with autonomy has been trenchantly criticised by a number of 'communitarian' political theorists. On the communitarian view, the identification of choice *as such* with autonomy is a central dogma of the modern politics of liberalism. Far from being the epitome of freedom and autonomy, some 'communitarians' contend that consumer choices are merely 'an arbitrary collection of desires accidentally embodied in some particular human being' (Sandel 1984:170). Viewed in this way (an *alternative* mode of representation to that of Hayek and Giddens –I do not claim that it is the 'correct' or 'true' way), it is 'unclear why the integrity of such a system [of desires] should be taken so morally and metaphysically serianthropological condition of the human subject as such. But by representing ously' *(ibid.)*. Giddens and Hayek present their picture of tacit knowledge as an consumer and entrepreneurial behaviour as epistemically and normatively privileged *knowledge,* they *ipso facto* grant their moral and political approval to the form of social organisation which generates it ('the first step is the one that altogether escapes notice' [Wittgenstein 1968:§308]).

This valorisation of the expression of personal preference into an epistemically privileged form of knowledge has been criticised, and set in historical context, by MacIntyre (1988). Drawing upon Wittgenstein's analysis of personal experience, MacIntyre attempts to bring to light the extent to which the transmutation of expressions of desire into individually sovereign knowledge is a political phenomenon. Wittgenstein's (1968:§244) description of the 'language-games' involving pain and fear suggests that first-person linguistic reports such as 'I am afraid', and 'I am in pain', overlay more 'primitive', 'natural expressions' of pain and fear–for example, groaning, grimacing, screaming. Wittgenstein (1968:§246) observes that philosophers tend to project an epistemically privileged status onto these first-person avowals: 'only I can know whether I am really in pain', asserts his interlocutor. This makes an avowal of pain look like a judgement based upon special personal knowledge rather than simply an *expression* of pain (a more sophisticated expression than a scream).

MacIntyre goes beyond Wittgenstein's critique of philosophers' theoretical redescription, seeking to specify the social conditions which give rise to this epistemology. MacIntyre (1988:339) suggests that these conditions consist in a 'restructuring of thought and action in a way which accords with the procedures of the public realms of the market and of liberal individualist politics'. In a nutshell, MacIntyre claims that there is an internal, 'logical' relation between the social organisation of the market economy and the elevation of individual desires and preferences to *epistemic* status. Seen in this light, the political consequence of Giddens's and Hayek's equation of tacit knowledge and autonomy is an ideological 'transformation of first-person expressions of desire…into statements of a reason for action, into premises for practical reasoning' (*ibid.:* 338). In Wittgenstein's register, this is a 'myth of symbolism': first-person avowals do not warrant the epithet 'knowledge': '"I know what I want, wish, believe, feel"', etc., says Wittgenstein (1968:221), is 'philosophers' nonsense'.

From a different political perspective, the epistemological argument can look like a fetishised inversion of social reality rather than an accurate picture of the essential nature of individual knowledge and social order. From this perspective, it is not that individuals reveal their 'knowledge' through the price mechanism; rather, the price mechanism reflects responses of individuals which are largely the product of their social environment. In our contemporary world of 'reflexive modernity', the media (advertising, television, newspapers, etc.) plays a commanding role in telling individuals who they are and what they want.[14] Rather than 'discovering' what people need/want, many commercial organisations use their economic power to force products onto the market, or to create new markets.[15] Instead of seeing a propitious contingent relation between the competitive market economy and individuals' 'tacit knowledge' of what they want and how to do things, the relationship can be seen to be internal. That is to say, whereas the epistemological argument claims that the market economy is the only form of social organisation which can *access* and *utilise* consumers' and producers' 'tacit knowledge', the opposing perspective contends that the latter are constitutive

products of the former. Hence, on this view, it is circular to argue that the market 'is the best and only way of accessing individuals' tacit (economic) knowledge because it is very largely the market social order that generates this 'knowledge'.

VII Market rationality?

In addition to the sanctity of consumer choice, the epistemological argument also claims sovereignty for 'entrepreneurial' tacit and practical knowledge. Optimum decision-making in production and commerce is said to be executed spontaneously and intuitively, not as a conscious process of calculation or ratiocination: 'many decisions, to be taken effectively, have to be made "on the ground" through the use of tacit knowledge and practical skill' (Giddens 1994b:66). Successful management and entrepreneurialism derives from tacit knowledge, skills and intuitions which cannot be rendered explicit or translated out of context into a prepositional format. Therefore managers and entrepreneurs must be left to control and invest as they see fit, free from outside intervention (that is, outside of the market's 'spontaneous order').

But this attribution of privileged tacit knowledge to controllers and investors has some quite undemocratic consequences: it serves to shield their activities from the possibility of public accountability, and it thereby becomes impossible to question their competence or rationality ('whatever is going to seem right' to the entrepreneur/manager will *be* right…). As I noted in the previous chapter, this 'democratic' objection to the indiscriminate invocation of 'tacit knowledge' has been levelled at Polanyian philosophy of science—the domain in which the concept originated. Fuller (1992:393) suggests that the rhetorical effect of Polanyi's theory of tacit knowledge is to 'foreclose the possibility that anyone other than scientists might know what is best for science'. But it is becoming increasingly clear that questions such as '*who* uses *which* knowledge to *what* end—and should they?' (*ibid.*: 397) are too important to entrust to scientists alone. Likewise, the epistemological argument presents a mythological picture of special, mysterious, entrepreneurial and managerial powers. But, as I have already suggested, quite often such entrepreneurial 'tacit knowledge' is nothing more mysterious and ineffable than the cynical exploitation of an opportunity afforded by the market structure; for example, making a huge overnight profit through the purchase and immediate resale of an underpriced public utility—at the expense of millions of taxpayers.[16]

Hayek's theory of the market economy says that prices function like a 'telecommunications system', communicating to producers the most efficient way to utilise resources. As Hayek (1949:88) puts it, when there is 'a scarcity of one raw material, without an order being issued', producers are led (by an invisible hand) to 'use the material or its products more sparingly; that is, they move in the right direction'. But it is clearly not the case for the environment as a whole that resources are used 'sparingly' and 'in the right direction'. Hayek conflates individual producer profitability with overall resource efficiency. Yet, one of the biggest, and perhaps ultimately most intractable, problems with the capitalist economy is that

what makes sound economic sense at the level of the individual producer, brings about a global depletion of scarce and irreplaceable resources and despoliation of the environment[17] –resulting in overall impoverishment and harm for all.

Thus far I have concentrated on 'deconstructing' the 'epistemic' side of the epistemological argument; that is, I have attempted to show that 'tacit knowledge' is an ontological picture constructed in the light of particular values, and applied in a particular way, for certain political purposes. However, the other side to the argument–that rational economic planning necessarily involves something like a central committee of planners continuously engaged in interminable planning meetings[18] –is just as much a pictorial construction as the epistemic side. This idea of a central board of planners is no more appropriate for a complex and sophisticated modern economy than Marx's and Engels's (1977:223) description of the capitalist state as 'but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie'. Set up in these terms, it is indeed difficult to see how a whole modern economy could be consciously regulated and planned by a central body. Such a model may have been appropriate for the newly industrialising Soviet Union in the first half of the twentieth century, but the information and communications technological revolution that has since taken place surely renders this model totally obsolete. Modern multinational companies–some of which are larger than some national economies–extensively technologised and computerised, manage to coordinate a large and complex array of information without resorting to competitive market procedures.[19]

According to the epistemological argument it is impossible to record and rationally plan for the overall satisfaction of individuals' expressed preferences. This may well be the case for a capitalist system in which 'the good' is good *because* (and for no other reason) individuals desire it, whatever it should be (Sandel 1984). If autonomy is to be equated with the capricious and wasteful consumption practices currently exercised in capitalist society, *then* an anarchic, uncontrollable pricing mechanism is no doubt the only suitable means for this end. However, this conclusion holds because the price mechanism plays a constitutive role in the generation of these consumption practices. But an egalitarian, rationally regulated and planned socialist economy would not be concerned with maintaining exactly the same kind and pattern of consumption choices as those generated in capitalist society. It would entail a revision of what currently passes for 'free choice' and 'autonomy' –but this is not so much a shortcoming as one of the principal aims of socialism. (This is not a theoretical proposition, but a 'grammatical reminder' on the *meaning* of socialism.)

VIII Conceptual versus empirical possibility

I now want to examine further the mode of (im)possibility invoked by the epistemological argument. It is claimed that not even a 'supercomputer' could accomplish the calculation and coordination necessary for a socialist economy (Giddens 1994b:66). Conceived thus, the issue is similar to the 'artificial

intelligence' debate. Many cognitive psychologists, scientists and philosophers believe that the construction of a 'conscious', non-human intelligence is imminently achievable–they point to the twin advances in computer technology and neuro-physiological knowledge of brain function. On the other side, it is argued that the task is impossible; Dreyfus (1992) claims that the research programme in artificial intelligence will never be able to translate the competence and expertise exhibited in human action into explicit procedures and algorithms.

Wittgenstein (1968:§360) has this controversy in mind when he says: 'but a machine surely cannot think! –Is that an empirical statement? No. We only say of a human being and what is like one that it thinks.' Wittgenstein was solicitous to separate 'empirical' from 'conceptual' questions. The former are to do with matters of fact and discovery, whilst the latter concerns the logic and application of concepts–'what we *say* about things' (Wittgenstein 1972:23). Thus, for example, in Wittgenstein's view, 'the unconscious' is not, as many of its advocates aver, the name for a new factual discovery, but a new way of thinking and talking about certain phenomena (*ibid.:* 23, 57). In saying that the possibility of a machine capable of thinking is not an empirical question, Wittgenstein means that it is independent of any current or future technology as such. The question is whether we would be prepared to ascribe the capacity for conscious thought to an inorganic artefact, however impressively it might perform–and this is not a contingent technical or empirical issue.

The conclusion of the epistemological argument is also supposed to hold independently of technological capacity, and is therefore a conceptual proposition, in Wittgenstein's sense. But the question addressed by the epistemological argument is surely an empirical one, because it is fundamentally about the *means* to an end (a rationally planned economy). The artificial intelligence debate, on the other hand, concerns what is to *count* as an end (a 'conscious' machine). There is no particular difficulty in conceiving what kind of state of affairs would count as a rationally planned economy; this has never been questioned by proponents of the epistemological argument–they deny its possibility, not its intelligibility. By contrast, it is not at all clear what would count as a 'conscious machine'. Considering then, that the question of a rationally planned and equitable economy is perfectly meaningful and intelligible (its conception surely does not require any special theoretical knowledge), then however unlikely and difficult it may be to realise, it should not be characterised as 'impossible'. The assertion of impossibility looks particularly unwise in our post-empiricist intellectual culture (to which Giddens and Hayek subscribe in their methodological pronouncements) which assumes that all factual statements are fallible. At a time when scientists have mastered the informational code of the DNA molecule, it can hardly be credible to maintain that the problem of coordinating economic information is insuperable. I contend, then, that the question of the possibility of a planned economy is an empirical matter, which depends not on inherent (impossibility but on its mass-desirability and political will.

According to Hayek and Giddens, the 'impossibility' of socialism follows from a theoretical understanding of the untranslatability of consumers' and producers' tacit knowledge into the explicit knowledge supposedly necessary for a planned economy. In taking this stance they claim that this 'impossibility' refers to an inherently absent and unobtainable metaphysical property of the everyday practices of social and economic life. Like more traditional conservative arguments, certain forms of social organisation are thereby deemed to be incompatible with 'human nature' (as in the arguments of the 'ideologist[s] of private property', mentioned above). I have argued, on the contrary, that the 'impossibility' of which the epistemological argument speaks is not a feature of knowledge or action *as such,* but is instead an 'impossibility' which is built into the theoretical representation of such phenomena. Giddens and Hayek 'predicate of the thing what lies in the method of representing it' and then convince themselves that they are 'perceiving a state of affairs of the highest generality' (Wittgenstein 1968:§104).

IX Conclusion

Ironically, it is often those who object to the metaphysical philosophy of history and notion of historical inevitability in Marx's writings who offer in its stead a theoretical denial of the possibility of a rationally planned economy. This denial is but the mirror-image of metaphysical historical inevitability, and is no more tenable. Hayek and Giddens argue that rational economic planning is not possible because the information that it allegedly requires is epistemically locked up in individuals' tacit knowledge. The ontological picture of knowledge on which this conclusion is based is one that Wittgenstein attempted to deconstruct, pointing out that, with regard to knowledge, understanding and meaning, 'nothing is hidden' in individuals' private experiences.

As I reported at the beginning of this chapter, Nyíri (1982:59) interprets Wittgenstein's philosophy as a profound expression of conservative thought, claiming that 'Wittgenstein tries to show that the given form of life is the ultimate givenness'. Likewise, Gray (1984:25) asserts that for Wittgenstein, 'forms of life', as 'basic constitutive traditions of social life…are simply given to us, and must be accepted by us'. But in opposition to this 'conservative' reading, I maintain that Wittgenstein is not, and does not try to be, *any kind of* social or political theorist. It is a mistake to read into Wittgenstein's philosophical writings anything remotely like a social-theoretical thesis–whether 'conservative', 'radical', or any other normative hue. Wittgenstein did indeed write: 'what has to be accepted, the given, is–so one could say–*forms of life*' (1968:226; see also 174, §§19, 23, 241). But he did *not* say that the expression 'form(s) of life' is to be understood as a theoretical concept equivalent to 'mode of production', 'social system', 'cultural tradition', or any such thing. The contexts in which the expression 'form(s) of life' occur in Wittgenstein's writings clearly show that he is talking about very basic phenomena such as 'meaningfulness', 'agreement', 'judgement', etc. As I have already argued, whereas philosophers and social theorists struggle to *explain*

these phenomena (invariably by invoking some transcendental entity or condition), Wittgenstein renounces the urge to explain at this level. To the extent that Wittgenstein can be said to be a conservative at all, it lies in his thorough-going scepticism regarding the capacity of philosophical theory to yield faithful representations of the essential nature of mental and epistemic 'facts'– representations supposedly unavailable to philosophically untutored consciousness.

My critique of the epistemological argument in this chapter might imply, to some, that I regard the theory of tacit knowledge and the 'rule-generating' model of human action as inherently conservative doctrines. This impression, though, would be seriously misleading, and contains the very assumption for which I have criticised Hayek and Giddens. One of the central points that I want to make is that *no* particular normative prescriptions follow automatically, 'objectively', from an ontological picture which purports to represent the essential nature of some phenomenon. My objection to Hayek and Giddens was not that they have an *inaccurate* ontological picture, but that they attempt to pass off their moral and political values as 'facts' of epistemic reality as such.

In fact, the ontological picture espoused by Hayek and Giddens can just as well support the *opposite* normative conclusion, namely that tacit knowledge is indeed a real phenomenon and is a primary and vital component of a rational social life–but free-market capitalism does not utilise this knowledge as efficiently as could be achieved under socialism (for example, Wainwright 1994; Fleetwood 1995; Adaman and Devine 1996). But this is no more of an effective argument than its opposite. Neither the positive nor the negative version of the epistemological argument deals with the central question of the moral and political desirability of socialism. Both versions of the epistemological argument conflate social description/explanation with social and political critique.

Like Hayek and Giddens, Bhaskar's theory of social ontology also embraces the concept of tacit knowledge, and emphasises the ontological primacy of individual free choice and agency. But Bhaskar does not argue against the possibility of socialism. On the contrary, he offers his social ontology as an epistemological foundation for a Marxist-informed explanatory and emancipatory social science. In the next chapter I examine critically the 'libertarian' concept of agency propounded by Giddens and Bhaskar, focusing on the conundrums generated by Bhaskar's attempt to prove its 'reality' via his philosophy of 'transcendental realism'. Although his political values differ from those of Giddens, Habermas and Hayek, Bhaskar's conception of social and political criticism is just the same as theirs, and it is this which is my primary object of criticism.

6

'FREE TO ACT OTHERWISE'?

Questioning the reality of Bhaskar's realist ontology

> Our blame is based on a law of reason whereby we regard reason as a cause that irrespective of all [antecedent] empirical conditions could have determined, and ought to have determined, the agent to act otherwise.
>
> (Kant 1964:477)

> It is analytical to the concept of agency: (a) that a person 'could have acted otherwise' and (b) that the world as constituted by a stream of events-in-process independent of the agent does not hold out a predetermined future.
>
> (Giddens 1976:75)

> It is analytic to the concept of action that the agent could have acted otherwise…the world is open and agency is real.
>
> (Bhaskar 1989a:114)

I Introduction

As we saw in the previous chapter, for Giddens and Hayek tacit knowledge and individual freedom are intimately interlinked; that is, individuals exercise their freedom 'routinely' without necessarily being consciously aware that they are doing so. This conception of freedom differs from more traditional, rationalist, 'subject-centred' views, where freedom is identified with consciously reasoned choice and intentional action. The crucial difference is that the theory of tacit knowledge grounds freedom and autonomy in individuals' powers of *agency,* not their conscious choices. Agency is seen to be the ontologically basic condition of individual action: 'agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place' (Giddens 1984:9). A corollary of this conception of agency as the basic and irreducible *capacity* of individuals to *do* what they do, is that 'at any point in time, "the agent could have acted otherwise"' (Giddens 1979:56). As will become evident later, this proposition

expresses the (intuitively compelling) conviction that individuals possess 'free will', and do not live in a deterministic (social and natural) universe.

Giddens's theory of structuration and Bhaskar's 'transformational model of social activity' (TMSA) place this conception of agency at the centre of their ontologies of individual and social life. These ontologies are designed to counteract the portrayal of individuals as structurally determined subjects, a picture which was intrinsic to deterministic social and political theories of the 'orthodox consensus'. The essence of the new ontological picture advanced by Giddens and Bhaskar is that individual agency, as outlined above, is a necessary precondition for the very existence and continuance of 'social structures', which 'exist only in virtue of, and are exercised only in, human agency' (Bhaskar 1989a:40). Acceptance of this picture of the individual as an active agent, continuously and recursively engaged in the work of drawing upon and reproducing their social world, is considered to be a necessary condition for a critical social or political theory. Any theory which either explicitly or implicitly denies the reality of agency as the omnipresent capacity of each and every individual to 'make a difference' (Giddens 1984:14; Bhaskar 1989a:114) to their (social and natural) world, is *ipso facto* judged to be inadequate.

This obsession (as I believe it to be) with individual agency is part of the postempiricist 'new consensus' which holds across a range of differing programmes, methods and aims in contemporary social and political theory. An index of the entrenchment of this new consensus is the extent to which people are called 'actors' and 'agents' in theoretical discourses–instead of the neutral term 'individuals'. So well entrenched is this linguistic practice that it is no longer a matter of 'political correctness' but just the accepted norm.

Giddens (1976:75, 1979:56) acknowledges that 'the sense of "could have done otherwise"' entailed by his conception of agency is 'manifestly a difficult and controversial one', but he never really engages with the philosophical debates in which that difficulty is addressed. This omission no doubt derives from his belief that social theory should concentrate on '"ontological" concerns', and avoid 'becoming preoccupied with epistemological disputes' (Giddens 1984:xx). Considering that structuration theory is pre-eminently concerned with the nature of knowledge and the transcendental conditions of subjectivity, Giddens's position is quite untenable; his ontological concerns are 'always already' unavoidably implicated in metaphysical and epistemological issues. Bhaskar, on the other hand, has engaged with just these issues in connection with their bearing upon his, and Giddens's, concept of individual agency. Hence, in this chapter, I focus primarily on Bhaskar's attempt to justify philosophically this ontological picture of agency as the inherent counterfactual that individuals always 'could have acted otherwise'.

Bhaskar's programme consists of two related and overlapping components: (1) an *a priori* philosophy of science called 'transcendental realism', which aims to specify the fundamental structure of reality: 'given that science does or could occur, the world *must* be a certain way' (Bhaskar 1978:29); and (2) 'critical realism',

which is an attempt to apply the general perspective of transcendental realism to the social sciences. Whereas (1) is supposed to reveal how the world is in general, (2) purports to provide explanatory enlightenment on 'particular entities and processes' in it, such as the nature of agency, consciousness, social structure, etc. (note that these 'particular entities' are nonetheless highly abstract and generalised). In practice, these two components collapse into one another–because the latter continues to be based exclusively on *a priori* reasoning and transcendental metaphysical inference. Thus Bhaskar's ontological accounts of the nature of agency, social structure, etc. are extremely hard, if not impossible, to distinguish from his general ontological claims on the way that 'the world *must* be'.

My strategy will again be to utilise the method of 'immanent' critique. I will assess Bhaskar's claims on the nature of agency and freedom 'immanently', from within the philosophical paradigm in which he operates. This will involve a consideration of the traditional philosophical dichotomy between 'free will' and 'determinism', and concomitantly, 'compatibilism' versus 'incompatibilism'. My aim is not to attempt any solution to this ancient philosophical dispute but, rather, to highlight some of the paradoxical consequences that follow from Bhaskar's attempt to resolve the conflict through the ontological machinations of his transcendental realism. Staying within this metaphysical 'language-game' of free will versus determinism, I will show that Bhaskar's theorisation of agency is incoherent and inherently contradictory–judged by *his own* criteria for justifiable knowledge-claims. I then proceed to examine Bhaskar's philosophical practice, drawing upon Wittgenstein's 'immanent' critique of 'commonsense realism'. I will try to show that Bhaskar's confusions result from certain linguistic and metaphysical assumptions built into the framework which structures his philosophy of transcendental realism. Finally, turning more specifically to the perspective of 'critical realism', I challenge the validity of Bhaskar's (1991:143) contention that 'there is an elective affinity between critical realism and historical materialism'.

II Freedom and/or determinism? Compatibilism versus incompatibilism

I will commence with a brief overview of the long-standing philosophical dispute on the relation between, and reality of, freedom and determinism. Originally the problem was a theological one: given God's omnipotence and omniscience, He must know in advance everything that will ever happen in the world. If this is so, how is it possible for individuals to choose between good and evil? God's omniscience seems to be incompatible with human free will, thus rendering the latter ultimately an illusion generated by lack of knowledge. The modern version of the apparent incompatibility replaces God's omniscience with the scientific principle of universal causation.

There appear to be only two alternatives regarding the freedom of human action, which Kant formalised in the 'thesis' and 'antithesis' of his 'third antinomy':

1 *Determinism*. 'There is no freedom; everything in the world takes place solely in accordance with laws of nature' (Kant 1964:409). Everything that happens in the world is caused; human beings are natural organisms and belong to the rest of the natural world; therefore, every event that occurs, including human choice, is causally interconnected via an infinite chain with every other event that has occurred and will occur in the future; each event is determined by its causal antecedent.
2 *Indeterminism*. Although humans are natural, biological beings, they also transcend nature in virtue of their possession of consciousness and free will. As biological beings, humans are subject to the laws of nature like any other natural entity; but as conscious, purposive agents, possessing 'free will', they are also able to *initiate* action which impacts upon the causal order of nature. Therefore not *everything* that happens is determined by an ongoing causal chain of events; the natural world may well be governed deterministically, but human choice is 'freely' initiated, not determined. The essence of indeterminism is encapsulated in the phrase that individuals always 'could have acted otherwise'.

This dichotomy seems to exhaust the possibilities: either everything is caused, or not everything is caused. On the first possibility (determinism) genuine free will is seen to be illusory–'if freedom were determined in accordance with laws, it would not be freedom; it would simply be nature under another name' (Kant 1964:411). But on closer examination, the second possibility (indeterminism) also seems unable to allow for genuine freedom. Thus if 'free' actions really are undetermined, they will lack coherent connection with anything–either 'inside' or 'outside' the individual, and hence will be totally capricious: 'freedom (independence) from the laws of nature is no doubt a liberation from compulsion, but also from the guidance of all rules' (*ibid.:* 410–11). A 'freedom' which consists in random, unpredictable and spontaneous acts hardly seems worthy of the name.

Historically, two broad strategies have arisen for reconciling freedom with determinism:

- *Compatibilism* (prime examples: the British empiricists–Thomas Hobbes, David Hume and John Stuart Mill.) Freedom is not really *opposed* to determinism; it actually requires it. Freely-willed choice refers to an action that is chosen and initiated by an individual. A paradigm of free will is an action that was freely chosen, from a range of alternatives, and initiated by the individual. In this paradigm case it is the *individual* who determines her course of action; the causal antecedents of her actions are the motives (beliefs, desires and reasons) that she holds. 'Given the motives which are present to an individual's mind, and given likewise the character and disposition of the individual, the manner in which he will act might be inerringly inferred…if we knew the person thoroughly, and knew all the inducements which are acting upon him, we

could foretell his conduct with as much certainty as we can predict any physical event' (Mill 1952:547). This position, then, is wholly naturalistic.

- *Incompatibilism* (prime examples: René Descartes; Romantic, hermeneutic and existentialist philosophers). According to an advocate of this position, the compatibilist is using linguistic sophistry. If *everything* is caused, says the incompatibilist, then there is no room for *real* freedom. Compatibilists portray action as the result of individual choice, but these choices are themselves *caused*–they are the product of circumstance, character and person-ality, formed through a combination of hereditary and environmental factors which are *not* chosen by the individual. Thus if we ask what causes the motives, character and dispositions which determine an individual's course of action, the answer has to be given, ultimately, in terms of the neuro-physiology of the body. For the incompatibilist, then, genuine freedom can only mean that individuals' choices are somehow self-originating: 'a power of *spontaneously* beginning a series of successive things or states' (Kant 1964: 412). A fundamental dualism between human freedom and natural necessity must be acknowledged; human beings are embedded in nature, and to that extent can only act in accordance with its laws, but they also transcend it in virtue of possessing the power to choose and initiate action.

However, both these positions can be seen, upon reflection, to be deeply unsatisfactory and unable to sustain the idea of freedom. Compatibilism presents a picture in which all aspects of social and personal life are causally interrelated. The relations and origins of the causal components are so vastly complex as to be unperceivable and practicably unknowable. Freedom only disappears at the rarefied level of philosophical reflection (a highly specialised practice, which Hume contrasted with the 'natural attitude' of everyday life and action). Nevertheless, the conclusion must be that freedom is ultimately illusory and unreal; as Bhaskar (1991:50) puts it, 'freedom' is thereby 'grounded in ignorance'. But incompatibilism fares no better because, upon close reflection, the notion of action *origi-nating* as a first (un-caused) cause of a series of events, and hence unconnected to its antecedents, looks capricious and irrational. And if individuals are continuously intervening in the natural world, initiating new series of events, then the idea of the causal interconnectedness of nature itself breaks down: 'side by side with such a lawless faculty of freedom, nature [as an ordered system] is hardly thinkable; the influences of the former would so unceasingly alter the laws of the latter that the appearances which in their natural course are regular and uniform would be reduced to disorder and incoherence' (Kant 1964:414–translator's brackets).

As I have indicated, determinism is usually associated with compatibilism, and indeterminism with incompatibilism; but it is a peculiarity of Bhaskar's theory that he seeks to combine indeterminism with compatibilism. I will shortly endeavour to expose some of the paradoxical theoretical consequences that this unlikely combination generates. But first, in order to bring out the depth of the conundrum of freedom versus determinism, I will move briefly from the level of

philosophical abstraction to a consideration of some practical real-life dilemmas which exemplify the issues. Thomas Nagel's (1979:24–38) discussion of freedom and responsibility in the domain of everyday action provides some apposite examples.

III Freedom, determinism and moral luck

It is because humans are seen as freely-choosing, rational beings that individuals are held to be morally responsible for their actions. People are only held to be accountable for actions that they were responsible for, hence the significance of intentionality and diminished responsibility in the legal sphere.[1] Responsibility is the price of freedom. Nagel (1979:24–38) asks the reader to imagine scenarios such as the following. A car collides with, and kills, a child. Assume that the accident was caused by relatively minor negligence on the driver's part, such as failing to service his brakes or tyre pressures at the correct intervals. The driver will undoubtedly feel great remorse, and will be held legally and morally accountable for his actions. Now compare this with another case, exhibiting the same kind and degree of negligence, but where the driver merely collides with a lamp post. Clearly, the latter case is likely to elicit very little recrimination, yet the individual's actions–in the sense of what she actually *did,* as opposed to the (unintended) consequences of her actions–were identical to the actions of the driver in the previous example. Moral culpability in these two cases crucially depends on factors outside of the driver's control, namely the presence or absence of a child in a certain place at a certain time. Another example of 'moral luck' is the following: 'someone who was an officer in a concentration camp might have led a quiet and harmless life if the Nazis had never come to power in Germany' (*ibid.:* 26).

These examples of 'moral luck' highlight a seemingly undeniable but disquieting truth: what individuals are held to be morally responsible *for* appears, from an 'objective' viewpoint, to be entirely outside of their free will and control. Taking an objective perspective, Nagel (*ibid.:* 28) identifies four major categories of luck: (1) constitutive luck: 'the kind of person you are…your inclinations, capacities, and temperament'. (2) Circumstantial luck: 'the kinds of problems and situations one faces'. (3) Causes of action: 'luck in how one is determined by antecedent circumstances'. (4) The unintended consequences of action: 'luck in the way one's actions and projects turn out'. (Categories 3 and 4 are conceptualised by Bhaskar [1986:126] and Giddens [1982a:7] in terms of one side of the 'duality of structure and praxis' [Bhaskar 1986:125], which I discuss below. But it is by ignoring the import of categories 1 and 2 that they are able to assert that individuals' capability of 'acting otherwise' is un-determined.)

Adopting this wider view–the materially, historically, and socially constitutive role of luck–the inevitable conclusion is that much of what individuals are held to be morally responsible for is actually outside of their control. We are left with a troubling antinomy: both the assertion and denial of responsibility now seem to

be intuitively correct. As Nagel (1979:35) says, 'the area of genuine agency, and therefore of legitimate moral judgement, seems to shrink under this scrutiny to an extensionless point'. Nagel arrives at this paradox by rigorous analytical reasoning, from seemingly undeniable premises regarding the reality of agency, freedom and responsibility. It is the apparently indubitable reality of these premises which leads him to reject both compatibilist and incompatibilist accounts of individual agency *(ibid.)*. However, he freely admits that he is unable to offer a solution. All that he can offer is a Kantian notion of the self and moral agency as 'noumenal' entities in a 'phenomenal' world governed by causality. And this, *as* he readily admits, sidesteps the issue by substituting a mystery for a paradox. This notion will be more fully explicated below.

Having outlined the problem of freedom versus determinism, I will now examine how Bhaskar attempts to deal with it–in so far as he recognises it as a problem at all–and how he tries to rescue agency from the compatibilist/incompatibilist dichotomy.

IV The transcendental reality of agency

Before I analyse Bhaskar's position in detail, it might be helpful to consider briefly a contrasting anti-realist characterisation of human agency. Rorty contends that modern science teaches us that 'commonsense' notions of agency, self and freedom are in fact, ultimately, illusory; human beings are nothing more than 'centreless webs of beliefs and desires' (Rorty 1989:88).[2] This being so, 'physicalism is probably right in saying that we shall someday be able, "in principle", to predict every movement of a person's body' (Rorty 1980:354). However, this 'in principle' possibility is, in practice, 'too difficult to carry out except as an occasional pedagogical exercise' *(ibid.)*. By reducing agency and mind to purely physical, 'natural' phenomena, physicalist theories deny the reality of any non-natural phenomena which, according to incompatibilists, distinguish human beings from the rest of the natural world. Thus Rorty subscribes to a modern version of Humean compatibilism, which reconciles human agency and physical determinism 'naturalistically'. This is not good enough for Bhaskar (1991:50), who complains, against Rorty, that 'freedom cannot be grounded in ignorance'. Bhaskar insists that human agency is 'real'–that is, agency really is as it commonsensically seems to be: 'free' and 'undetermined'. This casts Bhaskar as an indeterminist; however, he also (1989a:100) maintains that 'everything happens in accordance with physical laws'. Thus Bhaskar advocates both indeterminism and compatibilism–an unlikely combination.

Bhaskar's transcendental realist theory of mind and agency is developed in opposition to, and as the solution for, problems rooted in the antithetical positivist and hermeneutical traditions of philosophy. This approach mirrors the one that he –and Giddens–takes to the resolution of the structure-agency problematic (see chapter 4 and section V below); indeed, it is basically the same problem, but pursued in an overtly philosophical context. On the positivist side of the antithesis,

Bhaskar attacks the Humean epistemology of causality and law within which physicalist theories of mind and agency are framed, and he rejects the Humean ontological picture of a rigidly deterministic universe. On the hermeneutical side, he criticises anti-causal 'voluntarism', and rejects its ontological picture of a social realm constituted exclusively by individuals' meanings and self-conceptions, in which, so he (*ibid.:* 152) claims, 'social reality is exhausted by interpretive material'.[3]

Bhaskar objects that neither of these opposed traditions is able to conceptualise genuine freedom. Positivistic physicalism is a rigorously reductive, 'scientific' (or 'scientistic') philosophy of mind. Its basic commitment is to the 'mind-brain identity thesis', which holds that mind and brain are actually identical. Bhaskar finds all physicalist reductionisms deeply unsatisfactory because they reduce 'the fact of human agency' and the 'manifest phenomena' of consciousness (*ibid.:* 20, 13) to the ontological status of epiphenomena (freedom is thus grounded in ignorance). The 'hermeneutic' view—as Bhaskar (*ibid.:* 17–18) presents it—is no more adequate. It maintains that causality does not apply to human action, which is ontologically discontinuous from natural phenomena. Such a view generates the paradox of indeterminism that I discussed earlier—that is, the notion of individuals' actions being self-generating, and the 'irrationality' of this kind of freedom, which, if it existed, would mean that 'deliberation, ratiocination (and indeed thought generally) become practically otiose' (*ibid.:* 92).

Bhaskar's diagnosis of the error of physicalist reductionism is its reliance upon Humean constant-conjunction observability for the identification of causal laws. This picture of causality derives from an undifferentiated ontology, in which reality is exhausted by that which can be sensorially experienced. Such an ontology of 'empirical realism' (*ibid.:* 15) cannot allow for a complex ordering of mechanisms, powers and structures, acting upon each other 'transfactually'—that is, at a level of reality that is not perceivable by the senses. In the ontological picture of transcendental realism, causality exists and acts at a 'deep' level of reality—which transcends the possibility of direct sensory experience. Transcendental realism shows, firstly, that 'the world is stratified and differentiated' (*ibid.:* 5), and then, secondly, that certain powers, mechanisms and structures *must* exist as the condition of possibility for the 'manifest phenomena' of experience. These powers, etc. can only be known through transcendental inference, because they are the causal condition of all that is experienceable.

Because of their Humean conception of causality, mind-brain reductionists presuppose that the individual is a 'closed' system, complete in itself. They thereby neglect the fact that individuals (hence consciousness) are 'always already' embedded in a social, historical and natural context: human beings 'act in open systems co-determined by the effects of non-psychological mechanisms' (*ibid.:* 81). In a synthetic move which parallels the 'reconciliation' of action and structure in his TMSA and Giddens's theory of structuration, Bhaskar's 'causal theory of mind' (*ibid.:* ix) endeavours to effect an *Aufhebung* of physicalism and hermeneuticism (compatibilism and incompatibilism). Against physicalism, Bhaskar upholds the 'reality' of reasons, meanings and concepts (the preoccupation

of hermeneuticism); and against hermeneuticism he insists that reasons, etc. *causally* generate individual agency: 'human action…is caused by states of mind' (*ibid.:* 96). But the universe is, in Bhaskar's terminology, inherently 'open' –that is, un-determined. Hence human action–*along with every other kind of event* –is caused but not 'determined'. The only 'closed systems' that ever exist are the ones manufactured by human agents through (natural) experimental scientific intervention in the 'open' course of events (*ibid.:* 9).[4] It is this *contrived* 'closure', 'under meticulously controlled conditions in the laboratory', that generates the constant-conjunctions and regularities which empiricists identify with causal connection as such: 'human activity is in general necessary for constant conjunctions' *(ibid.)*. Closure is the (humanly produced) exception, not rule of nature.

V Predictability, determinism and emergent powers materialism

Bhaskar's attempted *Aufhebung* of physicalism and hermeneuticism depends on two central ideas: from the physicalist (compatibilist) side he retains the assumption that 'intentional human behaviour is caused', but adds that it is 'always caused by reasons' (Bhaskar 1989a:80).[5] Bhaskar (*ibid.:* 96) calls this the 'principle of psychic ubiquity determinism' (which is somewhat confusing, considering that he claims to be opposed to determinism). With the hermeneutical side, Bhaskar agrees that consciousness and agency are '*sui generis* real' *(ibid.)* in their own right, and are not 'reducible' to the purely physical phenomena of the body, from which they 'emerge'. By depicting 'reasons' as causal mechanisms, and invoking 'emergence' as the modality whereby causation is compatible with un-determined choice, Bhaskar claims to ground freedom and agency in 'reality'–as opposed to 'ignorance'. In the following, I am going to examine critically, firstly, the 'compatibilist' side, then the 'indeterminist' side to Bhaskar's reconciliation, and then the means of reconciliation itself.

In Bhaskar's (*ibid.:* 83) causal theory of mind, reasons are 'real'[6] entities which are 'analogous to the causal structures of nature'. But although Bhaskar subscribes to the thesis of universal causation ('every event has a real cause' [Bhaskar 1978: 70]), he does not accept that 'causality entails determinism' (Bhaskar 1989a:90). This qualification is based on his rejection of the ontological picture generated by a Humean conception of causation, namely 'the metaphysical thesis of regularity determinism' (Bhaskar 1978:69). Bhaskar replaces this 'constant-conjunction' conception of causality with the notion of causal powers as 'tendencies of things, which may be possessed unexercised and exercised unrealised' (Bhaskar 1989a:9). That is to say, the effects of causal powers are only rarely displayed in observable constant-conjunctions; hence causal powers must be conceived as 'transfactual tendencies of structures' (*ibid.:* 167).

According to Bhaskar, a Humean account of causality cannot accommodate the ontological picture of reasons as causes, and he insists that 'clearly such a

concept is non-Humean and generative' (*ibid.:* 83). Giddens (1984:345) also asserts that 'to declare that reasons are causes…no doubt implies a non-Humean account of causality'. But this is simply philosophically and historically wrong–the Humean conception of causality is, on the contrary, particularly apt for viewing reasons causally and, moreover, this is precisely what Hume did in fact propose (in slightly different language, of course). Where Bhaskar (1989a:90) refers to 'real reasons', Hume (1990:404) speaks of 'motives, temper, situation' as causes of intentional action. Bhaskar talks of the individual's '*possession* of a reason' which causally generates her intentional action; but as with Hume, this typically means 'a more or less long-standing disposition or orientation to act in a certain way' (Bhaskar 1989a: 93)–not a conscious thought-process (many of the states constituting individuals' 'real reasons' will be 'tacit' or unconscious).

Like Bhaskar, Hume also argued for a rigorous naturalism and compatibilism, in which human action is to be understood under the same principles of natural necessity and causal connectedness as the purely physical world: 'in judging the actions of men we must proceed upon the same maxims, as when we reason concerning external objects' (Hume 1990:403). Hume also emphasised the need to view individual mind and action in its wider social, historical and natural context. In a graphic portrayal of the moral, physical, social and personal elements that compose a scene of incarceration and execution, Hume (*ibid.:* 406) points to 'a connected chain of natural causes and voluntary actions'. For Hume (*ibid.:* 407), like Bhaskar, natural causation encompasses in equal measure 'motives, volitions and actions; or figure and motion'. As Mill (1952:548, 547) later pointed out, Hume's account of causality is particularly congenial to a compatibilist view of nature and freedom precisely because it does not posit any 'mysterious compulsion' between cause and effect–neither for natural events nor human will and action–and therefore does not contradict 'everyone's instinctive consciousness'.

It is highly ironic, therefore, that Bhaskar's (and Giddens's) purportedly anti-positivist critical social theory embraces what was originally an empiricist theory of action. But from the point of view of Wittgenstein's critique of the 'name-object' picture of language (see chapter 2), the idea that 'reasons' are 'causes' rests on a beguiling linguistic confusion. The grammar of the expression 'reasons are causes' immediately and imperceptibly makes 'reasons' into things (quasi-objects). As Wittgenstein (1972:47) observes, when theorists see that 'a substantive is not used as what in general we should call the name of an object', an obvious move is to make the substantive into 'the name of an aethereal object'. 'Reasons' thereby become 'aethereal objects' bestowed with causal powers.

This ontological picture in which 'intentional human behaviour is…always caused by reasons' (Bhaskar 1989a:80) employs the same kind of logic as the ontological picture of omnipresent, transcendental rules that I criticised in chapter 4. Thus I will again invoke Wittgenstein's (1972:13) distinction between 'following a rule' and 'acting in accordance with a rule'. Whilst actions can always be made out to be *in accordance with* some reason or reasons, it is a quite different matter to

contend that some particular reason or reasons was actually implicated in the genesis of an act. In the former case, the specification of a reason(s) for the action is *hypothetical,* and provides a *post hoc* rationalisation of the activity in question (*ibid.:* 14) –a rationalisation which may be inferred either by the individual concerned or an observer. But an action that is (merely) said to be in accordance with a rule or reason 'is also in accordance with any number of other rules [or reasons]; and amongst these it is not more in accordance with one than with another' (*ibid.:* 13). From this perspective, Bhaskar's assertion that 'intentional human behaviour…is always caused by reasons' is just a rationalist myth created by his own symbolism. If we desist from conceiving reasons as 'things' or 'aethereal objects', then we should see that what looks like the 'real reason' for an act from one point of view (the theorist's) may well look quite different from another perspective (participants' or, for that matter, other theorists'). Whilst not denying that *some* acts are motivated by reasons, Wittgenstein (1968:§211) contends that in many (most?) cases we just 'act, without reasons'.

Bhaskar is less consistent than Hume, for he wants to combine the mutually opposed metaphysical theses of indeterminism and compatibilism. This leads to an incoherent picture of individual agency and freedom, which is unable to show *how* individuals always 'could have acted otherwise', and that 'agency is real' (Bhaskar 1989a:114). Bhaskar endeavours to reconcile indeterminism and compatibilism in a wholly *naturalistic* manner. He is a compatibilist in that he views causal antecedence as a necessary condition of agency; but he also wants to proclaim indeterminism, which he does by denying that his compatibilism entails determinism in the metaphysical sense. This lengthy quotation illustrates the means by which Bhaskar attempts his reconciliation:

> it is an error of the greatest magnitude to suppose that what is going to happen in the future is (epistemically) determined before it is (ontologically) caused. For, when it is caused it will be caused by the action of bodies, preformed, complex and structured, possessing powers irreducible to their exercise, endowed with various degrees of self regulation (and transformation), in thorough-going interaction with one another, and subject to a flow of contingencies that can never be predicted with certainty.
>
> (*ibid.:* 87)

This is the transcendental realist ontological picture with which Bhaskar replaces Humean 'regularity determinism'. But despite its foreboding language, this passage says no more than that physical, social, and psychological phenomena are *extremely* complex–which nobody has ever doubted.

Transcendental realism, like all realisms, insists that the way the world is must be independent of human efforts to know it. A key distinction is made between knowledge (the 'transitive' realm) and that which knowledge is *about* (the 'intransitive' realm of ontology). Furthermore, the transitive realm is seen to be

rela-tivistic–knowledge is fallible, variable and contingent. The intransitive realm of ontology, on the other hand, is strictly non-relativistic–it consists of objects, powers, mechanisms, structures and relations which operate and endure 'transfactually', regardless of their state of empirical manifestation. Thus we have 'changing knowledge of unchanging objects' (*ibid.:* 11). Sustaining this distinction between the transitive and intransitive is the main strategy in Bhaskar's critique of non-realist philosophies. I will now utilise this distinction, 'immanently', against Bhaskar's position.

Bhaskar's position is heavily dependent on the way that he uses certain key terms, such as 'emergent', 'irreducible' and 'determined'. He seeks to restrict the term 'determined' to the transitive realm, by stipulating that it means (epistemically) 'predictable'. This allows him to claim that because the future is not, in general, predictable, it cannot be the case that it is determined. But the claim that, in discourses on free will, 'determined' denotes predictability is quite un-tenable–as can be seen upon examination of the grammar in his denial that 'what is going to happen in the future is (epistemically) determined before it is (ontologically) caused' (*ibid.:* 87). The transitive/intransitive distinction can be deployed here, against this categorisation; and, moreover, it is quite a useful means for expressing more precisely what Humean compatibilism entails.

Humean compatibilism does not claim that all causal relations are specifiable, nor does it require actual predictability of outcomes. It might well be the case that there is a 'species limitation' which will for ever prevent us from being able to grasp the nature of causal relations in every respect.[7] Utilising Bhaskar's nomenclature, all that Humean compatibilism states is that every event is *intransitively* (ontologically) 'determined'–because of universal causation–quite independently of our *transitive* knowledge of, and possibility of knowing, such relations and outcomes. The Humean compatibilist can readily agree with Bhaskar *(ibid.)* that what happens in the future will be the product of a complex admixture of causal powers, structures and relations, 'in thorough-going interaction with one another', and that their outcome will be 'subject to a flow of contingencies that can never be predicted with certainty'. There is no contradiction in maintaining that everything that happens is determined and yet the future is, and (probably) always will be, radically unpredictable. Humean compatibilists do not say that what is going to happen is determined 'epistemically' *before* it is caused; what they say (in transcendental realist language) is that what is going to happen is determined *ontologically* (intransitively), in virtue of the nature of things and their relations to one another. In a word, Humean determinism is quite 'compatible' with Bhaskar's version of 'un-determined' compatibilism.

The indeterminist side to Bhaskar's philosophical ontology is sustained through his use of the correlative pair of terms 'emergence' and 'irreducibility', which are deployed to combat the threat of determinism implied by his thorough-going naturalism. The concept of 'emergence' is the lynchpin of his characterisation of causality, by which he seeks to preserve the indeterminist picture of spontaneous, self-originating intentionality.[8] Bhaskar contends that 'mind' is an 'emergent power

of matter' (Bhaskar 1991:103). By 'emergent' he means that mind cannot be 'reduced' to physical matter, in the way that mind-brain identity theorists claim that mind is 'nothing but' certain physical properties of the human organism. Against this physicalist picture, Bhaskar maintains that the 'emergent powers' of mind (agency, intentionality, belief, desire, etc.) are not just qualitatively different from the matter out of which they emerge, but also *ontologically* distinct from it. Thus mind (and its powers) is both '*sui generis* real' *(ibid.)* in its own right, *and* causally generated by the brain. 'Emergence', for Bhaskar, is a 'real' feature of reality itself–not a term referring just to our attempt to *explain* reality.

But Bhaskar's 'ontologisation' of the concept 'emergence' is riven with perplexities that are just as puzzling as those produced by the ontological pictures that he rejects. What does it mean to say that certain phenomena 'cannot be reduced to' the phenomena from which they emerge? How is this 'cannot' to be understood? Is this a necessary or a contingent truth? If it is a necessary truth that the phenomena are 'irreducible', then how are we able to understand that they emerge in the first place? If it is a contingent claim, does it mean just that we cannot (as yet, at least) *explain* precisely how such emergent phenomena emerge? (an answer that is perfectly acceptable to the Humean compatibilist). Or is it just a 'linguistic reminder' that talk about brains etc. does not have the same meaning as talk about minds, consciousness and agency? Bhaskar's answer, which is contained in the passage quoted above, is that emergence and irreducibility are ontologically *real* features of the intransitive domain; they are entirely independent of the 'transitive' realm of explanation and meaning.

Bhaskar insists that emergent mental powers are causally generated by the physical phenomena from which they emerge. How, then, is freedom and agency preserved if we have to accept that 'ontological' emergence is just a totally non-explicable, 'irreducible' fact? It looks as if Bhaskar has committed his own 'ontic fallacy', namely 'the effective ontologization or naturalization of knowledge' (Bhaskar 1991:32). If emergence is to be seen as an (intransitive) ontological property of certain phenomena, and not as a (transitive) epistemological limit on our ability to explain or understand the relationship between levels, then we are back to Humean scepticism (against which–to put it mildly–Bhaskar is passionately opposed). If emergent phenomena really are 'ontologically' irreducible, then all we can do is note what are in effect only 'constant-conjunction' relations between higher and lower orders (mind and matter). Thus we know that brains are composed of physical stuff, and that mind and its powers are '*sui generis* real', but we must not try to say *how* it emerges from its physical basis because any such (reductionist) move *ipso facto* subverts the unique, 'emergent' reality of mental powers.

Somewhat perversely, Bhaskar treats 'emergence' in much the same way that Hume treated the concept of 'cause'. Just as Hume argued that we can enquire no further into causation than to observe that it is a regularity of constant-conjunction between related objects and events, so Bhaskar now claims that we must just accept that mental powers simply 'emerge' from their physical basis.

The connection between the two levels of phenomena (mental and physical) thereby becomes one of 'constant-conjunction'. I do not want to propose a 'correct' conception, but I would have thought it more in keeping with the scientific attitude, and with philosophical realism (Bhaskar's primary identification), to regard 'emergence' and 'irreducibility' as terms signifying our (contingent or necessary) inability to explain how levels of phenomena are connected, and therefore that 'emergence' and 'irreducibility' are *transitive concepts,* not intransitive phenomena. According to this view, eloquently summarised by Nagel (1979:182),

> emergence is an epistemological condition: it means that an observed feature of the system cannot be derived from the properties currently attributed to its constituents. But this is reason to conclude that either the system has further constituents of which we are not yet aware, or the constituents of which we are aware have further properties that we have not yet discovered.[9]

Bhaskar qualifies his thesis of 'psychic ubiquity determinism' with a non-Humean, 'generative' theory of causation, but retains a thoroughly Humean conception of emergence. The result is that, like Rorty, he too (according to his own epistemic standards) 'grounds freedom in ignorance'. The main substance of my criticism is not that Bhaskar's transcendental realist theory of mind and agency is inadequate in comparison to some superior, 'correct' theory, but that (1) he fails to achieve any solution to, or improvement on, the traditional philosophical puzzles, and (2) he is thereby unable to meet his own criteria for explanatory knowledge.

Having examined critically the two opposed sides—compatibilism and indeterminism—that Bhaskar seeks to reconcile, I now want to focus on the reconciliation itself. I also want to widen the focus, to take in Bhaskar's social ontology of 'structure' and 'agency', which is, as I noted above, closely related to his handling of the mind-body and agency-determinism problems.

In addition to mind and agency, Bhaskar also attributes *sui generis,* emergent reality to social structure (society). In this parallel case, society emerges from, but is irreducible to, people; and yet 'social structures…exist only in virtue of the activities they govern and cannot be empirically identified independently of them' (Bhaskar 1989a:38). The logical principle governing the connection between people and society is called by Bhaskar (*ibid.:* 35) 'the *duality of structure*', which he borrows from Giddens's (1976:121) theory of strucruration. If social structure is to connect causally with people, and thus be deemed 'real',[10] then social structures and people must belong to ontologically distinct modes of being. Hence, 'people and society are not…related "dialectically" …they refer to radically different kinds of thing' (Bhaskar 1989a:33). There is, therefore, 'an ontological hiatus between society and people' (*ibid.:* 46). In plain language, Bhaskar claims that social structure both has a *sui generis* real, separate existence from people, and does not exist independently of people.

In a nutshell, Bhaskar asserts: 'both *A* and not *A*', thereby violating the Aristotelian 'law of contradiction'. However, despite its pretensions otherwise, Bhaskar's problematic is not exactly a new one. Although Bhaskar (1991:58) steadfastly avows his opposition to dualism, it is actually intrinsic to his social and psychological ontology. To see that this is so, I will briefly recapitulate Descartes's dualism –but I will do so through the 'immanent' device of translating Descartes into the idiom of Bhaskar's transcendental realism. Dualism arises when two ontologically distinct modes of being are identified, and are also said to interact mutually with each other, as with Descartes's *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. Descartes believed that these two ontologically 'real' substances (mind and body) interact causally via the pineal gland in the brain. In a logically similar manner, Bhaskar's social and psychological ontology also has two radically distinct natural kinds (people and society; mind and physiology; agency and natural order) interacting causally.

Bhaskar's social ontology tries to circumvent the spectre of Cartesian dualism by invoking Giddens's notion of the *'duality'* of structure and agency. But this is a merely verbal stratagem–as it is for Giddens too (see chapter 4, section VI) –for it could just as easily be said that Descartes's ontology also expresses a duality, and not a dualism, of mind and body. Dualism contrasts not with duality (as defined by Giddens and Bhaskar), but with *parallelism,* or *occasionalism*–non-dualistic ontologies propounded by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Nicolas Malebranche respectively. With these latter two doctrines, ontologically distinct entities are identified (mind and body), but neither is held to interact causally with the other. Thus, given that Bhaskar identifies two ontologically distinct entities, the relation between them can be only one of either causal interaction (dualism), or no causal interaction (occasionalism/parallelism). Clearly, Bhaskar takes the former option; but he then, like Descartes, faces the enigma of *how,* exactly, two radically different kinds of entity (mind/brain; people/society; agency/nature) manage to act causally upon each other. For example, is the medium of interaction itself one of the two kinds, or is it a third kind? If the latter, how does this third kind interact with either of the other two? does it require a *fourth* kind…? I submit that Bhaskar's attempt to reconcile the opposed ontological perspectives of physicalist compatibilism and hermeneuticist indeterminism is no more successful than Cartesian dualism. Correlatively, Descartes's dualism is no less entitled to the epithet 'realism' than Bhaskar's 'synchronic emergent powers materialism'.

It is important to be aware that Bhaskar's social and psychological ontologies do not just derive from a fascination with philosophical puzzles (if at all); a primary motivation stems from his desire to justify the social sciences as genuinely scientific enterprises. In order to achieve this he believes that he has to establish the '*sui generis* reality' of social and psychological phenomena: *'what properties do societies and people possess that might make them possible objects of knowledge for us?* (Bhaskar 1989a:13–original emphasis). The concepts of emergence and irreducibility, and the picture of 'reasons' as 'causes' are, therefore, the means by which he endeavours to guarantee 'real objects' for social and psychological sciences to study. It is

ironic then, that the 'real objects' underwritten by his philosophical ontology are not so much *real* 'real objects' as *theoretical* objects. This is now an appropriate point at which to consider Bhaskar's theoretical practice in the light of Wittgenstein's 'immanent' critique of 'commonsense realism', and to examine more closely the proposition that individuals always 'could have acted otherwise'.

VI Is transcendental realism realistic?

Bhaskar and Giddens both believe that un-determined agency, as the inherent possibility that individuals 'could have acted otherwise', is an obvious and indisputable fact of personhood. Because it is a basic assumption, a 'more or less universally recognised feature[] of substantial social life' (Bhaskar 1989a:18), no attempt is made to justify this conception of agency argumentatively. Bhaskar evidently believes that asserting the reality of (this view of) individual agency needs no justification because it is an immediate and omnipresent fact of everyday experience–and indeed, it has not been seriously disputed within contemporary social and political theory, though it has often been doubted and denied by philosophers. Bhaskar's procedure, rather, is to seek to specify 'what the world must be like' in order for (this conception of) agency to be possible.

Bhaskar's epistemological position, and his philosophical practice, is remarkably like G.E.Moore's defence of 'commonsense realism'. By referring to some ordinary, everyday facts, the truth of which he assumed nobody could or would deny, Moore sought to refute idealism and scepticism, thus to establish the truth of realism. Amongst his favourite examples were: '"there are physical objects"', and '"I know that here is my hand"' (asserted whilst gesticulating with his hand) (Wittgenstein 1975: §§35, 40). These were facts which Moore claimed that he, and anyone else, could *know* with absolute certainty, thereby proving that the 'external world' really does exist independently of the perceiving subject. Moore's examples of things about which he insisted he had epistemic justification for claiming to know, provoked Wittgenstein's counter-arguments that such phenomena *cannot* be known in this way (see chapter 5, section IV). Wittgenstein's objection is not that Moore might have been wrong about the things he claimed to know, but that Moore argued that these facts proved the truth of a philosophical thesis, namely 'realism'. Bhaskar similarly argues from the apparently indubitable fact of individuals' power to 'act otherwise' to the truth of the philosophical theses of indeterminism and compatibilism. Like Wittgenstein, I do not claim that Bhaskar might be wrong about his (and our) ability to 'act otherwise', but that he 'does not *know* what he asserts he knows' (Wittgenstein 1975:§151), and that pointing to this supposed 'fact of human agency' (Bhaskar 1989a:20) does not prove the truth of the aforementioned theses.

The apparent obviousness and undeniability of individual agency, as the power to 'act otherwise', is, I believe–as with Moore's 'proofs' –the product of philosophical reflection on (apparently) paradigmatically self-evident exercises

of the will, such as choosing to move a limb in order to prove to oneself that one has the freedom to act just as one chooses.[11] According to Wittgenstein, such subjective certainties cannot be expressed as knowledge claims in the philosophical sense, 'where "I know" is meant to mean: I *can't* be wrong' (Wittgenstein 1975:§8). Apart from the difficulty of providing a meaningful context for the claims (other than as illustrations of philosophical positions), there seems to be no way in which they could be either verified or falsified. In these cases–'knowing that physical objects exist', or that we have 'free will'–we could give no grounds for believing the propositions that would be 'as certain as the very thing they were supposed to be grounds for' (*ibid.:* §307). Wittgenstein does not simply negate the realist's proposition that 'physical objects exist' (or that 'agency is real' [Bhaskar 1989a:114]); he does not say that these 'things' *do not exist* or are *not real.* Rather, he argues that both the realist and the sceptic misuse the verb 'to know'. It is equally untenable to say either 'I know that physical objects exist' and 'agency is real' (in Bhaskar's sense), or 'I cannot know that physical objects exist' and 'agency is not real' (in Bhaskar's sense). Wittgenstein does not doubt the genuineness of the realist's certainty; he merely points out that this is a psychological condition of individuals and should not be confused with knowledge claims, which 'must admit of being established objectively' (Wittgenstein 1975:§16).

The problem with taking simple actions as paradigm examples of un-determined free will is that such examples can just as easily be invoked as evidence for the opposite thesis, namely the *determined* condition of the will. Hume considered, and rejected, the claim that such self-observation provides direct evidence of an undetermined free will. Hume points out that if one tries to convince oneself that un-determined free will is real by choosing, say, to lift one's arm, there is still an antecedent cause for this volition, namely the desire to prove one's free will: 'the desire of showing our liberty is the sole motive of our actions' (Hume 1990:408; compare Mill 1952:548). Hence the action is not un-determined. The same situation holds for Moore's putative 'proofs' – the sceptic will simply reply: 'the only knowledge you have of those objects for which you claim independent existence is your own sensory experience of them'. And this is why Wittgenstein accepted that Moore's certainty on the existence of his hands was genuine, but denied that it proved the truth of a philosophical thesis (realism).

Bhaskar's appeal to the apparent obviousness and undeniability of free choice and agency as fundamental attributes of human being involves a method of philosophising that, in Wittgenstein's view, yields illusory and spurious accounts of pseudo-phenomena. The method is epitomised by Descartes and is endemic to professional theoretical activity; it is the practice of contemplation, the examination of the contents of one's consciousness in order to discover the true meaning of a word, concept or phenomenon. Bhaskar's (1978:211) statement that 'real definitions' are 'attempts to capture in words the real essence of things' encapsulates this contemplative attitude. The definition of agency as individuals'

power to 'act otherwise' is a prime example of such a 'real definition'. But for Wittgenstein (1968:§413), reflective introspection shows, for example,

> not the meaning of the word 'self'…nor any analysis of such a thing, but the state of a philosopher's attention when he says the word 'self' [or 'free-will', or 'agency' –N.P.] to himself and tries to analyse its meaning.

Instead of wondering '"what goes on in us when we are certain that…?"', Wittgenstein (1968:225) suggests that a more interesting and fruitful line of enquiry is: 'How is "the certainty that this is the case" manifested in human action?'

Considering their frequently professed allegiance to the doctrine of the inherent fallibility of all knowledge-claims, Bhaskar and Giddens exhibit a remarkable degree of certainty in claiming to know that individuals always 'could have acted otherwise', and that the world is indeterministically 'open'. Their epistemic certainty contrasts sharply with Kant, whose 'third antinomy' is based on an acknowledgement that *both* compatibilism and incompatibilism seem to be necessarily true. According to Kant, this antinomy is unavoidable when thinking of the knowable 'phenomenal' world. Kant's 'solution' to the antinomy is that both human will and the natural causal order emanate from an unknowable *'noumenal'* domain, in which the 'causality of their cause' (Kant 1964:470) resides. Thus human agency and natural causation are rooted in a domain entirely outside of 'any conditions of time', and in which they are 'at least *not incompatible with*' each other (*ibid*.: 468, 479). Clearly this is a heavy metaphysical price to pay for a resolution to the dilemma –which in any case stops short of claiming to be the truth.

But Bhaskar (and Giddens) perceives no antinomy; he just asserts blithely that individuals inherently possess the power 'to act otherwise'; that voluntary, intentional actions are 'always caused by reasons', and that the universe is indeterministically 'open'. However, although this 'ontological picture' of an indeterministic universe is supposed to show how it is that individuals are always free to 'act otherwise', its implicit meaning is actually the opposite of the one it asserts. The implicit message is that individuals possess precisely the same degree and kind of freedom (indeterminism) as the natural causal order (the picture is a compatibilist one). Thus human agency is only un-determined to the extent that *everything* in the universe is un-determined. Believers in free will might initially be comforted by Bhaskar's proclamation that intentional action is not subject to 'regularity determinism'–until they discover that the proclamation entails that human 'agency' shares exactly the same 'indeterminism' as everything else in the universe. Bhaskar's *indeterministic* compatibilism is, practically, the same as *deterministic* compatibilism in that, in both cases, human action is no more, nor less, 'free' than anything in the natural world. To put into proper perspective the proposition: 'the agent could have acted otherwise', it should be noted that, for Bhaskar, it is also the case that (for example) 'the weather system could have

acted otherwise'. As Weber (1970:119) so graphically puts it: 'causality…is not a cab, which one can have stopped at one's pleasure; it is all or nothing'.

If Bhaskar were simply to 'remind' us that individuals *sometimes* instigate a freely chosen course of action, and in *some* cases could have acted other than they in fact did, I would have little ground for objection. But I would still want to point out that even the 'freest' of actions are implicated in many conditions that have not been chosen–as Nagel's reflections on 'moral luck' demonstrate (see section III above). Of course, the philosopher is likely to reply: 'if you recognise that some acts are "free" and others are not, what is the relationship between those two categories–are they "compatible" with each other?' To this, I would just point out that the Wittgensteinian attitude is only to attempt to describe (hard though this often will be) what there is and what takes place–not to speculate on alleged transcendental conditions that purportedly 'explain' the possibility of these things. This attitude is encapsulated by Wittgenstein's (1975:§559) remark that our basic mode of being 'is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there–like our life.' The sensible conclusion is that neither the (abstract) statement 'the individual could have acted otherwise', nor its negation 'the individual could not have acted otherwise', is a realistic proposition.

But Bhaskar's 'transcendental realist' ontological picture of human agency does not really concern itself with any 'fact of human agency' (Bhaskar 1989a:20); it is just an exercise in *a priori* reasoning (and a rather incoherent one, so I have argued). Thus Bhaskar (*ibid.:* 114–my emphasis) simply pronounces that 'it is *analytic* to the concept of action that the agent could have acted otherwise'. If a statement is 'analytic', its truth is ascertained through an examination of the meaning of the terms from which it is composed. Hence the above statement is true by (Bhaskar's) definition, not fact; Bhaskar is *stipulating* that 'action' *means* 'the agent could have acted otherwise'.[12] Indeed, what exactly is the statement 'the agent could have acted otherwise' supposed to mean? Can it mean anything other than the tautology that 'the agent would have acted otherwise if she had acted differently than she did'?

Immediately following the analytic statement, Bhaskar goes on to claim that 'it is a necessary condition for the concept of action that the world is open'. This statement, however, contains a *non sequitur*. the world being open can hardly be a necessary condition for the *concept* of action; as a matter of fact many (determinist) philosophers do formulate a concept of action on the presumption that the world is not open in Bhaskar's sense. What Bhaskar means, presumably, is that it is a necessary condition for *his* concept of action that the world is *assumed* to be 'open' (not that it necessarily *is* 'open', for it is possible that a 'closed' world has determined that Bhaskar holds an incorrect concept of action). Bhaskar's purely *a priori* reasoning ensures that his account of agency tells us nothing about real people and real circumstances, and is, therefore, a quite useless premise for a critical social theory–which might be expected to address people as they in fact are.

I have argued that Bhaskar's 'philosophical ontology' provides, in its own terms, an incoherent and wholly unrealistic account of human agency. As I

indicated in the introduction above, this 'ontological picture' is central to Bhaskar's programme of 'critical realism'. This being so, I turn now to a brief evaluation of Bhaskar's claim that critical realism contributes valuable ontological foundations to Marxist social and political theory.

VII Critical realism: the open society

Bhaskar (1991:143) states that: 'Marx's work at its best illustrates critical realism …there is an elective affinity between critical realism and historical materialism'. Moreover, Bhaskar also believes that, where Marx was not at his best, he (Bhaskar) can improve it with up-to-date ontological foundations, derived from the 'philosophical ontology' of transcendental realism. I think that he is wrong on both counts.

Bhaskar's 'analytic' conception of agency leads him to reach this most un-Marxian conclusion: 'as the world is open, and agency is real, and as society is only materially present in intentional human action, it follows that social phenomena only ever manifest themselves in open systems' (Bhaskar 1989a:114). But for Marx, on the contrary, 'historical materialism' is an account of how the political and economic freedoms (and equality before the law) of modern society evolved out of social and economic conditions that lacked these freedoms. Marx and Engels (1974:51) speculate that human history began with simple, collectivistic communism, in which 'men's relations are purely animal'. They characterise this kind of social order as one of 'mere herd-consciousness' *(ibid.)*. In Marx's view, traditional society, contra Bhaskar, was essentially 'closed', and its members cannot be said to have possessed 'agency'–at least, not as Bhaskar defines it. Moreover, even members of modern Western 'open' society, according to Marx, command only very partial and limited 'agency'. Thus Marx (1971a:103) complains that, in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man,* 'the freedom in question is that of a man treated as an isolated monad'–an apt characterisation also of Bhaskar's philosophical ontology.

Marx was in fact highly critical of 'bourgeois economists' for positing 'ontological' premises that were remarkably like Bhaskar's. Marx (1971b:17) contends that the freely choosing, rationally calculating individual in the writings of Smith, Ricardo and the social contract theorists, appears 'not as a result of history, but as its starting point'. This 'ontological picture', Marx argues, is but an *a priori* requirement of the theory, not an intrinsic feature of human nature. And he adds *(ibid.),* 'this illusion has been characteristic of every new epoch' – which can now be taken to include our own. Classical political economists predicate their theories on a picture of the individual (as a freely choosing agent) which universalises the mode of individuality engendered by social relations peculiar to the capitalist mode of production, into an abstract and ahistorical property of 'human nature' as such. And this is precisely what Bhaskar does too; his philosophical ontology, from Marx's point of view, is a 'general historico-philosophical theory, the supreme virtue of which consists in being super-historical' (Marx 1977:572).

Bhaskar, along with Giddens (and Hayek), portrays agency as (1) a 'private' possession of individuals—a 'species-power' which is independent of social relations and historical context, and (2) as a power which manifests itself as undetermined free will. I have already observed, in the discussion of indeterminism, that completely un-determined freedom, whereby individuals are always able to 'act otherwise' if they should so desire, looks more like irrational capriciousness than genuine autonomy—'mere, sheer choice', to borrow O'Neill's (1992:210) felicitous expression. Far from endorsing this view of agency, as Bhaskar claims, Marx (1967:176) *satirised* it, depicting modern free-market social relations as 'a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property, and Bentham. Freedom, because both buyer and seller…are constrained only by their own free will…'

In contrast to Bhaskar, Marx argues that this 'free will' is a condition that depends on social relations which replaced the relations of feudal production, where most individuals' 'agency' was tightly circumscribed. Only by owning ('privately') their labour-power as a commodity can individuals enter into free and equal market relations. But the existence of labour-power, as an alienable commodity owned by individuals, is not grounded in human nature (ontology); on the contrary, 'it is clearly the result of a past historical development, the product of many economical revolutions, of the extinction of a whole series of older forms of social production' (*ibid.:* 169). Whatever one thinks of the accuracy and validity of Marx's historical interpretations, at least he understands the 'grammar' of individuality and agency as a material, social and historical development occurring in 'real time'—whereas Bhaskar presents a simplistic and abstract 'ontological picture' of agency as a power possessed by individuals as such.

VIII Conclusion

We are now in a position to see how very similar are the theories of individual and social ontology (agency, tacit knowledge, transcendental rules) propounded by Bhaskar and Giddens (and Hayek); and in chapter 8 it will be seen that Habermas's 'ontological picture' and conception of critical social theory shares these close 'family resemblances'. It is also apparent that although Bhaskar and Giddens share basically the same individual and social ontology, their professed political values are sharply divergent. In particular, Bhaskar subscribes to a Marxist critique of capitalism, whereas Giddens and Hayek, as we have seen, seek to defend both the inevitability and desirability of free-market capitalism. Whereas I criticised the latter for its latent ideology, I now criticise Bhaskar for his unrealistic idealism and utopianism.

In chapter 4 I exposed the projection of 'knowledgeability' onto lay individuals as the result of a process in which social theorists universalise their own intellectual capacities and conditions of work into a general social ontology. This current chapter consists in a criticism of much the same phenomenon with respect to individual agency. Having universalised intentional action into an omnipresent

power through which individuals are always able to 'act otherwise', Bhaskar deludes himself into thinking that people only need to be presented with the 'cognitively superior' theory (1989a:68) in order for them to recognise it as such and act upon it accordingly. Thus his account of the ontology of individual agency not only yields an idealised (and incoherent) model of human action, it also entails a hopelessly utopian belief in the motivational force of his critical social theory, as witnessed by his extraordinary assurance that 'explanatory critiques will lead, *ceteris paribus,* to action rationally directed to transforming, dissolving, or disconnecting the structures and relations which explain the experience of injustice and the other ills theoretically informed practice has diagnosed' (Bhaskar 1991: 72).[13] This view of the relationship between critical social theory and the population at large follows from the idea that everyone possesses the inherent power of acting otherwise, and the notion that 'reasons are causes'. Thus when 'explanatory critique' produces the 'cognitively superior' theory of some structural injustice, it has thereby produced a causally efficacious reason which *will lead* (other things being equal–whatever this might mean) to the appropriate transformational action. Contrary to this utopian picture (which is hardly vindicated by any historical facts involving critical social and political theory), I suggest that a more sceptical attitude towards the relation between critical theory and social practice is called for, and that it is profoundly *uncritical* to regard agency and freedom as 'a premise of politics rather than its precarious achievement' (Sandel 1984:175–6). I will return to this issue in chapter 8.

In the next chapter I continue my critical analysis of individual agency; but the focus will be on ethnomethodology rather than critical social theory. The object of my analysis is the ethnomethodological picture of the individual as a reflexive, interpretive agent–a picture which has been an extremely influential resource for critical social theory. Ethnomethodology has a clear affinity with Wittgensteinian philosophy, as many of its practitioners and other observers have pointed out; and it has, from its inception, been resolutely opposed to 'constructive' social theorising. It is apposite, therefore, that I should now situate my Wittgenstein-inspired 'immanent' critique of critical social theory in relation to the ethnomethodological critique of classical social theory.

7

MILGRAM VERSUS GARFINKEL

Are we cultural dopes or reflexive agents? A reflexive critique of ethnomethodology

I Introduction

The ontological picture of the individual as an active, reflexive, interpretive agent is fundamental to the critical social theory of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar. In previous chapters I examined and 'deconstructed' this picture with respect to the theories of tacit knowledge, rule-following and 'un-determined' individual agency. In this chapter I go back to what is, for critical social theorists, the primary source of this picture: Harold Garfinkel's creation and inauguration of ethnomethodology. Garfinkel's picture of the individual derives from a range of 'experimental' investigations into various routine practices of everyday life (reported in his *Studies in Ethnomethodology*), and it is upon these that my critical attention is focused in this chapter.

At the same time as Garfinkel's investigations (i.e. the early 1960s), another set of experiments–probably the most (in)famous in the history of the social sciences–were being conducted by the social psychologist Stanley Milgram. Milgram's studies, and the conclusions drawn from them (not necessarily by Milgram himself), epitomised the conception of social science, and picture of the individual, to which Garfinkel and ethnomethodology is most steadfastly opposed. Milgram is typically seen to be the archetypal positivist social scientist, belabouring under a fallacious picture of individuals as passive, structurally determined 'subjects', amenable to 'scientific' experimentation.

Post-empiricist philosophers and social theorists automatically assume that Wittgenstein is on the side of Garfinkel, and opposed to the very idea of work such as Milgram's. In my view this is an over-hasty and unwarranted judgement. I suggest, in fact, that there is very little in Milgram's experiments that is objectionable to the Wittgensteinian attitude which animates my critique of critical social theory. Critical social theorists believe that Wittgenstein's philosophy supports their picture of the skilful, reflexive individual agent, and that it is opposed to the 'mechanistic' conception of individual action which is allegedly presupposed by Milgram's experiments. However, I will argue that Milgram's work provides

a valuable corrective to the ethnomethodologically inspired picture of the individual which has so greatly influenced critical social theory. And in chapter 9 I will go on to argue that Milgram's work provides much more of a genuine social critique than critical social theory.

Neither critic nor follower has ever seriously questioned whether the 'experiments with trust' reported in Garfinkel's *Studies in Ethnomethodology* really demonstrate what he claims. Indeed, post-empiricist social theorists, Garfinkel himself (ambiguously), and most subsequent ethnomethodologists, do not regard these experiments as proper experiments at all. According to post-empiricist philosophers such as Rom Harré (1979) and Bhaskar, it is *ontologically* 'impossible' to conduct a genuine experiment in the social sphere. I shall argue against this *a priori* stipulation on the grounds that it derives from an ontological preconception, not any real 'facts' about human beings. In my view there is no inherent reason to deny experimental status to both Garfinkel's and Milgram's investigations. Rather than agreeing that Garfinkel's 'experiments' are not authentically experimental, I will challenge his, and others', *interpretation* of what they signify. I will suggest that Milgram's interpretation of his experimental subjects behaving as 'cultural' and 'judgemental dopes' of institutionalised authority is also a more apt characterisation of the behaviour of Garfinkel's 'subjects'.

My critical comparison of Garfinkel and Milgram may seem unlikely considering that Milgram's work is now usually consigned to the pre-'cognitive revolution' days of positivistic social science. However, no one seriously argues that Marx's work, for example, is entirely vitiated by the positivism undoubtedly present in it. I see no reason why the same degree of 'interpretive charity' should not be extended to Milgram. The policy that I commend, in respect of both Garfinkel's and Milgram's studies, can be summed up by Wittgenstein's (1968:§66) injunction to: '*look and see*…don't think, but look!'. That is to say, rather than deciding *a priori,* on the basis of an ontological picture of how things *must,* and can only, be (the method of critical social theorists), I propose a more open-minded view of what might be going on in Garfinkel's and Milgram's 'experiments'. Whilst I shall seek to deconstruct the ontological picture of the individual as 'reflexive agent', I have no intention of replacing it with another, supposedly more accurate picture, derived from my defence of Milgram.

Although ethnomethodologists proclaim their aversion to the ontological precepts of social theorists, there is in Garfinkel himself a tendency toward such theoretical pictures, the prime example being that of the 'reflexive agent'. In spite of the criticisms which ensue, in a sense I try to remain close to the 'spirit' of ethnomethodology, which arguably occupies a theoretical and methodological position somewhat similar to Wittgenstein's. In particular, the relationship between ethnomethodology and social theory mirrors Wittgenstein's relationship to philosophy. In both cases there is an assiduous attempt to problematise the assumptions, methods, concepts and aims of mainstream social

theory and philosophy respectively. At the same time there is an abiding vigilance against mounting their critique from an epistemically privileged viewpoint, and against surreptitiously offering alternative theories to replace those which they reject.

Garfinkel does not claim to have been strongly influenced by Wittgenstein (Lynch 1993:183 n.65). But Garfinkel and Sacks ([1969] 1986:169) do point to an affinity between their perspective and Wittgenstein's, describing Wittgenstein's 'later studies' as a 'sustained, extensive, and penetrating corpus of observations of indexical phenomena'. Whatever the actual extent of Wittgenstein's influence on Garfinkel, the perception of most social theorists (and ethnomethodologists) is that ethnomethodology exemplifies a sociological application of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Wittgenstein is without question a major resource for many of the more prominent followers of Garfinkel and exponents of ethnomethodology. Coulter (1979), Button and Sharrock (1991, 1993) and Lynch (1993) are all in substantial agreement on the basic compatibility and complementarity of Garfinkel and Wittgenstein.

I acknowledge that there is considerable consonance in philosophical outlook and attitude between Wittgenstein and ethnomethodology, but in this chapter I bring to the fore my disagreement with ethnomethodology. After my critique of the picture of the 'reflexive agent/actor', I go on to question how consistently ethnomethodologists have followed their central methodological principle of the 'essential reflexivity of accounts' (Garfinkel 1984:7). I conclude with another critical comparison, this time between Garfinkel's and Wittgenstein's 'reflexive' practice.

I do not intend to say much more on my agreement with ethnomethodology, although I should note that Garfinkel has also, like Wittgenstein, frequently been subjected to social-theoretical (mis)readings (for a recent example of both see Turner [1994]). But this is not the place for me to defend ethnomethodology against those misreadings. My main concern is with the *influence*–whether direct or indirect, witting or not–that ethnomethodology has exercised upon critical social theory. My critique of ethnomethodology differs markedly from that typically deployed by social theorists, for example Gellner's accusation of 'subjectivism'; Giddens's and Habermas's charge of relativism, its 'paralysis of the critical will' (Giddens 1979:250–1), and its failure to theorise unacknowledged consequences of action and power in social life.

In my view, my critique of ethnomethodology is fully compatible with its principle of the 'essential reflexivity of accounts' (to be elaborated later). I continue with the stance of 'immanent' critique; in this case my basic objection, in a nutshell, is that the ethnomethodological critique of classical social theory is not sufficiently radical, and thus is vulnerable to assimilation by critical social theory. Ethnomethodology ultimately replaces one abstract theoretical picture of the individual and of social order with another–and to this extent is susceptible to its own critique of social theory.

II Ethnomethodology and social theory

Ethnomethodology was born out of a radical dissatisfaction with established social theory and social science. Just like Winch before him, Garfinkel's principal objections concerned what he saw as a spurious claim to scientificity and objectivity, and a deep antipathy to the way people are portrayed by social theorists and social scientists as 'judgemental' and 'cultural dopes' (Garfinkel 1984:66–7). Garfinkel *(ibid.)* alleges that these 'social science theorists' –that is, 'social psychiatrists, social psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists' –are chronically 'misled about the nature and conditions of stable actions'. As a consequence, individuals become the cultural and judgemental 'dopes' of theorists' representations.

Yet although he is vehemently opposed to 'constructive analysis',[1] Garfinkel's statement of intent sounds very much like the orthodox social-scientific desire to reveal and illuminate social structures and conditions of action, 'the rule governed activities of everyday life' (*ibid.:* 35). Ethnomethodological investigation, he says (*ibid.:* 38), 'should tell us something about how the structures of everyday activities are ordinarily and routinely produced and maintained'. Thus Garfinkel (*ibid.:* vii) proposed that 'practical sociology's fundamental phenomenon' is the locally situated everyday activities through which individuals create social order, as an 'an ongoing accomplishment of the concerted activities of daily life, with the ordinary, artful ways of that accomplishment being by members known, used and taken for granted'. The picture of the individual agent/actor which Garfinkel derived from his ethnomethodological studies has exercised enormous influence on subsequent social theory. His picture of the individual as an active, skilful, interpretive, reflexive agent has effectively replaced the 'passive', socially and environmentally determined subject portrayed in classical social theory.

The first post-empiricist social theorists to take cognisance of this 'reflexivity of the actor' (Heritage 1984:31)[2] were Harré and Secord (1972), who endeavoured to incorporate the ethnomethodological picture of action and social order into a new philosophy of social science. Harré and Secord (1972:12) translate 'reflexivity' into 'self-monitoring', and claim that 'the self-monitored following of rules and plans' is 'the social scientific analogue of the working of generative causal mechanisms' studied by natural scientists. Following Harré and Secord, the 'reflexivity of actors' becomes, with Giddens (1984:3) and Bhaskar (1989a:81), 'the reflexive monitoring of action' –which emphasises the predominantly 'tacit' form of this postulated process (see chapter 4). Similarly, Habermas (1991:127 –original emphasis) endorses what he takes to be Garfinkel's identification of *'the invariant features of the interpretive procedures used by participants in communicative action.'* And McCarthy (1994:71), Habermas's translator and expositor, suggests that there are 'deep affinities between Garfinkel's account of the routine grounds of everyday activities and Habermas's account of the structure of communicative action'.

Thus ethnomethodology is widely credited with providing for social theory insights into the organisation of the 'lifeworld', and with demonstrating the

centrality of individuals' reflexive, interpretive agency. Garfinkel's 'experiments with trust' are presented by him, and accepted by social theorists, as evidence of the skilful, interpretive procedures used by 'knowledgeable' individuals in the process of creating and maintaining social order (see chapter 4, section VIII, on 'the skilful creation of social order').

III Experiments with social reality

It has often been claimed that a major limitation of social science is that its practitioners, unlike their natural-scientific counterparts, are unable to experiment with their subject matter. This is said to be the major factor accounting for the greater scientificity of empirical psychology (for those who think that psychology is a genuine science), where closely controlled and replicable experimentation does take place. Such experimentation, though, depends on the rigorous circumscription of social interaction and individual interpretation, and for this reason it is argued that these investigations are not really *psychological,* but *physiological*. Any domain that is constituted by social phenomena, hence 'concept-dependence, or conceptuality' (Bhaskar 1989a:134), seems to be recalcitrant to experimentation. This view is formalised in Bhaskar's transcendental realism, where he argues (1989a: 47) that the *'practical access'* which experimentation affords to the 'structures of nature' and 'the malleability achieved in the laboratory' is, because of 'ontological limits' that are intrinsic to human phenomena, not available to social scientists. Because 'the objects of social inquiry…only ever manifest themselves in open systems', these objects 'cannot be experimentally, closed' (*ibid.:* 45; compare Harré 1979:103).

Against this picture of 'ontological limits', Garfinkel's celebrated 'breaching' experiments with trust appear to hold out the possibility of a revolutionary approach to the study of social action and relations. According to ethnographic studies of experimental practice,[3] natural science inescapably depends on the work of scientists engaged in the artful manipulation of materials and the creation of scenarios. This work is described by Rouse (1987:101–2, 1996:128–32) as the creation of 'phenomenal microworlds'.

Rouse's description of experimentation in natural science applies equally well to the methods used in Garfinkel's 'experiments with trust' and Milgram's 'obedience experiments'. Experimentation, says Rouse (1996:129), 'places a premium on introducing and monitoring controlled disturbances into previously stable and well-understood settings'. And in a series of 'experiments' this is just what Garfinkel and his team endeavoured to do. Their policy was to 'make trouble' for their 'subjects'–by disrupting some area of commonplace activity in subjects' daily lives, or by playing an 'experimental game' on subjects who had consented to participate in a different kind of investigation to the one that ensued. In this way, Garfinkel can also be said to have introduced 'controlled disturbances into previously stable and well-understood settings'.

These 'experiments' yielded dramatic results–'massive effects', in Garfinkel's (1963:220) words. The most dramatic effects were obtained from scenarios in which student-experimenters attempted to treat members of their family as 'anthropologically strange' (Garfinkel 1984:9), acting as if they were boarders in their own home. In another experiment, student subjects were tricked into thinking that they were participating in, and assessing, a new counselling programme for the Department of Psychiatry. The counselling programme required the subject to discuss 'some serious problem on which he would like advice' with an unseen 'counsellor'–who was actually the experimenter, in an adjoining room, connected to the subject 'via an inter-communication system' (*ibid.:* 79). Subjects were told that 'most people want to ask at least ten questions' (*ibid.:* 80) and that each question would receive only a 'yes' or 'no' answer from the 'counsellor'. The 'answers' had in fact been randomly predecided. A typical 'therapeutic' session went like this:

Subject: I would like to know whether or not I should change my major at the present time. I have a physics major with quite a deficit in grade points to bring up to get my *C* average in physics. I would like to switch over to mathematics. I have a little difficulty in it, but I think maybe I could handle it. I have failed several math courses here at U.C.L.A. but I have always repeated them and had C's. I have come close to getting a *B* in math in one specific course because I studied a little more than in others but my question is still should I change my major?

Experimenter: My answer is no.

Subject: Well he says no. And if I don't then I will have to make up my deficit in grade points which will be awfully difficult because I am not doing too well this semester. If I pull through this semester with seven units of *A* then I can count on possibly going on to get my degree in physics in February, but then I have this stigma of nuclear physics facing me. I thoroughly dislike the study of nuclear physics. Nuclear Physics 124 will be one of my required courses to get a degree in physics.

Do you think I could get a degree in physics on the basis of this knowledge that I must take Physics 124?

Experimenter: My answer is yes.

Subject: He says yes. I don't see how I can. I am not that good of a theorist. My study habits are horrible. My reading speed is bad, and I don't spend enough time in studying.

Do you think that I could successfully improve my study habits?

Experimenter: My answer is yes.

Subject: He says that I can successfully improve my study habits. I have

been preached to all along on how to study properly, but I don't study properly. I don't have sufficient incentive to go through physics or do I?

Do you think I have sufficient incentive to get a degree in physics?

Experimenter: My answer is yes.

Subject: He says my answer is yes. I think possibly so if I didn't have a bad scholastic record behind me to follow me up. It would be awfully difficult to get that degree.

Do you think I could successfully do my studying while trying to keep happy relations at home with my wife and still get my work done? I don't do my studying well at school and I don't have much incentive to study when I am at home. But when my wife comes home, I like to study. Yet this keeps us from doing things, and whenever she doesn't do things, it gets on my nerves because there is all this work piling up.

Do you think I could successfully do my studying at home?

Experimenter: My answer is no.

Subject: He says no. I don't think so either…

(Garfinkel 1984:85–7)

The most striking 'finding'[4] of the experiment was the extent to which subjects interpreted the 'counsellor's' responses (which were completely arbitrary) as reasonable and helpful advice to their problem:

> the underlying pattern was elaborated and compounded over the series of exchanges and was accommodated to each present 'answer' so as to maintain the 'course of advice', to elaborate what had 'really been advised' previously, and to motivate the new possibilities as emerging features of the problem.
>
> (*ibid.:* 90)

It was found that the course of subjects' monologue was shaped by their interpretation of the import of the 'counsellor's' responses to the questions they asked –as can be clearly seen in the extract quoted above. Throughout the session subjects were seen to be continuously engaged in interpreting '"what the adviser had in mind"' *(ibid.:* 89), and how this 'expert knowledge' related to their problem.

This experiment (and others) are taken to provide evidence of two fundamental ethnomethodological phenomena: (1) there is an omnipresent order of norms, rules, methods and procedures constituting the corpus of socially shared knowledge of how to 'go on' in social life–'*all* actions', Garfinkel (1963:198) maintains, have a 'constitutive structure' and a 'normative order'. And (2) 'interpretive work' and

'judgemental work' (Garfinkel 1984:31, 71) is required of individuals to access and maintain that order of normality.

The family-breaching experiment provides an insight into (1), the 'seen but unnoticed' (*ibid.:* 36) backdrop of normative order. Most dramatically, this experiment indicates the constitutive role of normality and regularity in social life–that deviations from what are normally said and done are highly sanctionable and 'accountable' transgressions. The *moral* obligatoriness of ordinary behaviour only becomes apparent when normality and regularity are violated in some way. The 'counselling' experiment, on the other hand, exhibits most strikingly (2), the 'interpretive' and 'judgemental work' of individual subjects; this experiment 'catch [es] the work of "fact production" in flight' (*ibid.:* 79). In this case, what is less clearly shown (but vital nevertheless) is the way subjects draw upon just that normative background order (1) highlighted in the family-breaching experiment. In a moment I shall argue that the background normative order to the counselling experiment is much the same as that which Milgram engineered in his experiments, namely 'scientific' expertise and authority.

Together, these and kindred 'experiments' are presented by Garfinkel as an empirical demonstration that *real* individuals are not like the 'cultural dopes' portrayed in classical social theory. However, I suggest that Garfinkel has replaced the classical social-scientific picture of the 'cultural dope' with his own 'ontological picture' of knowledgeable, reflexive agents, continuously and actively needing to make sense of their environment.

IV 'Cultural dope' versus 'reflexive agent'

I remarked above that the background normative order to the counselling experiment is underemphasised by Garfinkel. Garfinkel (1984:92–original emphasis) does refer to *'institutionalised features of the collectivity as a scheme of interpretation'* which informs subjects' 'seen but unnoticed' 'background expectancies' (*ibid.:* 36). By this, he means those things which are 'known in common' with the 'counsellor'. He lists 'family, school, home, occupation to which the subject's interests were directed' (*ibid.:* 93). But I suggest that Garfinkel omits from his analysis the most relevant cultural and institutional background features of the counselling experiment.

It is my contention that Garfinkel overlooks the extent to which his *own* practice (as experimenter) is 'reflexively' implicated in bringing about the effects he observes in the counselling experiment. Garfinkel mentions that some subjects entertained the possibility of trickery but, even so, found this suspicion difficult to maintain in practice, and could be seen to search actively for ways in which the 'counsellor's' answers 'made "good sense"' (*ibid.:* 91). I suggest that subjects found it difficult to act upon their suspicions primarily because of the power and authority relations structuring their experimental situation. Expert knowledge in general, and experimental research in particular (both of which were primary ingredients in the counselling experiment), carry the legitimating authority of science. My

alternative account of the counselling experiment is that the experimenter-counsellor exercised 'scientific' authority over his subjects, gaining their compliance in virtue of his occupancy of the role of 'expert' and 'scientist'. This trust and compliance in the experimenter is precisely what Milgram (1974) engineered in his obedience experiments.

Rather than agreeing with Lynch (1993:140) that Garfinkel's 'experiments' were more like 'practical jokes' than 'social-psychological experiments', I suggest that a comparison with Milgram's experiments is apt and instructive.[5] The design of Garfinkel's and Milgram's experiments was very similar in that both constructed a naturalistic 'phenomenal microworld'. In order to achieve the necessary level of naturalism, both deceived their subjects on the true aim and nature of the experiment.[6] But whereas Garfinkel claimed that his 'experiments' show individuals to be inherently 'reflexive', 'interpretive' agents, Milgram interpreted the results of his own experiments as evidence that the majority of people are much more likely to obey, 'blindly' and 'automatically', than act 'interpretively' and 'reflexively', when in situations of institutionalised authority. Milgram's experiments bring to the fore the relations of power and authority in an experimental situation which I contend were crucial, though unremarked ('seen but unnoticed'?), factors in Garfinkel's counselling experiment.

In Milgram's experiments, subjects believed that they were participating in a learning programme, in which they were instructed to administer to a 'learner' (the experimental stooge) an electric shock each time he answered incorrectly. The shocks increased in severity, up to a maximum of 450 volts. Even though the learner was heard to scream in pain and protest that he had a weak heart, the majority of subjects (65 per cent) proceeded to administer the highest level of shock, categorised as 'DANGER–SEVERE SHOCK' on the control panel. A white-coated psychologist politely, but firmly, told subjects who faltered that they must continue, and subjects were led to believe that he, the psychologist, assumed responsibility for everyone's welfare in the experiment. Subjects were not coerced into acting in the way they did: 'obedience' was 'willingly assumed in the absence of any threat of any sort' (Milgram 1974:xiii).

I am not saying–and neither did Milgram–that the obedience experiments show that individuals are really, essentially, 'un-reflexive agents' –'cultural' and 'judgemental dopes'. It is often claimed that this is Milgram's conclusion, but it is clearly a misinterpretation. What Milgram does conclude is that in his experiments many (frighteningly many), but by no means *all,* individuals behaved like 'cultural dopes'. In fact, some 35 per cent of his subjects are shown to be–through their 'disobedience' –genuinely 'reflexive agents' vis-à-vis the experiment.[7] My argument is that the scenarios constructed by Milgram closely matched Garfinkel's 'counselling' experiment, and that within those situations we see (the majority of) both sets of subjects acting as 'cultural' and 'judgemental dopes'. Nevertheless, in both Garfinkel's and Milgram's experiments, a sizeable minority of subjects did behave in a manner that I (and Milgram) regard as genuinely 'reflexive'.[8]

One big difference between Milgram's and Garfinkel's experiments is the differential critical response they have elicited. It is quite significant that the morality of Garfinkel's 'experiments' has hardly ever been seriously questioned,[9] whilst Milgram's experiments have attracted considerable moral opprobrium from psychologists, social theorists and philosophers (see Mixon 1989). Garfinkel's 'experiments' are usually referred to good-humouredly as involving playful trickery (for example Lynch 1993:40); but Milgram's experiments are often denounced as a 'nasty', 'obnoxious', deceitful exploitation of innocent subjects (Harré 1979:106). In support of Garfinkel, it would probably be argued that, unlike Milgram, his experiments did not require that subjects believe they were doing anything harmful to other people. However, as Garfinkel himself reports, his subjects did experience varying degrees of stress, discomfort and confusion: 'unanticipated and nasty developments frequently occurred' (Garfinkel 1984:49); 'their suffering was dramatic and unrelieved' (Garfinkel 1963:234). And these reactions were just what Garfinkel (1984:55) had predicted; the results of breaching background expectancies, he says, 'should be those of bewilderment, uncertainty, internal conflict, psycho-social isolation, acute, and nameless anxiety along with various symptoms of acute depersonalisation'.[10]

Moreover, Milgram's experiments provided some of his subjects with illuminating self-knowledge—as revealed in their de-briefing interviews. Milgram (1974:199–200) cites an 'illustrative case', who reported that: 'participation in the "shock experiment"…has had a great impact on my life'.[11] Garfinkel's subjects, though, were given no such opportunity for edification: 'only rarely did [subjects] find the experience instructive' (Garfinkel 1963:227). I conclude that Milgram's experiments were no more morally dubious than Garfinkel's studies, and that they should, therefore, (morally) stand or fall together. Anyway, whatever the rectitude of treating subjects in the way that Garfinkel and Milgram did, I am concerned here mainly with the validity of their procedures and interpretations (see Gillet and Pigden [1996] for a powerful ethical defence of Milgram).

I will now proceed to defend Milgram's interpretation of his obedience experiments against critical re-interpretations that have been proffered by post-empiricist philosophers and social theorists. I will focus on objections raised by Harré (1979, 1993) and Don Mixon (1972b, 1989), which appeal to an 'ethnomethodological' picture of the individual as a knowledgeable, reflexive, interpretive agent. These critics claim that, when properly interpreted, it can be seen that the subjects in Milgram's experiments acted in the same manner as those in Garfinkel's 'experiments'. Hence, on this re-interpretation, Milgram's experiments *exemplify* rather than *contradict* Garfinkel's portrayal of the individual as a 'reflexive agent'. Harré and Mixon assume that Milgram's subjects in the obedience experiments were engaged in a complex process of 'judgemental' and 'interpretive work', based upon a common framework of 'background expectancies'—to which Milgram was blind.

Harré's (1993:25) critique of Milgram follows from the ethnomethodological premise that the 'creation and maintenance of small-scale social order' is 'an

artful achievement of active human agents'. Harré and Mixon both claim that the meaning which Milgram attributed to subjects' actions is quite different to the meaning actually experienced by the subjects themselves. Thus, despite appearances to the contrary, Milgram's (obedient) subjects were in reality much more like Garfinkel's 'reflexive agents' than the 'cultural' and 'judgemental dopes' that Milgram made them out to be. According to Harré and Mixon, Milgram's 'obedient' subjects did not obey 'blindly'; on the contrary, they proceeded on the basis of their interpretation of the situation. It is alleged that, as knowledgeable, skilful, reflexive agents, subjects would have interpreted (correctly) that they would not be asked by a 'scientific' psychologist to administer potentially fatal electric shocks to another person. Thus Mixon (1989:40) asserts: 'to suppose that in ordinary circumstances 65 per cent of the population can be expected to obey an illegitimate command to harm and kill is quite simply a delusion'.[12]

But Milgram does not claim that 'in ordinary circumstances 65 per cent of the population' might obey *illegitimate* commands to harm and kill. Rather, Milgram contends that the obedient subjects in his experiments obeyed the orders because they perceived them to emanate from a *legitimate* source of authority. Mixon's argument implies that because it is not reasonable to believe that 'in ordinary circumstances 65 per cent of the population' might obey commands to harm and kill, therefore it is not reasonable to believe that people might behave in this way in *exceptional circumstances,* such as those engineered by Milgram–which were designed to recreate certain features of the social conditions that pertained in Nazi Germany.

Appealing to the 'background expectations' which he assumes to be continually operative, Mixon (1972b:157, 158) claims that subjects *really* knew that 'safeguards [were] in place', and that 'people are not harmed in psychological experiments'. The question-begging nature of these propositions is evident in the way they are phrased: 'the assumption of safeguards *must* to some degree confound the interpretation of any action involving supposedly dangerous consequences' (*ibid.:* 169–my emphasis). Thus Mixon's re-interpretation relies on absurdly confident assumptions about what subjects *'must'* have known about their situation, which in turn relies upon his faith that people generally (hence also Milgram's subjects) do not, and would not, deliberately hurt another person just because they are told to do so. This faith, it must be said, has precious little grounding in the historical reality of 'civilised' societies. Mixon's position is completely hostage to what he simply assumes 'must' be the case–'"must": that means we are going to apply this picture come what may' (Wittgenstein 1976: 411). In support of his claim that Milgram's subjects knew that 'people are not harmed in psychological experiments', Mixon (1972b:158) points out that in modern Western democracies psychologists are not authorised to issue commands which knowingly visit harm on people, hence Milgram's experimenter's commands were 'illegitimate'. This is, of course, quite correct in the *de jur*e sense, but Milgram's (obedient) subjects did nothing to indicate that *they* thought the experimenter's commands were 'illegitimate'. On the contrary, they *(ex hypothesi)* did what they did precisely because

they *perceived* the experimenter as a legitimately authoritative expert and the laboratory as a legitimate scientific setting. But if subjects had, as Mixon contends, thought that the experimenter's commands were illegitimate, wouldn't that provide an even stronger reason for disobedience? Mixon (1989: 27) says that, in contrast with Milgram's experiments, the 'hideous commands so many obeyed' in wartime Germany *did* emanate from legitimate authority; they were, he says, 'commands authorised by the Nazi state'. But it is precisely the question of *how* perpetrators of these atrocities came to perceive their actions to be legitimate that Milgram sought to illuminate via his experiments.[13]

The reasoning process that Mixon attributes to Milgram's obedient subjects is the following: 'the psychologist's commands are not legitimate, therefore the "learner" is not really receiving dangerous electric shocks'. But this is a *non sequitur,* and would be morally reckless on the part of the subject–the conclusion could just as well be '…therefore this is not a genuine scientist and I should not obey him'; or '…therefore the research that this psychologist is pursuing is immoral and I will play no part in it'. Mixon's explanation is an extremely intellectualist and heavily counterfactual interpretation, claiming to know what subjects *really* believed–what they *must* have believed.

Mixon (1989:30) maintains that because the experimenter showed no concern for the condition of the learner, subjects would interpret this as confirmation that the shocks were not *real;* or as assurance that no real *harm* was being done. This alleged belief about the import of the experimenter's reactions (or lack of them) is supposed to have counteracted the evidence of subjects' perception of the learner's pain and suffering and their knowledge of his physical condition (his weak heart, the effects of high voltage electric shocks, etc.). Yet it seems quite clear from the observed distress of subjects and from their de-briefing interviews, that they really did believe that they were administering (real) electric shocks to a vulnerable victim.[14] This interpretation is only confirmed by the subsequent moral outrage of Mixon, Harré and many other philosophers, psychologists and social theorists. In Harré's (1979:106, 104) opinion, 'the most morally obnoxious feature of this outrageous experiment' is the behaviour of Milgram and his assistants–not that of the 'otherwise kindly citizens' participating in the experiments.[15] Mixon also questions the ethical propriety of exposing subjects to the kind of distress so vividly described by Milgram as follows (quoted by Mixon [1989:32]):

> I observed a mature and initially poised businessman enter the laboratory smiling and confident. Within 20 minutes he was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching a point of nervous collapse. He constantly pulled on his earlobe, and twisted his hands, at one point he pushed his fist into his forehead and muttered: 'Oh God, let's stop it'.

But it is clearly inconsistent for critics such as Harré and Mixon to maintain both that subjects did not believe they were causing the learner any real harm *and* that

Milgram reprehensibly put subjects into a situation which caused them such palpable distress. Why were subjects so distressed if they either realised that the shocks were not real, or believed the experimenter's assurance that 450-volt electric shocks 'may be painful', but 'there is no permanent tissue damage' (Milgram 1974:21)? Harré (1979:105) claims that subjects 'believed their actions were not going to affect the learner at all, other than in the beneficial way of improving his capacity to learn'. But he does not tell us how he knows that this is what Milgram's subjects really believed. Harré neither observed Milgram's experiments, nor has he attempted to replicate them himself. The basis for his claim regarding the beliefs of Milgram's subjects is just an *a priori* theoretical derivation from his ontological 'conception of man as actor' and 'self-directing agent' (Harré and Secord 1972: 313). This conception accords primacy to 'the role of actors' interpretations and beliefs' because they are 'the central determining factor of action' (Harré 1979: 101, 104). The upshot of this commitment is that, rather than taking seriously the 'beliefs and interpretations' of subjects manifested in Milgram's experiments, Harré elects to infer, solely on the basis of his ontological picture of 'man as actor', what subjects *must* have believed. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, Harré and Mixon make Milgram's subjects into 'dopes' of a kind–albeit 'reflexive', 'interpretive' 'dopes'.

Although Harré has not conducted any empirical research which might have given him insight into the beliefs and perceptions of subjects in obedience experiments, Mixon (1989:28) *does* claim to have managed '(successfully) to simulate the conditions in the study that led to the extreme tension and stress exhibited by many of Milgram's subjects'. But, Mixon's (1972b) study differed from Milgram's in one crucial respect: Mixon avoided the need for deception (or 'technical illusion') because his 'experiment' was performed with volunteers in a 'role-playing simulation'. In other words, this 'replication' involved volunteers *pretending* that they were in a real obedience experiment (although, of course, they knew it was only a simulation and hence that nobody actually received real electric shocks). Mixon explains that 'the role player is told to imagine particular things and certain consequences and to behave *as if* they are real' (*ibid.:* 147). After this 'replication' of the obedience experiments, Mixon 'debriefed' his actors, and thereby discovered that they 'could not understand why [the experimenter] behaved the way he did, how he could *know* without looking that the "learner" was all right' (Mixon 1989:28–9). According to Mixon, this 'discovery' provides the key to seeing what Milgram's subjects *really* believed. Thus Milgram's subjects allegedly would have taken their definition of the situation from the experimenter; that is, they would have believed his assurance that the shocks are 'painful but not dangerous' (*ibid.:* 30). Mixon *(ibid.)* maintains that 'the experimenter's verbal and nonverbal behaviour' would communicate to subjects that the shocks 'are not harmful'. Hence Milgram's subjects, on this re-interpretation–contrary to what appeared to be the case–never *really* believed the deception. Mixon does not say whether *he* thinks that ('merely') painful high-voltage electric shocks are not harmful. Presumably he does not think this, and if he doesn't, why would the

subjects? –surely one does not need to be a social theorist to know that painful electric shocks are not harmless.[16]

Harré and Mixon both believe that experimentation is a wholly inappropriate method in social psychology because it presupposes erroneous ontological and metaphysical commitments (Harré 1993:102). They claim that experimental investigation of human action is governed by a positivistic philosophy of science and a mechanistic conception of human beings, whereas the role-playing method privileges individual agency and interpretive skills. Thus the rationale to role-playing simulation is that individuals are treated as 'actors'. In contrast, orthodox experiments, such as Milgram's, treat individuals as mere 'organisms' (Mixon 1972a). From the perspective of post-empiricist philosophical realism, which Harré helped to found, role-playing simulation 'represents the closest analogue of experimentation in natural science' (Greenwood 1991:126).

However, justification for the methodology of simulation and role-playing is inseparable from the ontological picture of individuals as essentially knowledgeable, reflexive, interpretive actors. This being so, the method of role-playing simulation can hardly count as an independent empirical test of the validity of Milgram's obedience experiments, because it has the assumption that people always act 'reflexively' built into it–it presupposes the very assumptions it claims to investigate. This methodology is a prime example of what Woolgar (1988:98) calls 'ontological gerrymandering'. On the one hand, Harré maintains that the conditions necessary for the 'application of the experimental method' to social action 'can never be met'; but on the other hand, he claims that Mixon's simulation of the obedience experiments enabled the latter to 'manipulate the interpretations and beliefs which the subjects brought to the experiment' (Harré 1979: 103, 105). And Harré also objects that social-psychological experiments such as Milgram's invariably involve the bringing together of strangers–but 'studies of the interaction between strangers have shown striking differences from interactions between those who know each other well' (*ibid.:* 107). So, whilst it is impossible for *Milgram* to experiment successfully, the reason for this 'impossibility', according to Harré, can be definitively established by empirical means.

Harré's and Mixon's certainty that they know, contra Milgram, what his subjects *really* believed and experienced, emanates directly and immediately from their ontological picture of the individual. This 'knowledge' is not based on any evidence, it is a theoretical preconception–'a preconceived idea to which reality *must* correspond' (Wittgenstein 1968:§131). Obsessive theoretical commitment to an 'actor' model of human action convinces Mixon and Harré that Mixon 'successfully' re-enacted, through his simulations, the phenomenological experience of Milgram's original subjects. Yet there is a crucial difference between eliciting from role-playing subjects how they ought to behave (i.e. how they behave in a simulation) and knowing how they *would* behave in a *real* situation. Most of us are aware of the worrying indeterminacy between knowing, on the one hand, how we should–and would want to–behave in a morally-testing situation; and on the other, how we would *in fact* behave if actually confronted by that situation.

(And it could justifiably be said that anyone who is unaware of this vital distinction is deficient in their understanding of the conditions of both their own and others' actions.) One of Wittgenstein's 'grammatical reminders' is quite apposite here: he remarks that 'looking up a table in the imagination is no more looking up a table than the image of an imagined experiment is the result of an experiment' (Wittgenstein 1968:§265). Similarly, the result of a simulated experiment is not the result of a real experiment.

V The grammar of interpretation

Returning briefly to Garfinkel's 'experiments', I want to take a closer look at the supposed 'interpretive work' of his subjects. Garfinkel's account of how subjects in the counselling experiment managed to construct '"good sense"' (Garfinkel 1984:91) and therapeutic value out of the 'counsellor's' randomly predetermined 'yes' or 'no' responses to their accounts of their problems seems to attribute to individuals the possession of inherent active, skilful, interpretive abilities. Examples of subjects' postulated 'interpretive' and 'judgemental work' include the following: 'subjects heard the experimenter's answers as answers-to-the-questions'; 'subjects saw directly "what the adviser had in mind"'; 'much effort was devoted to looking for meanings'; 'throughout there was a concern and search for pattern'; etc. (*ibid.:* 89–91). These examples present a picture of individuals driven by an inherent desire to find meaning, and make sense.

However, there is no necessity to accept, uncritically, Garfinkel's interpretation of his 'experiments'. On the contrary, adopting the same kind of strategy as Harré and Mixon, I contend that Garfinkel's counselling experiment can be re-interpreted as exhibiting the kind of conformity manifested in Milgram's experiments. Harré and Mixon challenge Milgram's interpretation of the obedience experiments, asserting that although his subjects *appear* to obey 'blindly', in fact they were able to penetrate the deception by interpreting the true meaning of the actions and responses of the experimenter. Utilising the same kind of argument, but reaching the opposite conclusion, it can be suggested that Garfinkel's subjects only *appear* to be engaged in 'judgemental' and 'interpretive work' through the interpretive work contained in Garfinkel's textual presentation. On this re-interpretation, Garfinkel's subjects were merely responding, in a particularly unreflective manner, to the situation into which they had entered. Milgram (1977:120) attributes to his (obedient) subjects an 'uncritical acceptance of the experimenter's definition of the situation', and this seems to me to be the more accurate description for both his and Garfinkel's subjects.

In the family-breaching 'experiment', where the experimenter pretended to be a stranger in their home, it is evident that most of the 'subjects', just like Milgram's, did not really engage in 'interpretive work'. Only two out of 42 families were not taken in by the deception, and interpreted their situation 'as a joke from the beginning' (Garfinkel 1984:47). Although Garfinkel *(ibid.)* says that the deceived subjects 'vigorously sought to make the strange actions intelligible', the examples

that he reports do not look to me like an interpretive search for meaning. Typical reactions of subjects were: 'withdrawal by the offended member, attempted isolation of the culprit'; 'one mother…began to shriek in angry denunciation of her daughter', etc. (*ibid.:* 48). Subjects often 'demanded explanations' from the miscreant, but this was a demand to behave properly, for example: '"if you can't treat your mother decently you'd better move out!"' (*ibid.:* 47, 48). The reaction of most subjects was simply spontaneous outrage and exasperation at the senselessness of their predicament, closely followed by the demand that the deviant behaviour cease immediately. What many of these scenarios depict, in my view, is a rather poignant image of an undercurrent of anger, hostility and aggression running just below the surface of 'normal' family relations, which easily boils over in response to apparently trivial disturbances of normality.[17] This is a dark image of 1960s middle-class American family life, in which communication, interpretation and the search for meaning actually seems to play a disturbingly small role. Moreover, the picture of 'human nature' that Garfinkel's studies present is hardly more 'optimistic' than the one portrayed by Milgram.

This is an appropriate juncture at which to consider some 'grammatical' reflections and 'reminders' (in Wittgenstein's sense) on the meaning/use of 'interpretation'. The activity of interpretation, I would suggest, is closely associated with the aim of 'discovery'. Thus one attempts, through interpretation, to discover 'the meaning' of a poem; anthropologists and historians interpret strange practices in distant cultures, theorists interpret difficult or controversial texts, and people interpret each other's actions and motives–in an effort to discover their meaning. In short, interpretation is a highly reflective and necessarily intentional process (interpretation is not 'automatic'). Even those 'post-modern' theorists who seek to 'de-construct' meaning are engaged in 'interpretive work' which is both reflective and intentional. But the majority of Garfinkel's subjects (just like Milgram's) seem not to have engaged in interpretation in this sense–at least not on the basis of the evidence that is presented. On the contrary, subjects in the counselling and other experiments attempted to 'normalise' discrepant events by making them fit into their customary mode of being. This is hardly an example of 'skilful', 'reflexive' accomplishment. Thus the more appropriate description for (the majority of) Garfinkel's subjects is that they behaved 'conservatively', 'uncritically' and 'obediently'. I suggest, therefore, that the epithets 'interpretive' and 'reflexive', in this context, are best reserved for the small number of subjects who discovered the deception. The latter is indeed quite properly described as a 'skilful accomplishment'.

Of course, it could be claimed that (most of) Garfinkel's and Milgram's subjects behaved interpretively in some sense other than the one I have just outlined. Such a reply, though, has the unfortunate consequence that one needs to be an ethnomethodologist or critical social theorist in order to see these subjects as 'reflexive agents' (one needs to be under the thrall of their ontological picture of the individual). Most lay persons, I believe, would be inclined to see the behaviour of these subjects as 'un-reflexive' and (probably) as rather stupid. Indeed, I think

there is a further irony: the reason that most social theorists accept Garfinkel's account of his subjects' behaviour is that *they* (the social theorists) become 'cultural' and 'judgemental' 'dopes' in relation to Garfinkel's text, accepting uncritically what they are told to expect in it.

VI Real experimentation, or aids to a sluggish imagination?

Having discussed some of the interpretive controversies arising from Garfinkel's and Milgram's studies, I return now to the question of the epistemic status of these studies. Garfinkel equivocates on whether his investigations were 'experiments', revealing genuine insights or, rather, just vivid enactments of 'what anyone knows' (Garfinkel 1963:215). Most subsequent ethnomethodologists tend to opt for the latter characterisation, agreeing with post-empiricist realist philosophers that experimentation in the social domain is radically misconceived. Garfinkel's (1984:49, 38) account of the epistemic status of his investigations is ambiguous, oscillating between (on the one hand) presenting them as experimentally based discoveries: 'there were several entirely unexpected findings'; and (on the other hand) as 'not properly speaking experimental', but '"aids to a sluggish imagination"'.

Drawing upon the studies of experimentation cited in note 3, I propose that there is no principled reason to deny experimental status either to Garfinkel's or to Milgram's investigations. (I would, however, categorise Mixon's role-playing simulation as 'not properly speaking experimental'.) If Garfinkel's and Milgram's investigations are to be denied experimental status it is because they are judged to lack whatever it is that constitutes authentic experimentation. Authenticity depends on whether or not a putative candidate for experimental status is, in key respects, 'the same as' a genuine experiment. Such a judgement will depend on the criteria for what is to count as 'the same' or 'different'. Hence the question is: 'how do we *compare* these experiences; what criterion of identity *do we fix* for their occurrence?' (Wittgenstein 1968:§322). Notice that Wittgenstein's formulation emphasises that it is we (that is, we who are engaged in a comparative exercise[18]) who decide the criteria of identity. We should not assume that objects, practices or experiences somehow embody their own criteria of identity independently of *our* 'interpretive' and 'judgemental work'.

One of the most interesting observations of ethnographic studies on experimentation is that 'the sameness/difference attributed to two or more experiments depends on interpretive work carried out by the scientists concerned' (Mulkay 1985:134–paraphrasing Collins's [1985] work on replication in natural science[19]). And scientists' judgements of sameness/difference 'often derive from, or at least vary with, their views about the scientific phenomena under investigation' (Mulkay 1985:134).[20] As I observed in chapter 4 (section IX), these interpretive disputes in natural science often revolve around the question of whether a phenomenon has been discovered, recorded and measured, or whether it is just

an artefactual product of the experimental procedure itself (see Collins 1985; Latour and Woolgar 1986). Whether an experiment is adjudged to have accessed a genuine phenomenon, or just created a pseudo-phenomenon, is an outcome of the 'interpretive work' of the scientists involved in the dispute. The question of 'artefactuality' is also, of course, the main point of contention in disputes over the interpretation of Milgram's experiments–and also informs my re-interpretation of *Garfinkel's* counselling experiment.

Thus we can see that the dispute between advocates of experimental methods in psychology such as Milgram, and post-empiricist philosophers and social theorists such as Harré and Mixon–who deny the possibility of experimentation with social phenomena–mirrors the kind of dispute over experimental validity that is commonplace in natural science. In both cases disputes revolve around the 'interpretive work' of the disputants, and cannot be resolved just by appealing to the nature of phenomena *as such*–because any such appeal entails judgement about experimental validity, thereby rendering the appeal circular. This reiterates the point that I made above when I highlighted the circularity of justifying the method of role-playing simulation by appealing to an ontological picture of the 'reflexive actor'.

The claim that neither Garfinkel's nor Milgram's investigations were properly experimental is inextricably tied to the 'interpretive work' which is needed to *show* how and why they differ from the real thing. My discussion above of Harré and Mixon depicts some of the 'interpretive work' through which they deny experimental status to Milgram's investigations. In criticism of them, I have myself engaged in 'interpretive work' (appealing to the 'interpretive work' involved in denials and affirmations of replication) in order to defend Milgram's interpretation of his experiments. But my point is simply that the ontological picture of the individual as 'knowledgeable', 'reflexive' actor is not just an unmediated reflection of human/social reality as such; it is, rather, *actively* created through the 'interpretive work' of the theorists who purvey it.

VII Conclusion on Milgram and the obedience experiments

I have not sought to provide a comprehensive defence of Milgram's experiments, nor would I want to defend all of his interpretations and conclusions. Nor, for that matter, do I wish to defend experimental psychology more generally; I have no doubt that many of the criticisms concerning its 'ecological validity' (i.e. realism) are well deserved.[21] My main purpose was, firstly, to defend Milgram's interpretation of the behaviour of subjects in his obedience experiments, and then to argue that this interpretation is also a better account of the behaviour of Garfinkel's subjects in his 'experiments with trust'. And secondly, I have sought to rebut post-empiricist *a priori* arguments against the very possibility of experimentation in the social sphere.

To a certain extent my argument thus far in this chapter complements what I said in chapter 2 regarding Wittgenstein's renunciation of 'theory'. I pointed out

there that Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblances' 'reminds' us that there are many different kinds and uses of theory–not just the theory produced by scientists and philosophers. In this chapter I repeat this point, only now with respect to 'experimentation': experimental investigation has many more applications than the forms to be found in physics and chemistry laboratories. The latter may well be the 'paradigm case' of experimentation, but this does not entail that other experimental practices cannot be more or less related to these. The term 'experiment' is not a synonym for '*scientific* experiment'. At its most basic, I would suggest, the term 'experiment' signifies the deliberate engineering of some kind of test situation–but this does not necessarily require the clinically strict regulation and control of laboratory science. Harré (1979:106) claims that social-psychological experiments lack 'ecological validity' and are not 'the kind of event which occurs frequently in the real world of social activity'. But the special ingenuity of Milgram's experimental design inheres in the fact that he *intended* subjects to perceive that they were in a psychological experiment and not 'a typical social event' *(ibid.)*. Hence the 'simplified environment' *(ibid.)* of the social-psychological experiment is not a problem in Milgram's case because that is exactly what subjects were *supposed* to perceive and experience. The realism was, so to speak, a direct consequence of the 'unreality' (in Harré's sense) of the scenario.

Both Milgram's and Garfinkel's 'experiments' are, I believe, marvellously ingenious and do indeed advance our understanding of certain aspects of modern social life and social relations. But it is a mistake, in my view, to categorise Milgram's experiments as positivistic social science. These experiments were an investigation into the social and personal effects of scientific authority itself (they had an essentially 'reflexive' purpose). The kind of understanding afforded by these experiments is quite remote from the positivist goal of precise measurement, prediction and the formulation of strict laws; it is, rather, more akin to 'hermeneutical' insight. Unlike most of positivistic social science, Milgram's work has a direct, unmediated (by any external policy-making authority) emancipatory and enlightening potential both for his subjects and his readers. Milgram's work provided an opportunity for a powerful lesson in self-knowledge with respect to some fundamental features of 'human nature' and social organisation in the modern Western world. This work certainly does not provide any straightforward answers, but it does ask vitally important questions about what ordinary, civilised, 'kindly citizens' (in Harré's words) are capable of doing to one another (see Bauman 1991: ch. 6). And in this century of mass-cruelty and genocide, uncomfortable though these questions may be, they have to be posed if we are to justify a claim to even a semblance of civility.[22] I shall return to this theme in the concluding chapter.

In the remainder of this chapter I will focus on Garfinkel and ethnomethodology, examining critically ethnomethodologists' self-conception of their theoretical practice, and paying particular attention to the use and meaning of 'reflexivity'.

VIII 'Reflexivity of the actor' versus 'reflexivity of accounts'

Central to Garfinkel's picture of social and psychological reality is the notion that 'the activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organised everyday affairs are identical with members' procedures for making those settings "account-able"' (Garfinkel 1984:1). This image of the identity between social order and 'members" methods for making the various features of social order knowable to one another exemplifies the ethnomethodological phenomenon of 'reflexivity'. The primary reality for ethnomethodology is conceived praxiologically, as members' 'accounting practices' (*ibid.:* 9), through which social life is structured. Garfinkel 'respecified' the concept of social structure so as to signify features of social life that are 'known' (often in a 'seen but unnoticed' manner) to all competent members. On this view, 'social structure' does not refer either to 'internalised need dispositions', or to an external transcendental order, the 'laws' and principles of operation of which can only be detected and revealed by professional social theorists.

In contrast to 'constructive' theorists' pictures of social order, Garfinkel insists that those features of reality which are alleged to be either hidden in individuals' heads, or transcendent of their actions, are in fact publicly displayed, observable aspects of the organisation of 'settings'. The organisation of settings '*consists* of members' methods for making evident that setting's' organisational features (*ibid.:* 34). Garfinkel's fundamental point is that the normative and integrative force which Durkheim and Parsons attribute to social structure works only through its 'accountability'. The normativity of social order entails that structural and organisational features of settings are 'detectable, countable, recordable, reportable, tell-a-story-aboutable, analysable–in short *accountable*' to members themselves (*ibid.:* 33). Not professional theorists, then (or rather, not in their capacity as professionals), but 'members of a society…make the social structures of everyday activities observable' (*ibid.:* 75). No epistemic distinction is made between lay and professional 'persons doing sociology' (*ibid.:* 2), nor 'lay or professional analysts of ordinary activities' (Garfinkel and Sacks 1986:162).

In contemporary social-theoretical discourses the notion of 'reflexivity', and the use of 'reflexive' as a prefix to various descriptions of action, often seems to carry a bewildering array of subtly shifting meanings. Some of this confusion may be due to a failure to distinguish two different forms of reflexivity at work in Garfinkel's classic text. One of these forms is what Garfinkel (1984:7) calls 'the essential reflexivity of accounts'. This is the claim that any account of an activity is 'reflexively' tied to the practices through which the activity is made accountably observable. In other words, Garfinkel is pointing to the fact that *professional theorists'* theoretical accounts of social phenomena–just like lay persons' commonsense understanding of their everyday social world–also presuppose 'background assumptions' and 'expectancies', and 'common knowledge' shared with their audience. Thus 'the reflexivity of the practices and attainments of sciences' is

inextricably tied to 'the organised activities of everyday life, which is an essential reflexivity' *(ibid.)*. The upshot of this 'essential reflexivity' is expressed in the principle of 'ethnomethodological indifference', meaning that *all* accounts of social phenomena–whether those of 'lay' or 'professional' sociologists–are treated as no more nor less than members' situated accounting work (Garfinkel and Sacks 1986:166). No special ontological or epistemological insight is credited to the accounts of professional theorists. This is summed up very well by Pollner (1991: 370), who argues that acknowledgement of this form of reflexivity 'enjoins the analyst to displace the discourse and practices that ground and constitute his/her endeavours in order to explore the very work of grounding and constituting'.

The second form of reflexivity is that which throughout this chapter I have called the ontological picture of the individual as 'reflexive', 'interpretive', 'knowledgeable' agent/actor ('the reflexivity of the actor', as Heritage [1984:31] puts it). According to this picture, individuals are always performing 'interpretive' and 'judgemental work' in order to make sense of their social environment; 'members to an organised arrangement are continually engaged in having to decide, recognise, persuade, or make evident the rational, *i.e.,* the coherent, or consistent, or chosen, or planful, or effective, or methodical, or knowledgeable character' of their activities (Garfinkel 1984:32). Although, as I observed in note 2, Garfinkel does not explicitly use the phrase 'reflexive actor', the effect of this picture can perhaps be seen most clearly in his (*ibid.:* 116–85) celebrated study of Agnes, an 'inter-sexed person'.

Agnes was born a male, but in late adolescence developed feminine breasts–in addition to having a 'fully developed penis and scrotum'; and exhibited 'a very female shape' (*ibid.:* 119). Agnes wanted to be accepted as the female that she believed herself naturally and inherently to be; she therefore had to *learn* how to present and conduct herself in an authentic feminine manner. According to Garfinkel (*ibid.:* 180), 'Agnes' practices' make 'observable *that* and *how* normal sexuality is accomplished'. Agnes can serve, therefore, as a kind of 'natural experiment', revealing the means by which individuals' 'sexual status' –which for most people is just a 'seen but unnoticed', 'taken for granted' natural fact–is produced (*ibid.:* 118). Garfinkel seeks to show that sexuality is not just a 'natural fact', but a status that is actively produced and managed, and 'omnirelevan[t]' to the routine 'affairs of daily life' *(ibid.)*. Garfinkel does not say that sexual status is *not* a 'natural fact'; his aim is to show how this particular natural fact is produced and sustained.

Garfinkel provides a detailed and fascinating account of Agnes's use of methods, strategies and rules for presenting herself as a 'normal', 'natural' female. However, whilst I believe that Garfinkel provides an illuminating perspective on the world of the transsexual, I do not accept that his study of Agnes shows 'how normals make sexuality happen' (*ibid.:* 180). Garfinkel's analysis suggests that Agnes's and 'normals" sexual self-presentation are identical in appearance, and are produced through the same rules, methods, procedures and 'judgemental'/ 'interpretive work'. The only difference between Agnes and the 'normal' is that

Agnes does all this in a consciously 'reflexive' mode, whereas 'normals' do it 'reflexively', but without being *consciously* aware that they are doing it. 'Normals' are immersed in the practical work of producing their sexual identity, in an entirely 'routine', 'seen but unnoticed' manner.

I agree that Agnes is perspicuously described as a 'practical methodologist' *(ibid.)* and, I might add, as a truly 'reflexive actor', who had to make her sexuality happen. But there are important differences between Agnes and 'normals', and in order to see this I appeal once more to Wittgenstein's distinction between 'following a rule' and 'acting in accordance with a rule' (see chapter 4, section VII).

Agnes's actions and self-presentations were indeed produced 'reflexively', by her *following* rules (and frequently having to actively 'discover', and formulate for herself, what rules she should follow). As a 'practical methodologist' Agnes was continuously engaged in 'judgemental' and 'interpretive work', and in what Giddens (1984:3) calls 'the reflexive monitoring of action'. But it is precisely this, I aver, which distinguishes her from 'normals', whose presentation of sexuality can be described as being *in accordance* with Agnes's rules and methods. Unlike Agnes, though, 'normals' do not (and do not need to) *follow* such rules, nor continuously engage in 'interpretive work', in order to produce and manage their sexuality. Nor do they learn how to present and manage their sexuality—as Agnes did—through explicitly learning the 'rules of the game'. That is to say, in most cases the 'rules' of sexuality—which for Agnes were 'learned only over the course of the actual interaction, as a function of actual participation' (*ibid.:* 146) —are rules which come into existence with Agnes's formulation: they are not known or experienced *as* 'rules' by 'normals'. If questioned about aspects of sexual self-presentation the 'normal' is likely only to be able to say 'this is what I/we do' – whereas Agnes could provide an answer expressed in terms of 'rules' of conduct. These differences are made evident in Garfinkel's account of Agnes's extreme regret at needing to be such an accomplished 'practical methodologist'. Garfinkel reports that despite great efforts, she was unable to 'routinise her daily activities' (*ibid.:* 183).

Although Garfinkel does draw attention to the exceptional 'reflexivity' of Agnes, he nevertheless goes on to extrapolate from the case of Agnes to sexuality in general: 'members' practices alone produce the observable-tellable normal sexuality of persons' (*ibid.:* 181). According to this picture, 'the normally sexed person' is also, like Agnes, 'a contingent, practical accomplishment' *(ibid.)*.[23] But in what sense, exactly, is the sexual identity of 'normals' a 'contingent, practical accomplishment'? Firstly, the idea of 'accomplishment' suggests a goal towards which people strive, implying that sexual status is a desirable outcome which individuals struggle to master—in the way that one may seek to become a competent tennis player, an accomplished actor, a master-builder, etc. (see also chapter 4, section VIII). Secondly, and correlatively, the qualification of 'accomplishment' with 'contingent' suggests that at each and every point in time one's level of accomplishment might suddenly be subverted: one must constantly be on guard

against having one's hard-earned accomplishment discredited (as was clearly the case for Agnes). But surely, for most people, most of the time, their sexual status is neither something they strive towards, nor something 'contingent' which could at any time be radically undermined–in the way that, for example, an actor's claim to professional competence is always a 'contingent accomplishment'. The notion of sexuality as a 'contingent accomplishment' implies that achieving this status is a challenging goal, one which is *difficult* to carry off, something at which one is in serious danger of *failing*. This is obviously the case for Agnes, but not for 'normals'.

Continuing now with my discussion of the two types of reflexivity depicted by Garfinkel, it should be evident that these two forms are not compatible. Whereas the 'reflexivity of accounts' refers to a contextual embeddedness which no account can escape, the ontological picture of the individual as 'reflexive actor' is a universal generalisation regarding the essential nature of individuals as such. Hence this 'ontological picture' is neither 'reflexive' nor 'indexical'. It is readily assimilable into the theoretical systems of critical social theorists (see section II above). And it is not only 'constructive' social theorists who express Garfinkel's 'findings' in an 'ontological' idiom; many ethnomethodologists do so too (for example Heritage [1984]; even Pollner, who champions 'the essential reflexivity of accounts', espouses an ontological picture of the 'nature of the social actor and social action' [Pollner 1991:372]). But the ontological picture of individuals' inherent reflexivity clearly contradicts the principle of 'the essential reflexivity of accounts', in that the latter categorically renounces ontological, universalist and ('constructive') theoretical practice–'ethnomethodology is referentially reflexive to the extent it appreciates its own analyses as constitutive and endogenous accomplishments' *(ibid.)*. Although both forms of reflexivity are present in the 'classical' phase of ethnomethodology, most subsequent social theorists, and many ethnomethodologists (see Czyzewski 1994), concentrate solely on the 'reflexivity of the actor', thereby neglecting the 'reflexivity of [their own] accounts'.

Ethnomethodologists, Garfinkel included, often do not practise what they preach when their own reflexivity is, or ought to be, in question. The central 'reflexive' problem that I want to pose for ethnomethodology is this: what is the basis for, and status of, the objection to portraying individuals as cultural, judgemental or psychological dopes? This objection is not just a policy recommendation about how to conduct empirical studies; its main function is to negate the image of individuals, social action and social structure promulgated by classical social theory. The picture of individuals as knowledgeable, interpretive, reflexive actors is presented as the *central finding* of Garfinkel's enquiries. Speaking retrospectively, Garfinkel (1991:17) remarks that 'these phenomena were not suspected until the studies established their existence [and] provided the methods to study them'. Garfinkel's (*ibid.*: 10) 'respecification' of social structure as the 'local production and natural, reflexive accountability of the phenomenon of order' looks very much like a 'constructive' theoretical representation to my eyes–which is exactly how ethnomethodology has been received by post-empiricist

critical social theorists such as Harré, Giddens, Habermas and many others. I do not think, as some indignant ethnomethodologists have implied (Button and Sharrock 1991: 138), that critical social theorists have entirely misinterpreted Garfinkel and ethnomethodology on this. It is difficult not to read Garfinkel as offering a *more accurate* account of the real nature of 'social order' and 'the individual' than the ones provided by classical social theorists.

Lynch (1992b:285) claims that Garfinkel's celebrated remarks on the 'cultural dope' are misconstrued if understood to be stating that '"the human agent" is active rather than passive'. In fact, says Lynch *(ibid.),* Garfinkel is *asking a question,* namely: '"how is an investigator *doing* it when he is making out the member of society to be a judgemental dope?"'. Taking Lynch at his word, it is appropriate therefore, in the interest of 'reflexivity', to turn this question round and ask: how is Garfinkel (and other ethnomethodologists) *doing* it when he makes out the member of society to be a knowledgeable, interpretive, reflexive actor? How does he make accountable, what 'interpretive work', assumed knowledge, background assumptions and expectancies, is he utilising in order to present individuals as knowledgeable, reflexive actors? To what end, and for what purposes, are individuals portrayed in this way? Why has no ethnomethodologist pursued this line of enquiry? The reason for this absence, it seems to me, is that despite disclaimers to the contrary, ethnomethodologists invariably *do* hold and commend, 'unofficially', what Lynch *(ibid.)* (deprecatingly) calls a 'general theory of social action'.[24]

If it were the case that Garfinkel's *Studies in Ethnomethodology* did not claim that individuals are essentially active, reflexive agents, but merely provide some examples of practical action in which, in some respects, from a certain point of view, at a given time and place, some individuals are seen to act in a 'knowledgeable', 'reflexive', 'interpretive' manner–if only this were being claimed, then Lynch's objection would be justified. Moreover, if this were the case–that is, if ethnomethodologists really held no *a priori* conception of 'the agent'–then their approach would be quite compatible with acknowledging that in *some* cases (at least) people do behave as cultural and judgemental dopes–as in the kinds of situation contrived by Milgram, for instance.

However, it is evident that Garfinkel's references to 'members' and members' 'accounting practices' are not restricted to certain kinds of situation. The theoretical tone is set on the very first page of *Studies in Ethnomethodology,* where the 'central recommendation' is that 'the activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organised everyday affairs are identical with members' procedures for making these settings "account-able"', and that these 'practices consist of an endless, ongoing, contingent accomplishment' (Garfinkel 1984:1). Whenever Garfinkel mentions his key concepts of 'members', 'accountability', 'local production of order', 'practical accomplishment' 'interpretive work', etc., there is no limitation of scope, nor examples of phenomena which do not fit the typifications. In a word, Garfinkel does not respect his own principle of 'the essential reflexivity of accounts'.

Despite their claims to the contrary, it is clear that ethnomethodologists do not 'deconstruct' the so-called 'problem of order', nor do they abstain from the quest for a 'general theory of social action'. Rather than deconstructing the problematic, Button and Sharrock (1991–original emphasis) 'respecify' it so as to 'treat the solution to "the problem of order" as completely *internal to those sites*'. Although the ethnomethodological picture of social order is quite different to the one depicted by classical social theorists, it nevertheless amounts to what Kripke (1982:66) calls a '"straight" solution' to a sceptical question, in that the basic terms of that question are accepted. From the beginning, Garfinkel set for ethnomethodology the (Kantian) task of addressing sociologically the 'general question of how any…common sense world is possible' –that is, 'the possibility of the everyday world' (Garfinkel 1984:36). And ethnomethodology remains wedded to a social-theoretical problematic which is preoccupied with accounting for the basic nature of individual action and social order.

I remarked in the introduction to this chapter that it has often been observed that ethnomethodology embraces a theoretical and methodological position very close to that of Wittgenstein. One of Garfinkel's principal aims was to escape from the metaphysics and transcendentalism of classical social theory. Because Wittgenstein's 'reflexive' critique of his own Tractarian philosophy was similarly motivated, I will end this chapter with a brief examination of his 'reflexive' practice in comparison to Garfinkel's.

IX Wittgenstein's reflexivity

In the *Tractatus,* Wittgenstein struggles to say 'how things are' in the world. He thinks that the doctrine of solipsism contains an important truth, but 'what the solipsist *means* is quite correct; only it cannot be *said*' (Wittgenstein 1988:5.62). Nevertheless, Wittgenstein (*ibid.:* 5.64) goes on to try to indicate what it is about solipsism that is so ineffably profound: 'solipsism, when its implications are followed out strictly, coincides with pure realism. The self of solipsism shrinks to a point without extension, and there remains the reality coordinated with it.' Returning to the topic later, in the *Blue Book,* Wittgenstein (1972:59, 60) defines solipsism in much the same way as before–the solipsist is someone 'who says only his own experiences are real', and '"only I really see (or hear)"'. But Wittgenstein no longer thinks that this expresses a profound truth about 'how things are', whether sayable or only showable. The significance of solipsism for Wittgenstein now is seen to reside in the idiosyncrasy which makes anyone (a philosopher) want to say such a thing.

Wittgenstein (*ibid.:* 57) now points out that the solipsist has introduced a new 'notation', a new 'form of expression'. This is not objectionable in itself, so long as the speaker/writer indicates how the new notation is to be used, and how it connects with the old way of speaking and writing. For example, how is the distinction between real/false, simulated/natural, etc. to operate given that these tasks are managed perfectly well in the old notation? Wittgenstein (*ibid.:* 59) says

'why shouldn't we grant him this notation?' –but immediately adds, 'in order to avoid confusion he had in this case better not use the word "real" as opposed to "simulated" at all, which just means that we shall have to provide for the distinction "real"/"simulated" in some other way'.

Wittgenstein's new approach is very similar to the ethnomethodological policy of treating social theorists' (but not, as we have seen, ethnomethodologists' own) categories and concepts 'reflexively'; that is, Wittgenstein now treats solipsism as the product of certain kinds of 'interpretive' and 'judgemental work', which presupposes certain 'background expectancies'. His aim is to bring to light the interpretive work, assumptions and expectations through which the solipsist constructs her ontological claims. Wittgenstein no longer thinks that the solipsist has any special insight into 'how things are' but, rather, is engaged in a peculiar, esoteric conceptual and linguistic practice (the construction of a new 'notation') –and moreover a practice which has a deeply problematic relation with other central and well-established linguistic and conceptual practices.

Like the solipsist, Garfinkel's statements are presented as (and understood to be) a new discovery about the true nature of individual and social reality: 'ethnomethodological studies contribute to [a] deeper understanding of the nature and role of rules, rationality, and agency in social life' (Pollner 1991:371). But on Wittgenstein's (1972:57) later view, theoretical generalisations, including those formulated by Garfinkel, are above all symptomatic of the desire for 'a new notation'. The exceptionless generality of Garfinkel's use of his key terms–the practical accomplishment of order is 'everywhere, always, only, exactly and entirely, members' work' (Garfinkel 1991:11) –exemplifies what Wittgenstein regards as a 'metaphysical' use of language. Another of Wittgenstein's examples of a metaphysical proposition is the empiricist's claim that '"a man's sense data are private to himself"' (Wittgenstein 1972:55). Garfinkel's assertions on 'background expectancies', 'practical accomplishment', 'interpretative' and 'judgemental work', etc., actually embody the same grammatical form as the empiricist's claim (in that they are exceptionless, general statements on 'how things are'), and are therefore, on Wittgenstein's view, *metaphysical* propositions. Rather than referring to an enquiry-independent reality, metaphysical propositions, for Wittgenstein, express certain attitudes and dispositions of the writer or speaker (see the comments on emotivism in chapter 4, section IX). Thus 'we may be irresistibly attracted or repelled by a notation' (*ibid.:* 57), and this is evident in ethnomethodologists' distaste for 'notations' in which individuals are represented as cultural and judgemental 'dopes'.

Garfinkel's insistence that all aspects of social order are 'everywhere, always'[25] members' skilful and reflexive accomplishments, looks like an empirical proposition, but it is being used in the same *a priori* way as the empiricist's proposition regarding the essential privacy of sense data. Garfinkel, and other ethnomethodologists, 'are going to apply this picture come what may' (Wittgenstein 1976:411). As Wittgenstein says, there is nothing *per se* wrong with idiosyncratic notations. However, such notations are rarely just an eccentric way

of talking or writing; the user of a 'metaphysical' notation is invariably tempted into making exaggerated claims, and distorting reality by making it fit into *a priori* categories. Thus ethnomethodologists are prone to projecting skilful, reflexive interpretation onto situations where no such thing is going on. Like psychoanalysts who claim to have discovered the previously unknown phenomenon of 'unconscious thought' (Wittgenstein 1972:57), ethnomethodologists conflate their own creation of a new mode of representing human action and social order with psychological and social reality *as such*.

X Conclusion

Although I have not argued the case positively here, I believe that the most useful service that ethnomethodology can provide is the deconstruction of ontological pictures, not the provision of new, 'improved' ones. My argument has been directed at the ontological picture of the 'knowledgeable', 'reflexive', 'interpretive' agent/actor that ethnomethodology has bequeathed (even if unwittingly) to contemporary social and political theory. Yet the construction of ontological pictures is a practice quite incompatible with ethnomethodology's principle of the 'essential reflexivity of accounts'. The originally stated purpose of this principle is to engender critical reflection on the theoretical construction and maintenance of ontological pictures ('"models of man"' [Garfinkel 1984:68]) –and this should be taken to include, I aver, ethnomethodology's own favourite picture.

I reiterate that my point has not been to argue, in opposition both to ethnomethodology and critical social theory, that individuals are, really, inherently and essentially 'cultural' and 'judgemental dopes'. My point is, rather, that *both* contrasting ontological pictures–the individual as 'reflexive actor/agent', or as 'cultural dope'–are equally objectionable from the Wittgensteinian point of view that I advocate. Hence, in my view, we should look and see at which times, in which places, doing which kind of activities, which kind of people (etc.) are behaving 'reflexively', 'dopily', or some combination thereof.

Ethnomethodology, like Winch's 'Idea of a social science' (see chapter 3), remains locked into the very same social-theoretical problematic that it claims to reject. Despite their emphasis on relativity, localism, contingency, agency and interpretation, the pictures of individual action and social order constructed by both Winch and ethnomethodologists are nevertheless issued as true representations of 'the way things really are'. But ethnomethodology has a further shortcoming. The kind of social theory and social science which serves as a critical foil for ethnomethodology is old-style deterministic Parsonian and Durkheimian 'grand theory', and survey-research-based 'abstract empiricism'. But however successful their original critique of this kind of work, the critique no longer suffices for contemporary critical social theorists–for the simple reason that the latter have endeavoured to incorporate the central lessons of ethnomethodology (and Winch) into their own theoretical programmes. 'Constructive' social theory, in the shape of critical social theory, nowadays also

insists upon agency, interpretation, reflexivity, knowledgeability and the 'skilful, local, production of social order'. The 'dopes' of social theory today are no longer structural and cultural 'puppets'–they are 'active', 'creative', 'knowledgeable', 'reflexive' dopes. I say 'dopes' because the 'actors/agents' in contemporary social theory–as I have argued in preceding chapters–are just as much a theoretical abstraction as their classical ancestors.

Contemporary ethnomethodology sustains its picture of the individual and social order against a straw-person deterministic social theory. For example, Lynch (1993: 30–1) describes the critical social theory of Habermas and Giddens as arising out of 'the tradition(s) of historical materialism'; and their theoretical systems are said to be an amalgamation of 'existential philosophy', 'critical theory', 'Marxist hermeneutics' and 'left-structuralism'. But whilst it is true to say that part of Habermas's critical social theory evolved out of Marxism and critical theory (see chapter 8), this does not really apply to Giddens. Giddens, on the contrary, has been most strongly influenced by Weber, ethnomethodology, Goffman, Wittgenstein and post-Freudian ego-psychology. And Habermas too, particularly since his turn to 'communicative action' and 'discourse ethics', is quite remote from the 'grand narratives' of Marxism and structuralism (of which he was always suspicious). Like Giddens, Habermas has also been strongly influenced by Wittgensteinian philosophy and ethnomethodological sociology. Lynch (1993:31) is, therefore, a long way off the mark when he says that Giddens's and Habermas's main objection to ethnomethodology is that it 'disavows structural determinism'. On the contrary, Giddens and Habermas advocate much the same picture of the individual and social order–and indeed, as we shall see in picture of social order, why should we not accept the ones presented by Giddens chapter 8, of social critique–as ethnomethodology. But if we are to accept *any* or Habermas, for they incorporate all that is in the ethnomethodological picture?

In the preceding chapters I have sought to subvert the view that portraying individuals as 'reflexive agents/actors' is *ipso facto* a critical intervention in social and political affairs. Equally, in this chapter, I have argued against the converse of this position, namely the charge that any portrayal of individuals behaving 'non-reflexively' *ipso facto* entails conservative reactionism. I will continue this line of criticism in the next chapter, where I examine Habermas's contention that all individuals are 'always already', inherently 'critical theorists' simply in virtue of being normally socialised, competent speaking and acting subjects.

8

HABERMAS AND THE IDEA OF A CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

A change of paradigm?

> According to the presupposition of the communicative model of action, the agent possesses just as rich an interpretive competence as the [social-scientific] observer himself.
>
> (Habermas 1991:118)

I Introduction

My task in this chapter is to investigate what, precisely, the adjective 'critical' signifies in critical social theory. My orientation in this investigation is, unsurprisingly, Wittgensteinian–in that my strategy will be to examine the *use* ('grammar') which critical social theorists *themselves* make of the term 'critical' in their theoretical discourses. I do not seek to replace their critical theory with any supposedly superior theory of critical activity; nor do I claim that social and political criticism is an 'illegitimate' theoretical activity. On the contrary, I do not think there is any particular difficulty with the notion of critique–problems arise when theorists seek to ground their 'critical theory' in the 'facts' of individual and social 'ontology'. Indeed, in comparison to our ordinary understanding of criticism, critical social theorists' use of the notion looks extremely odd, and actually seems to turn it into its opposite, into 'a-critical theory' (a kind of Hegelian 'dialectical reversal').

The focus in this chapter is primarily upon Habermas. I begin with an examination of the 'grammar' –origins and use–of the notion of critique in Frankfurt School, first generation Critical Theory. This will facilitate a clear view of Habermas's 'communicative' reformulation of the latter. It will be seen that Habermas's conception of critique, and the meaning of 'critical' in his critical social theory, is virtually indistinguishable from the stance of ethnomethodology. There is, however, an important difference between them: ethnomethodology explicitly presents its position as being rigorously *a-critical,* whereas Habermas, on the contrary, claims to have captured the essence of what *critical* theory is, and can only be. In the course of this chapter I shall also confirm that Habermas's 'ontological picture' of the individual

as a rule-following, 'reflexive', knowledgeable agent is essentially the same, and has the same source as, that espoused by Giddens and Bhaskar.

The reformulated 'critical theory' of Habermas is now prosecuted entirely through *social theory*–that is, theoretical representation ('rational reconstruction' as Habermas calls it) of the supposedly universal and transcendental conditions of individual subjectivity, action and social order. Although Habermas claims that critical theory must be done *through* social theory, I will argue that in practice he *replaces* critical theory with social theory. Critical theory is now entirely *contentless*. The solution that Habermas offers to (what he sees as) the problem of how to ground social and political critique is quite a neat one. In essence he claims that *everyone* is 'always already' a 'critical theorist', simply in virtue of being a socialised, speaking and acting subject. This looks to me like a return to the Young Hegelian critique of alienated reason–only now the enemy is not distorted individual reason, but false and distorted *portrayals* of individual and social life by positivist, hermeneuticist, post-modernist, etc. philosophers and social theorists.

The notion of critique in Frankfurt School Critical Theory initially stood for the recommendation of a Kantian picture of the individual subject as an active, rational, agent, and an 'ideology-critique' of positivism–before Theodor Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's declension into deep anthropological pessimism. After outlining the development of Adorno's and Horkheimer's Critical Theory, I move on to Habermas's 'critical social theory', noting the differences and similarities between first and second generation 'critical theory'. The most significant and profound change, according to Habermas, is the shift from what he (1991:386) calls 'the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness' shaping first generation Critical Theory, to his 'new' 'paradigm of communicative action'–a paradigm which is characteristic of critical social theory. Habermas's 'theory of communicative action' (TCA) and his theory of 'discourse ethics' are central to the 'new' paradigm, and I shall concentrate my critical attention on them.

Although the term 'critical' is frequently used in contemporary social-theoretical discourse, very little attention has been given to the question of *how* exactly, and in virtue of *what,* critical theory is supposed to achieve its much-vaunted criticality. So much is this the case that it is surprisingly difficult to say just what it is that is supposed to be critical about critical social theory. In the case of Marxism, or political libertarianism, or Burkean conservatism, for example, it is reasonably clear what is being criticised and what advocated. To put the issue starkly, the question: what is critical about critical social theory? can only be given a *long,* not a *short,* answer–to the extent that it can be answered at all, that is. In order to see how critical social theory attempts to redeem its claim to criticality one really needs some knowledge of the tradition from which it emerges.

II Frankfurt School Critical Theory

According to Geuss (1981:1), Critical Theorists argued that Marx's work is neither natural science nor speculative philosophy, nor is it 'an empirical economics

fortuitously conjoined with a set of value judgements and moral commitments'. Rather, it is supposed to be 'a radically new kind of theory' *(ibid.)*. In calling their theory 'critical', Frankfurt School theorists clearly aligned themselves with the Idealist tradition in German philosophy: 'critical theory is the heir…of German Idealism' (Horkheimer 1972:245). Although critical of Idealist metaphysics, and prioritising 'materialism' as the correct mode of social analysis, Critical Theorists nevertheless sided with the Idealist view of the individual as an active, autonomous knowing-subject–in opposition to the picture of individuals as passive puppets, portrayed by deterministic forms of Marxism and positivist social science. This is the crux of Critical Theory, and it is an orientation which derives from Kant's 'critical philosophy'. So although Critical Theory drew upon Marxism substantively, it is not just another form of Marxism, but a continuation of, or return to, Kantian philosophy.[1]

Whereas Kant's critique took the categorial structure of 'reason' as its object, Critical Theory was concerned with 'the categories which rule social life' (*ibid.:* 208). However, although Critical Theorists were committed to a Marxist 'dialectical critique of political economy' (*ibid.:* 206n), the most distinctive feature of Critical Theory, in comparison to Marxism, was its 'reflexive' concern with the nature of theory and the human subject: 'what is needed is a radical reconsideration, not of the scientist alone, but of the knowing individual as such' (*ibid.:* 199). This represented a return to Kantian Idealist philosophy–the merits of which Marx (Marx and Engels 1974:121) acknowledged in his *Theses on Feuerbach* for its emphasis on 'the *active* side' of human experience (albeit 'developed abstractly'). The adjective 'critical' in Critical Theory, then, denoted an attempt to combine Marxist social science with a Kantian-inspired philosophy of the human subject. Thus, according to Habermas (1991:386), Critical Theory, despite its appearance of radicalism, continued to operate within the traditional CartesianKantian 'paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness'.

The scientism, objectivism and determinism that beset classical Marxism was diagnosed by Horkheimer as a product of the baneful influence of 'traditional', 'objectifying' theory–to which he counterpoised the new Critical Theory. In his seminal article 'Traditional and Critical Theory', Horkheimer (1972:204) accepted that traditional theory is a perfectly legitimate and progressive enterprise so long as it remains in its proper domain, namely that of the technological, theoretical and applied natural sciences. However, Horkheimer maintained that traditional theory has seriously pernicious effects on philosophy and the social sciences, where it becomes empiricist and positivist ideology. For Critical Theorists, empiricism and positivism are not just an erroneous epistemology and methodology but, much more seriously, the dominant ideology of the mature bourgeois age. Masquerading as an objective, value-neutral, scientific description of 'social facts', positivist social science, in the view of Adorno, actively '*supports what exists* in the over-zealous attempt to say what exists' and is, therefore, 'ideology in the strict sense' (Adorno *et al.* 1976:296). Positivist social science and empiricist philosophy were seen to be un-critical in virtue of subordinating reason to the

authority of given facts and states of affairs. In the *Weltanschauung* of the positivist 'there are always only series of phenomena, never forces and counterforces' (Horkheimer 1972:229).[2]

Critical Theory depicts individuals as naturally autonomous, reasoning, wilful agents: 'activity governed by reason is proper to man' (*ibid.:* 210). Following from this, the relation between subject and object is seen to be qualitatively different to that which 'traditional theory' presupposes. With traditional theory there is an ontological gap between theory and its object–the object 'is not affected at all' by any theory about it, and 'the observer as such can effect no change in the object' (*ibid.:* 229). Critical Theory, by contrast, relates quite differently to its 'object' (i.e. human subjects): 'a consciously critical attitude…is part of the development of society' *(ibid.)*. Thus Critical Theory presents itself as endogenous to the social order about which it theorises; it seeks to be 'a force within [the concrete historical situation] to stimulate change' (*ibid.:* 215). Whereas classical Marxism attempted only to expose the true nature of the objective social and historical situation, and to identify the 'economic law of motion of modern society'–to 'shorten and lessen the birth-pangs' of transition (Marx 1967:10)–Critical Theorists wanted to enter into the situation itself, so as to be 'a critical promotive factor in the development of the masses' (Horkheimer 1972:214).[3]

Although Critical Theorists combined their philosophical views with a Marxist critique of political economy, it is in respect of the former rather than the latter that Critical Theory claimed its distinctive criticality. As Bubner (1975: 345) says, 'no criticist ever was occupied with writing the critique of political economy of the present time. There are no theories in Marx's sense.'[4] The criticality of Critical Theory consists solely of *meta-critique,* in that its object is the 'ontology' of the individual subject and social order, the relation between theory and human subjects and, above all, a critique of 'traditional', positivist theory and its 'instrumental reason'.

Marx's ideology-critique of capitalism focused on substantive political economy. The reification of social relations into 'things' (values and market forces), which results from the 'fetishism of commodities', is the mature form of Marx's critique of self-alienation in capitalist society. In their later years of increasing pessimism, Adorno and Horkheimer went on to develop a theory of reification and domination which totally radicalised both Marx's critique of political economy and their own earlier critique of positivism. Their later notion of 'instrumental reason' went way beyond the historically specific conditions of industrial production, and was seen to be built into the very structure of human subjectivity as such. Adorno and Horkheimer now see 'instrumental reason' as inherent in 'the anthropological foundations of the history of the species' (Habermas 1991:379). Thus domination by the (historically specific) commodity form and exploitative relations of production in Marx's critique, becomes domination by reason itself–a much more pervasive and universal mode of self-alienation. The critique of ideology and alienation is thereby detached 'from the dimension of interhuman relations altogether' *(ibid.)*. For Habermas, this amounts to a complete abandonment of

reason and, *a fortiori,* surrendering the idea of a critical theory. Habermas's (1991:366) diagnosis of the cause of this loss of faith in reason is that it is 'merely the consequence of an approach that remains rooted in [the paradigm of] the philosophy of consciousness'.

III Habermas's reformulation of critical theory

> The programme of early critical theory foundered not on this or that contingent circumstance, but from the exhaustion of the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness.
>
> (Habermas 1991:386)

Although Habermas wants to advance a critical theory for modernity which improves upon Marx's critique of political economy (which Habermas [1987: 295–6] alleges is also stuck in 'the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness'), he regards the Critical Theorists' concept of instrumental reason as an Idealist regression. What is required, he insists, is a shift of paradigm–to 'the paradigm of communicative action'. Only by this means, Habermas (1991:386) argues, is it 'possible to return to the undertaking that was *interrupted* with the critique of instrumental reason'. In a manner strongly redolent of Garfinkel's critique of the 'cultural' and 'judgemental dope' in social theory/science (see chapter 7), Habermas (1989:391) claims that, in contrast to 'Marxist functionalism' and Frankfurt School Critical Theory, 'the theory of communicative action conceives of the lifeworld as a sphere in which processes of reification do not appear as mere reflexes'. That is to say, despite their earlier commitment to a Kantian view of the individual as an active, autonomous, rational agent, Critical Theorists ended up promulgating a picture of the individual in which the individual is equally as passive and determined (by its own nature)–if not more so–than individuals in any picture portrayed by Marxist or positivist social science.

The central problem for critical theory, according to Habermas (1974:238), is how to justify 'critique as such'; how to 'justify those elements which critique owes to its philosophical origins'–in a non-foundationalist way. The problem is most acute given the widespread scepticism in twentieth-century intellectual culture, which has cast doubt on epistemic certainty, the teleology of historical 'grand narratives', and prescriptive political utopias. In his later work, Habermas emphasises time and again that the most important lesson to be drawn from postempiricist philosophy of science is the unavoidably fallible status of all knowledge-claims.[5] The main implication of this lesson, for Habermas, is that the critical theorist must give up the quest for a *substantive* critique of social and political life.

The change of paradigm proposed by Habermas consists in a shift away from 'the philosophy of consciousness' to the intersubjective rules of communicative action–the 'generative rules according to which the speaking and acting

subjects…produce the social context of life' (Habermas 1991:107–8). This Wittgenstein-inspired turn[6] is grounded in the notion of a 'symbolically structured lifeworld that is constituted in the interpretive accomplishments of its members…and reproduced through communication' (ibid.*: 398*). But in spite of this supposed change of paradigm, Habermas, as I elaborate below, continues to place the (transcendental) powers and capacities of individuals at the centre of his critical social theory.

I noted above that (early) first generation Critical Theory relied upon an unreconstructed Marxist political economy for its substantive social critique. Habermas's critical social theory, in sharp contrast, renounces the validity of substantive critique, and concentrates instead on the construction of a comprehensive explanatory theory of individual knowledge and competence, intersubjective rules, and social reproduction (a theory which bears strong 'family resemblances' to those of Giddens and Bhaskar which I exposited and criticised in earlier chapters). The positivism against which the (later) Frankfurt School railed was seen by them to be intrinsic to modern scientific practice, and 'instrumental reason' was seen as intrinsic to human subjectivity as such. But the positivism and instrumental reason against which Habermas takes up arms is confined to other theorists' theoretical *representations* of individuals and social organisation: 'the pathology of modern consciousness calls for an explanation in terms of *social theory*' (Habermas 1990:45). By 'pathology of modern consciousness', Habermas means the alleged failure of other social theorists and philosophers to see that reason is embedded in speech and action, not individual subjectivity. The shift in normative content from Critical Theory to critical social theory is perfectly epitomised by Giddens's (1982a:16) statement that 'to regard social agents as "knowledgeable" and "capable" is not just a matter of the analysis of action; it is also an implicitly political stance'. Habermas's model of social order, like those of Giddens and Bhaskar, portrays the 'skilful production' of social life *per se* as a normative virtue in itself. Whereas Marx and the (early) Frankfurt School located normativity in the struggle towards a *new* form of society, Habermas and other critical social theorists locate it in the mere *production* of social life and the social system (see also chapter 4, section VIII).

One marked trend which characterises the development of Critical Theory, and intensifies with critical social theory, is an increasingly rapid movement away from first-order substantive social critique as the primary focus of analysis (exemplified by Marx), to second-order 'meta-critique'. Habermas is now even less involved in substantive social and political critique than the Critical Theorists (who added nothing of substance to Marxist political economy). Habermas's critical social theory is exclusively concerned with abstract, transcendental social structures and individual competences *per se,* rather than criticising currently existing social and political institutions. This, adapting Bubner's (1975:345) words to cover both generations of critical theory, can be seen as 'the late triumph of young Hegelians over the mature Marx'. The increasing contentlessness of the

historical development of critical theory can be encapsulated diagrammatically (Figure 1).

	Marx	*Frankfurt School*	*Critical social theory*
Substantive critique	Substantive critique of political economy	Critique of political economy (wholly derived from Marx)	None
Theory of individual/ social ontology	None – criticised the 'ontological picture' of the 'freely choosing agent' (see chapter 6, section VII)	'ontological picture' of the active agent, generating the idea of Critical Theory	Abstract, universalist ontology of the essential nature of the individual and social order *per se*

Figure 1 The shift from substantive critique to ontological theory

IV Communicative action and discourse ethics

> There is no form of sociocultural life that is not at least implicitly geared to maintaining communicative action by means of argument.
> (Habermas 1990:100)

i Communicative action

Habermas's TCA arises from his Wittgenstein-inspired linguistic and pragmatic turn in social theory–an alleged turn away from 'the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness'. The essence of the new theoretical perspective can be formulated in the following propositions: (1) 'the human species maintains itself through the socially coordinated activities of its members'; (2) 'this coordination has to be established through communication–and in certain central spheres through communication aimed at reaching agreement [*Verständigung*]'; (3) 'the reproduction of the species *also* requires satisfying the conditions of a rationality that is inherent in communicative action' (Habermas 1991:397). 'Communicative action' is one of four types of action identified by Habermas, but it is accorded ontological primacy over the others–it is 'the *original mode* of language use' (*ibid.:* 288).

The TCA proffers a novel solution to a problem which has plagued critical theory from Marx onwards, namely: how can a critical theory justify itself; how does it ground its own normative standpoint? For Marxism this problem arises out of its distinction between ideology and science. The classical Marxist assumes a privileged epistemic vantage point for her own theoretical position, whilst diagnosing social conditioning and class-serving interests for all other opposing

views–and thereby incurring the conundrum of self-referentiality. Habermas attempts to resolve this problem by locating critique and justification not with the theorist, but with 'every subject competent in speech and action' (Habermas 1990:89). Under the new paradigm of communicative action, it is no longer the prerogative of the 'expert' professional theorist to issue substantive normative proposals or engage in social and political critique. The normative ideal of a fully just and rational society can no longer be 'based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer' (Marx and Engels 1977:231). Rather, the ideals of justice, autonomy and rationality are now seen by Habermas to be immanent in the rule-governed structure of language, and the 'rule-consciousness' of individuals: 'reaching understanding is the inherent telos of human speech' (Habermas 1991:287). But these ideals are no longer understood to be substantive in any way; on the contrary, they are purely procedural (Habermas 1987:316).

By the light of the new paradigm, critique and justification are seen to be embedded 'immanently' and 'implicitly' in the everyday process of communicative action itself, through which individuals interact and coordinate their activities with one another. It is 'presupposed that those acting communicatively are *capable of mutual criticism*' (Habermas 1991:119). But communicative action requires, as a condition of its possibility, a shared 'taken-for-granted' background of tacit norms, assumptions and expectations. Each communicative act raises, but usually only 'implicitly' or 'tacitly', 'criticizable validity claims' with respect to its 'truth, rightness, appropriateness or comprehensibility' (*ibid.:* 38–9). Thus, as with Giddens's and Bhaskar's theoretical systems, the picture of individual tacit knowledge and cognitive powers lies at the heart of the new paradigm. In the normal course of everyday life, in the context of the taken-for-granted horizons of understanding in the 'lifeworld', validity claims are not raised consciously or explicitly in communicative acts; but they are raised explicitly when communications are disputed or action becomes problematic in some way. The only way of legitimately criticising or defending a validity claim is through offering reasons in support of, or to challenge, the validity of the act or communication in question, thereby entering into a process of *argumentation,* which is 'a reflective form of communicative action' (Habermas 1990:125).

Although Habermas 'democratises' critical theory by releasing it from the monopolised 'expertise' of the professional theorist, the latter retains the role of 'critical theorist' through her function of 'rationally reconstructing' the presuppositions and conditions of communicative action. This is where social theory comes in. Social theory (critical social theory) provides 'reconstructive' analyses of the practical, intuitive, tacit, knowledge possessed by individuals, the rule-governed structure of language, and the 'mechanisms' of social reproduction. This knowledge, and these rules and powers, are constitutive of the infrastructure of the 'lifeworld'. Reconstructive analysis is the process of translation whereby the critical social theorist renders individuals' 'implicit knowledge', and abstract

social structures and mechanisms, into explicit prepositional form, as in the TCA and discourse ethics.

Habermas solicitously tries to avoid the *aporia* of foundationalism and epistemic certainty, but he nevertheless arrogates to critical social theory the authority to formulate just what critical theory is—and can only be-in post-traditional modernity. Somewhat paradoxically, there is a definite tone of absolutism with which Habermas makes the case for a fallibilist (but nonetheless universalist and essentialist in its claims) 'post-metaphysical' reformulation of critical theory; he is adamant that there can be no other way. Whilst the *content* of 'ethical life' (i.e. substantive moral, political and practical issues) is gladly given over to individuals to work out for themselves, the *form* of critical theory (i.e. the TCA and discourse ethics) is tenaciously retained as a matter on which only the professional critical social theorist is competent.

This new version of critical theory is parallel in form to Garfinkel's (1984:2) proposal that no principled distinction should be made between 'persons doing sociology, lay and professional'.[8] Just as Garfinkel (1984:75) insists that professional social theorists have no more insight into social reality than 'lay' sociologists, so Habermas maintains that professional critical theorists have no special insight into 'the good', and that it must be left to individuals to work out their own goods: 'it is the actors themselves who seek consensus and measure it against truth, rightness, and sincerity' (Habermas 1991:100). Unlike the previous forms of critical theory, critical social theory 'no longer claims to know the telos of "the" good life' (Habermas 1993:127). Thus the essence of critical social theory consists in the demonstration that all subjects capable of speaking and acting are *ipso facto* 'always already' critical theorists themselves.

ii Discourse ethics

As a sequel to his TCA, Habermas has gone on to develop a programme called 'discourse ethics', which is a contribution to theories of justice and morality in political philosophy. Discourse ethics examines the mode of reflective argumentation arising out of communicative action where contentious validity claims concerning legal-moral-political issues in the 'intersubjective world' are explicitly raised. Discourse ethics has a close affinity with Rawls's theory of justice, but utilises a rather different mode of theoretical justification (Habermas 1990:198). Whereas Rawls's theory of justice operates within 'the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness', discourse ethics is grounded in 'the paradigm of communicative action', and offers 'a transcendental-pragmatic demonstration of universal and necessary presuppositions of argumentation' (*ibid.:* 116). Rawls and Habermas both prioritise Kant's universalisation imperative, but Habermas claims that it must be a '*"real"* process of argumentation in which the individuals concerned cooperate' (*ibid.:* 67). Habermas argues that the question of whether or not an act or principle can be willed to apply universally cannot be decided introspectively from the a-social (expert theorist's) 'original position'. Rather, universalisability

must be worked out *practically,* wherein 'all affected are admitted as participants' in argumentative discourse (*ibid.:* 66). Thus Habermas *(ibid.)* objects to Rawls's substantive principles of justice because they are 'the outcome of a "theory of justice", which he as an expert is qualified to construct'.

As a 'critical theory', the most radical feature of discourse ethics is its rigorous restriction of theoretical knowledge to the specification of a universal framework within which particular conceptions of the good may be advanced and defended –by individuals themselves, not expert professional theorists. This is, of course, the fundamental principle of modern liberal political theory, which Habermas (1993:181 n.58), following Rawls, expresses as 'the priority of the right over the good' (this will be discussed further in section VI below). Thus discourse ethics is fully consonant with the radical liberalist spirit of 'late' modernity:

> anyone who goes beyond procedural questions of a discourse theory of morality and ethics and, in a normative attitude…embarks on a theory of the well-ordered, or even emancipated, society will quickly run up against the limits of his own historical situation.
>
> *(ibid.)*

Nevertheless, Habermas (1990:114 n.81) claims that his programme of discourse ethics does provide 'guidance for an emancipatory practice'–'by becoming part of a critical social theory that can be used to interpret situations'.

Yet despite his criticism of Garfinkel (in particular, that Garfinkel treats 'validity claims' relativistically, as *'mere phenomena'* [Habermas 1991:128]), Habermas ends up with a view of social and political critique which is, rather surprisingly, virtually indistinguishable from the stance of ethnomethodology. The principles of 'ethnomethodological indifference' and the 'reflexivity of accounts' (see chapter 7, section VIII) yield a thoroughgoing scepticism regarding the epistemic and critical powers of professional social theorists. Thus, according to Button and Sharrock (1991:148):

> sociologists, as individuals, are as entitled as anyone else in society to make judgements of fact and value, but…their capacity to do this is entirely due to their *enfranchisement* as members of society, not derivative purely from their specific resources *as theorist.*

Although Habermas disagrees with ethnomethodologists on the explanatory power of social theory regarding the conditions of communicative action ('judgements of fact'), he is in complete agreement with their assessment of professional theorists' lack of authority on judgements of 'value'. Habermas argues that theorists who try to make 'material contributions to the theory of justice', or theorists 'engaged in drawing up normative blueprints for an emancipated society', can only do so 'from the perspective of a citizen participating in the political process' (Habermas 1993:176). The theory of discourse ethics, then, marks the last stage on critical

theory's increasingly rapid retreat from the substantive criticism of dominant social and political institutions, to a purely formal concern with the supposedly universal structural features of social systems and the transcendental conditions of individual action and agency *as such.*

V Critique of the TCA and discourse ethics

i A change of paradigm?

Failure to make the paradigm change from the philosophy of consciousness to communicative action is a major category of criticism for Habermas. The list of philosophers that Habermas criticises for failing to make this paradigm change includes such luminaries as Hegel, Marx, Heidegger, Adorno, Horkheimer, Derrida–and, of course, Descartes and Kant, who established the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness. However, I contend that, despite his vehement renunciation of the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness, Habermas has not escaped it either.

The TCA and discourse ethics is centred upon a 'reconstructive' analysis of individuals' 'intuitive rule consciousness' of 'the system of rules of [their] language' (Habermas 1979:12–13); the 'know-how of subjects who are capable of speech and action' (Habermas 1990:31). The aim of reconstructive analysis is to translate what is assumed to be the *implicit,* or *tacit* knowledge and knowhow, which individuals supposedly *must* utilise in order to speak and act intelligibly and rationally, into *explicit,* propositional, theoretical form. The mode of analysis is an updated (pragmatic) form of Kantian transcendental deduction; it 'focusses on general, indispensable, conceptual preconditions that make experience possible' (*ibid.:* 6). The form of analysis is transcendental, but the subject matter, in distinction from Kant's categories of subjectivity, purportedly concerns the 'intrinsically intersubjective' pragmatics of language use and rational action, rather than the epistemic 'privacy' of 'the solitary subject that confronts objects' in the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness (*ibid.:* 9).

But this 'new' paradigm, as I argued in chapter 4, is not really so new as Habermas claims–it remains essentially a *Kantian,* not Wittgensteinian paradigm. The 'new' paradigm is based upon the symbiotic concepts of 'implicit/tacit knowledge' possessed by individuals, and 'transcendental rules'–that is, the

> pretheoretical knowledge and the intuitive command of rule systems that underlie the production and evaluation of such symbolic expressions and achievements as correct inferences; good arguments; accurate descriptions, explanations, and predications; grammatically correct sentences; successful speech acts; effective instrumental action; appropriate evaluations; authentic self-presentations; etc.
>
> (*ibid.:* 31)

These rules are conceptualised as inherently social in nature, but the 'intuitive knowledge' of how to apply them is, allegedly, embedded deep in individual consciousness. It is all very well to claim that the rules underlying practices are 'intrinsically intersubjective' and social in nature, but the 'implicit knowledge' of how to apply them remains intrinsically *subjective* in the 'new' paradigm. Habermas, like Giddens and Bhaskar, continues to be beholden to individualistic, subject-centred pictures of the individual. The supposed paradigm change from the 'philosophy of consciousness' to that of 'communicative action' is merely the supersession of the old category of 'self-consciousness' with the new category of 'intuitive rule consciousness'. Thus the 'paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness' becomes the 'paradigm of the philosophy of *tacit* consciousness' – which in my view is not much of a paradigm change.

Despite the thoroughly Kantian pedigree of his 'new' paradigm, Habermas (1974:17) nevertheless believes that the TCA is present embryonically in Wittgenstein's philosophy: 'Wittgenstein has remarked that the concept of reaching an understanding lies in the concept of language'. But this is a complete inversion of one of Wittgenstein's fundamental points, thereby 'standing him on his head'. Wittgenstein actually says the opposite to what Habermas claims that he says. Wittgenstein does not say that 'the concept' of *reaching understanding* lies in the *concept* of language; he says that language rests upon the brute fact of agreement. However, 'that is not agreement in opinions but in form of life' (Wittgenstein 1968:§241). Agreement here does not mean Habermasian 'rationally motivated assent' (Habermas 1991:287), it means non-justified and non-justifiable practice; 'the language-game',[9] says Wittgenstein (1975:§559), 'is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there–like our life'. It seems that Habermas mistakes Wittgenstein's interlocutor's voice for Wittgenstein's own. The interlocutor *does* say something quite similar to Habermas, namely: '"you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?"' (Wittgenstein 1968:§241). Wittgenstein rejects this interpretation, and replies: 'it is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use' *(ibid.)*. In other words, linguistic action presupposes non-cognitive agreement, in 'form of life'–in what is *done*–in order to say things that can be judged true or false. Wittgenstein's point is that people agree in what they do with language, but it is absurd to think that they must somehow *reach* an agreement/understanding *before* they can mean anything. Such a view would entail an infinite regress of agreement/understanding on the meaning of words. The idea that the concept of 'reaching an understanding' lies immanently in the ontology of 'Language' is a rationalistic 'ontological picture'; Wittgenstein's view is that reaching understanding/agreement is only one of the multifarious linguistic practices (and a quite specialised one at that) in which human beings engage (this point is made very well in Tully's [1989] critique of Habermas's TCA).

In the light of the foregoing, it can be seen that, with respect to 'the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness', Habermas's critical social theory is essentially no different from Adorno's and Horkheimer's Critical Theory. The latter centred

their critique on a theoretical picture of the nature and powers of the individual as such, a picture which later emphasised the pathology of reason inherent in individual subjectivity. Their critique was directed at 'traditional theory' in general, and positivist theory in particular. Likewise, Habermas's critical social theory is also centred on a theoretical picture of the nature and powers of the individual (*qua* language-user) as such. Similarly, his critique is also directed at 'traditional theory' and positivism. In addition, he is also critical of more recent post-modern and relativist philosophy and social theory, all of which (including the Frankfurt School), in his view, have failed to escape the problematic of 'traditional theory'. Habermas's critical social theory restricts itself to criticising the errors, and appropriating the 'insights', of other philosophies and social theories. This aspect of critique was, of course, practised by Marx as well, in his critique of 'bourgeois' political economy (see note 1). But the latter theoreticians had rather more practical impact on social conditions than the purely academic theorists against which Habermas's critical social theory is directed.

Habermas has clearly retreated considerably from his earlier allegiance to Marxism; nevertheless, he still maintains that the 'theory of communicative action does follow the Marxian model. It is *critical* both of contemporary social sciences and of the social reality they are supposed to grasp' (Habermas 1989: 375–original emphasis). Yet his critical social theory does no more than criticise (what he sees as) other theorists' mistaken ontological pictures of the individual and social action as such. The 'achievement' of the TCA and discourse ethics is to claim to demonstrate that all individuals are 'always already' inherently critical theorists themselves, simply in virtue of their ability to use language communicatively. A corollary of this 'insight' into the nature of communicative action is that the *professional* critical theorist must refrain from presenting any substantive criticisms of social and political organisation. The Frankfurt School Critical Theorists, on the other hand, remained highly critical of modernity–even though they came to renounce the idea of a critical theory as just another symptom of 'instrumental reason' (Habermas 1991:382). The Frankfurt School continued to criticise social reality (albeit through their notion of a pathology intrinsic to individual reason), but gave up the idea of Critical Theory; Habermas, conversely, claims to have found a way of grounding critical theory, but in so doing has given up criticising social and political reality.

Habermas (1974:2) maintains that critical social theory

> understands that its claims to validity can be verified only in the successful process of enlightenment, and that means: in the practical discourse of those concerned. Critique renounces the contemplative claims of theories constructed in monologic form.

And he has complained that Wittgenstein's philosophy 'leaves the world as it is' (Habermas 1990:11). It is clear, then, that Habermas intends his TCA and discourse ethics not just as correct theoretical description ('reconstruction') but,

more importantly, as an impetus to help bring about enlightenment and emancipation: 'in regard to providing guidance for an emancipatory practice, discourse ethics can acquire a significance for orienting action' (*ibid.:* 114 n.81). Habermas says very little about the *mechanism* by which his critical social theory is supposed to realise its purpose (he prefers to talk about 'ontological' mechanisms), but presumably it is realised through bringing to people's *explicit* awareness the fundamental, inescapable normativity that is *implicitly* embedded in their everyday communicative action. When people become aware of the implicit normativity of their communicative action they will seek to institute 'reflexive discourse' as the only legitimate procedure for 'collective will formation' (Habermas 1993: 16). The central mechanism of Habermas's critical social theory, then, is to provide a translation service for the people, which makes *explicit* and consciously intelligible for them what had hitherto been only *implicit* in their practice, and tacit in their consciousness. This is a strikingly Hegelian strategy (see the conclusion, below).

In order for Habermas's critical social theory to be effective as *critical theory* it is essential that it be directly *understood* by 'ordinary' people themselves. Yet it is difficult to see how his critical social theory could connect with most people's consciousness, understanding and beliefs. Understanding the TCA and discourse ethics requires a formidable familiarity with modern philosophy and the intellectual history of social and political theory, which is only accessible to those with a rather specialised and esoteric education. Habermas's theoretical system would surely be unintelligible to the vast majority of people.[10] This being so, Habermas is entangled in his own 'performative contradiction'–which is another major category of criticism for him (see chapter 2, section V).

Habermas's 'performative contradiction' is that his own theoretical practice effectively negates the understanding that he attributes to every competent language-user. Thus, in order to demonstrate that individuals are 'always already' critical practitioners, he has to employ a battery of theory and argumentation that the vast majority of these very same (supposedly) critical practitioners could not understand (not 'explicitly', anyway). Paradoxically, most lay individuals lack the technical wherewithal to understand Habermas's demonstration that they are themselves 'always already' critical practitioners. Habermas's picture of the individual therefore looks like a relative of the 'cultural' and 'judgemental dope' that Garfinkel identified in classical social theory: Habermas depicts a *theoretical 'dope'*.

However, perhaps a more serious problem is that if all competent language-users could somehow be induced to see themselves as 'always already' critical practitioners, this might well have the effect of *reducing* their motivation for engaging in explicit critical reflection and action. In other words, this self-image is more likely to engender self-satisfied complacency than critical-reflective action. (Contrast this with the subjects in Milgram's obedience experiments, who were provided with illuminating–though frequently disconcerting–self-knowledge and very strong motivation to reflect critically on the conditions and consequences of both their own and others' actions).

But despite what he says, in practice Habermas is more concerned with convincing other philosophers and social theorists that the TCA provides a correct theoretical representation of the individual and social action *as such,* than providing 'communicative actors' with a resource that could help or inspire them to criticise existing social and political organisation–or indeed, convincing them that it *needs* criticism. This theoretical practice results from an obsessive reaction to the post-Cartesian/Kantian renunciation of certainty and foundationalism. Obsessed by the theoretical problem of how to ground one's own critique–an obsession which has bedevilled Marxism–Habermas has displaced the search for certainty on normative foundations with a quest for correct 'ontological' representation of individual powers and social constitution. (Hence the shift from critical theory to critical social theory.) This displacement is effected by professing to embrace *epistemological fallibility,* but at the same time insisting upon *ontological infallibility*. Thus Habermas (1990:97) claims (epistemologically) that '*our reconstructions* of [subjects'] pretheoretical knowledge and the claim to universality that we connect with it' may not be correct. But he also insists (ontologically), on the other hand, that his theoretical reconstruction discerns essential rules and implicit knowledge which point to 'the inescapability of the general presuppositions that *always already* underlie the communicative practice of everyday life' (*ibid.:* 130). It is, therefore, 'impossible to refute this practical knowledge itself' (Habermas 1993:162). Thus Habermas (*ibid.:* 84) oxymoronically claims to provide 'an explanation of the moral point of view that rests on fallible reconstructions of the normative content of factually unavoidable presuppositions of argumentation'. But if his 'reconstructions' are inescapably fallible, it is difficult to see how the 'presuppositions of argumentation' that Habermas claims to discern can at the same time be said to be 'factually unavoidable'.[11] How can he know this if his reconstructions are inescapably fallible? Habermas's response to post-foundationalism is an attempt to dig the foundations deeper, thereby aiming to reach beyond theoretical representation, to a level ('ontology') at which things supposedly just are as they are, unmediated by (fallible) representation. But Habermas's knowledge of the 'presuppositions of argumentation' is *logically* dependent on his theoretical 'rational reconstruction'. In effect he claims to 'know without knowing'.

Habermas's claim that universally valid principles of rationality and normativity are built into linguistic action as such, has attracted much criticism. This idealisation of language is often disparaged for its 'idealism'–that is, its 'unreal-ism' (for example Walzer 1989–90:185). In the real world, it is claimed, social life and language use is characteristically beset by disagreement, deception, force, coercion, ignorance, insincerity, etc. Walzer (1989–90:184) contends that 'agreement in actual conversations is no more definitive, no more foundational, than disagreement'. Habermas's rejoinder to this kind of objection is that his theory does not postulate either current or future *actual* social conditions in which the idealised assumptions of the TCA and discourse ethics are 'foundational'. However, he clearly is committed to the belief that his 'reconstructive' model of 'rational discourses',

depicting 'argumentation as such', does correspond to individual and social reality at least to *some* extent–even though such discourses may be only 'islands in the sea of everyday practice' (Habermas 1993:56).

In the following sub-section I examine a sociologist's study of a (real) dialogue between scientists, with a view to checking whether it exemplifies an 'island' of 'rational discourse' in Habermas's sense. If 'rational discourse' is to be found anywhere, we would surely expect to find it in the 'hard' sciences, which are usually taken to exemplify 'rational agreement'. The dialogue that I am about to review involves two eminent biochemists attempting to come to agreement, or reach an understanding, on a set of disputed scientific facts. I presume that it is quite apposite to check scientific communication for its exemplification of 'rational discourse', not least because Habermas (1990:92) has suggested that his theory 'can be verified empirically by studying the authorisations, exemptions, and procedural rules that have been used to institutionalise theoretical discourse in science'.

ii Rational discourse: the search for understanding and/or agreement in science

The case study that I review here was conducted by Michael Mulkay (1985), a sociologist working in the Social Studies of Science research programme (see Pleasants 1997). Although Mulkay makes no reference to Habermas's TCA, his study is particularly germane to Habermas's 'rational reconstruction' of 'argumentation as such', because he examines an episode in which two scientists enter into a 'reflexive discourse' with one another, with the explicit aim of trying to reach an understanding/agreement on a set of disputed facts. The two scientists involved had been in disagreement on some experimental data and the interpretation of theoretical frameworks for some ten years (Mulkay 1985:33). During this period each of the scientists had published a number of papers in which their respective theoretical accounts of central aspects of a biochemical process contradicted one another. In terms of Habermas's TCA, this period was one in which many aspects of the scientists' work remained embedded in the background norms and assumptions of the scientific 'lifeworld'. A reflexive discourse, in which 'validity claims' were explicitly raised, ensued when one of the scientists invited the other to enter into written discourse via the exchange of letters.

Over a period of nine months, the scientists exchanged ten letters, in which 'the object', one of them states, 'is simply to try to reach a mutually acceptable understanding of the facts and concepts in our field' (*ibid.:* 46). The personal letter is a quite different communicative medium from the institutionalised scholarly media through which scientists usually communicate with each other. The conventional media employ modes of communication which Mulkay calls 'empiricist discourse'–an essentially monologic form of expression, addressed to no one in particular and everyone in general.[12] In this mode of communication,

the identity of the author is generally suppressed (apart from the title of the paper), and the communiqué is organised so as to allow 'the facts' to 'speak for themselves'; great effort is made to rigorously exclude opinion and interpretation. This is the standard form of the scientific journal or conference paper. In contrast to 'empiricist discourse', dialogue by letter affords the opportunity for 'open-ended activity involving free, and in principle equal, interpretive agents' (*ibid.:* 68) –that is, Habermas's essential conditions of reflexive discourse. Whereas standard 'empiricist discourse' seeks to provide a direct representation of 'the facts' themselves, 'letters tend to focus more openly on the arguments, claims and objections of particular scientists' (*ibid.:* 20). The opening letter of the series under consideration, in particular, exhibits the Habermasian qualities of reflexive discourse, for it was, says Mulkay (*ibid.:* 32), 'more concerned with establishing the grounds for discourse than with actively engaging in the [technical] debate as such'.

I will not go into the details of the letters exchanged; the significant feature of the exchange, for present purposes, is that no agreement was reached (the more rigorous desideratum of *Verständigung* in discourse). Perhaps it is not surprising that the scientists were unable to come to an agreement on the disputed facts. Habermas's 'rational reconstruction' of 'argumentation as such' does not claim that disputants must *reach* agreement, only that they should sincerely strive towards it. It would suffice that disputants come to an understanding in which they agree on what it is that they disagree about, acknowledging that the other's view is based on 'good reasons' (the less rigorous desideratum of *Verständigung*). However, the dialogue between these two scientists did not result in either of these desiderata. Mulkay (*ibid.:* 19) reports that 'the objective of "resolving a difference of opinion"…appears not to have been achieved; and indeed the letters end with no apparent alteration in the incompatible claims of the two authors'. Nor did the failure of the dialogue bring the dispute to a close: 'several years later both authors were still publishing papers defending their initial answers to the central question explored in the letters' *(ibid.)*.

In addition to satisfying the conditions for free and unforced communication, the scientists' dialogue exemplifies each of Habermas's (1991:308) three interconnected world-relations (objective, subjective and intersubjective). Thus: (1) No agreement was reached on the object-world–the disputants could not agree on matters of 'fact/opinion', 'observation/interpretation', and 'apparent value/true value'. They tended to portray their own view as 'identical to the realities of the phenomena under investigation', whilst representing the other's view as 'mere opinion' based upon faulty interpretation (Mulkay 1985:65–6). (2) There was doubt about the scientists' sincerity/truthfulness in respect of their 'subjective world': Mulkay notes that they were, at times, ironic, suspected one another of dogmatism, and frequently assumed 'interpretive superiority' vis-à-vis the other (*ibid.*: 51). In general, each seems to have suspected the other of having an insufficiently self-critical attitude to their own work. (3) Perhaps most seriously of all, far from achieving the desired outcome of greater

understanding and agreement, 'close observers sometimes describe [the letters] as having become increasingly bitter and a source of bad feeling' (*ibid.:* 19). The scientists' discourse failed to fulfil one of the three core functions of communicative action, namely the 'function of securing an interpersonal relationship' (Habermas 1991:308). On the contrary, through its production of bad feeling and distrust, the discourse had the effect of jeopardising intersubjective relations in the community of science.

Were these scientists acting perversely or irrationally? Not according to Mulkay, who suggests that the failure of this particular discourse was not an aberration. His investigations lead him to suspect that the open dialogical format (defending and challenging validity claims) of an interpersonally conducted 'reflexive discourse' is in fact peculiarly unsuited to the desiderata of reaching agreement/understanding in natural science. If this is correct (as many other studies in the field of Social Studies of Science suggest), consensus and understanding is an 'emergent' outcome of the institutional structures that constitute the modern scientific 'lifeworld', rather than an achievement of individual scientists engaging one another in 'reflexive discourse' in Habermas's sense.[13] Thus Habermas's model of discourse, if followed, is likely only to exacerbate disagreement and intensify the (sometimes) fractious intersubjective relations between scientists.

In an earlier investigation, Mulkay (Gilbert and Mulkay 1982:176) recorded some of the reasons given by scientists themselves, in interview, to account for other scientists' errors. Reasons cited were:

> prejudice, commitment to one's own theories, reluctance to make the effort, complexity of the theory, dislike of the new theory, extreme naivety, narrow disciplinary perspective, threat to status, rushing in too quickly, insufficient experimental skill, false intuition, subjective bias, personal rivalry, irrationality and general cussedness…

The list continues in the same vein. None of the reasons seems remotely connected with 'the unforced force of the better argument' (Habermas 1993:163), which is the only legitimate form of disputation that Habermas recognises. Considering that natural science is generally taken to be the model of rationality and objectivity *par excellence,* it is difficult to imagine what other 'island' in the 'sea' of social life might better instantiate Habermas's idealised notion of 'reflexive discourse'.

The foregoing example is not intended to be an empirical 'falsification' of Habermas's reconstruction of 'reflexive discourse'. Its purpose was to make the point that we should 'look and see'–that is, examine actual social practices–in order to find out how agreement and consensus is achieved, rather than decide in advance, on the basis of a transcendental theory, how it *must* work.[14] This point is only reinforced by Habermas's repeated insistence that the TCA and discourse ethics are grounded in *real* practice and argumentation, not on utopian idealism.

VI Reflections on the grammar of social/ political criticism

My critique of Habermas's reformulated 'critical theory' is, as Wittgenstein would say, 'grammatical'. That is to say, I contend that Habermas's claim that people are 'always already' critical theorists themselves, simply in virtue of being 'speaking and acting subjects', is simply *not* a *critical* theory. I have no objection to describing such a position as a 'social theory', but it seems to me to be a perverse misuse of (ordinary or theoretical) language to call it a *'critical'* social theory. At this point the reader may wish to ask: what then is the proper form of a genuine critical theory? I think it would be injudicious to accept the terms of this question and attempt a positive answer to it. It is largely through posing, and trying to answer, this question that Habermas and other critical social theorists end up advocating a 'critical' theory that is not critical at all. My rejection of this question is based on the same kind of reasoning that leads to Wittgenstein's (1968: §65–original emphasis) insistence that it is illusory to expect to be able to formulate an account of 'the *general form of propositions* and of language'.

However, this does not mean that I endorse the view, espoused by ethnomethodologists, Habermas, and many followers of Wittgenstein, that 'professional' philosophers and social theorists should refrain from engaging in any kind of social, political or moral criticism. In spite of Habermas's radically a-critical stance, such a view tends automatically to be seen as the natural corollary of an attack on critical social theory (the logic seems to be: anyone opposed to the idea of a transcendentally grounded critical theory must *ipso facto* be opposed to social criticism).

In chapter 7 I argued that ethnomethodologists are prone to violating their own fundamental principle of 'the essential reflexivity of accounts', the end result of which is two domineering ontological pictures: the picture of the skilful, local production of social order, and the picture of the individual as 'reflexive', interpretive agent. The effect of these pictures is that ethnomethodologists grant special privilege to 'the actor's point of view', which yields the belief that actors' practices cannot (or should not) be criticised 'externally' by social and political theorists, because the latter have no special competence in such judgements. On this view, any criticism 'from outside' of the locally situated action-context is *ipso facto* a denial of 'the actor's point of view' (a charge repeated in Giddens's [1979:71] assertion that positivist/ objectivist social theory constitutes a *'derogation of the lay actor')*.

Although it is generally assumed that Wittgenstein pioneered the new picture of individuals as 'reflexive agents', I find no warrant in his philosophy for privileging 'the actor's point of view' in either the ethnomethodological or the Habermasian way. On my reading of Wittgenstein, although he seeks to deconstruct (or in his language, 'therapise' philosophers from the hold of) Cartesian, Kantian and empiricist pictures of action and subjectivity, he does not present an alternative picture of 'the way things really are' –the *true, essential* nature of the individual. Thus, in my view, there is nothing in Wittgenstein's philosophy which intends, or implies, the preclusion of 'professional' social and

political critique. On the contrary, in a letter to Malcolm (Malcolm 1958:39), Wittgenstein suggests that the chief value of philosophy lies in its ability to facilitate reflection upon wider issues than merely technical, specialised ones:

> 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.

I contend that it is not necessary to agree with ethnomethodologists–as Habermas evidently does–that critical evaluation is exclusively the concern of lay persons themselves, and that the social theorist 'is effectively *disqualified* from making…[such] judgements' (Button and Sharrock 1991:148).

Privileging the 'actor's point of view' in this way leads directly to ethnomethodologists' (and other 'micro-sociologists") belief that the only valid form of criticism is that which is practised by ordinary people themselves, and which is internal to 'the sites of everyday activity' (*ibid.:* 141). Thus, according to Button and Sharrock (*ibid.:* 148), 'the overwhelming mass of the affairs of daily life are simply none of the sociological theorist's business'. In my view, this is a very restricted conception of the practice of criticism, one which seems to confine criticism to 'the fact that people "make mistakes"' (*ibid.:* 146) in their-everyday lives. Ordinary 'members of society', we are told, are not 'seeking to "understand objective social reality"' (*ibid.:* 173 n.21). Whilst I agree that lay persons are not concerned with the highly abstract and abstruse transcendental social theories constructed by Habermas and other critical social theorists, this does not mean that they are uninterested in moral, political and social issues. Of course, it could be said that lay persons *ought* not bother themselves with trying to '"understand objective social reality"' (because it can't be done). But it seems to me to be simply factually incorrect to say that ordinary people *do not* seek such an understanding.

In my view, both Habermas and ethnomethodologists present a distorted and restricted account of the 'grammar' of criticism. Against both these positions, I suggest that it is an important part of the 'grammar' of social and political criticism that such critique is practised (though not exclusively) by professionals. This is not because professional theorists possess special ontological, metaphysical or epistemic insight (I agree with ethnomethodologists that they do not), but because the working conditions and relative detachment from everyday life (the partial withdrawal from 'immersion in the natural attitude' [*ibid.:* 148]) affords professionals the possibility of a critical-reflective perspective on social and political affairs that is not so readily achievable by lay persons. I would make an analogy here with Wittgenstein's account of what happens when a child first learns to talk about their pain. Wittgenstein (1968:§244) observes that, initially, a child's pains are just 'the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation'; then adults talk to the child, and 'teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the

child new pain-behaviour.' By analogy, I am suggesting that when one learns social theory and the critical, reflective thinking that it should entail, one, as it were, learns new 'critical-reflective practices'. The form of these practices is qualitatively distinct from 'everyday criticism'–though equally, it is a mode of practice which, like the child's increasingly sophisticated pain-language, is built upon 'primitive', unreflective behaviour.

If people really did correspond to the way they are pictured in ethnomethodology and Habermas's critical social theory–as knowledgeable, skilful, critical, reflexive agents–then restricting social critique exclusively to lay actors themselves might well be perfectly reasonable. However, given the nature of the average lay member of contemporary society as they in fact are, what kind of social and political critique can we expect from them? When people are brought together to discuss social, political and moral issues, what we invariably see is an emotive exchange of prejudice rather than 'reflexive discourse' in Habermas's sense. Restricting social critique to lay actors would be almost tantamount to outlawing social critique.

However, I want to reiterate that I have no prescription to offer on the general form that a critical theory should take, nor do I think that such a quest is a reasonable one. My attitude towards the concept of social critique is much the same as Popper's with respect to the concept of 'truth'. Popper argued that there is an important distinction to be made between the *meaning* of 'truth' and a *criterion* for truth. The former, Popper (1966:370) claims (rightly, in my view), is quite straightforward: 'everybody knows what truth, or correspondence with the facts, means (as long as he does not allow himself to speculate about it)'; but the latter, a criterion for truth, by which to decide in any particular case what *is* true, is chimerical.[15]

Adapting Popper's argument slightly, I would say that the *meaning* of social critique is straightforward and unproblematic–and by this light both Habermas's and ethnomethodology's view looks very odd. However, it is quite another matter to formulate *criteria* for a successful critical theory, which is precisely what Habermas attempts to do. In consequence, because of this debilitating obsession with theoretical justification, Habermas has been forced to renounce substantive social and political critique altogether. And whilst I agree with ethnomethodology that the professional social/political theorist cannot plausibly claim any privileged epistemic or ontological insight for their social and political critiques, I do not agree that this entails that they therefore have no extra critical-reflective sophistication over lay persons.

It is, or should be, the aim of the 'critical theorist' to provoke lay persons into questioning the taken-for-granted facticity of their social 'system' and 'lifeworld' (this is meant to be a 'grammatical', not a 'normative' proposition). But I do not see how Habermas's TCA or discourse ethics can produce that effect. I agree with Habermas's diagnosis–that the grounding of a critical theory is extremely problematic. But I disagree with his solution, which is to try to ground his 'critical theory' better than all those failed previous attempts. In my view, the whole

'problem' of theoretical grounding is a pseudo-problem which should, as Wittgenstein would say, be *dissolved.* This 'problem' is not a real, practical problem, but a purely academic one; the point of a critical theory is surely not, or not *just,* to persuade other professional theorists, but rather to persuade 'the masses'. And *that* is a *really* difficult problem.

Habermas's programme of discourse ethics is essentially concerned with justifying the liberal principle of 'the priority of the right over the good' (Habermas 1993:181 n.58), which consists in the claim that this fundamental moral/political value is immanently grounded in the 'irrefutable' normativity of everyday communicative action. Discourse ethics makes a rigorous distinction between, on the one side, 'substantive principles or basic norms, which can only be the *subject matter* of moral argumentation' (Habermas 1990:93), and which must be conducted by all those who might be affected (and who are 'competent in speech and action'). On the other side are the rules and procedures of argumentation through which the fundamental principle of universalisation is realised. These two sides correspond to 'the good' and 'the right' (or 'the just') respectively. And as we have seen, Habermas's critical social theory claims expert competence solely and exclusively over the latter–'the right/just'.

My basic objection to this programme is not primarily the one that Habermas (1990:197) tries to pre-empt, namely that discourse ethics might be 'just a reflection of the prejudices of adult, white, well-educated, Western males of today' (which he of course claims to refute). It may well be so; but a more serious objection is to the 'conjuring trick' through which Habermas tries to pass off his own moral and political views as 'valid universally' *(ibid.)*. To do this, Habermas argues that the principle of universalisation (the 'priority of the right over the good') is not as such a *moral or political principle at all;* rather, he attempts to pass it off as a necessarily unavoidable, 'rule of argumentation', which is 'part of the logic of practical discourses' (*ibid.:* 93). Thus the 'rules of discourse are not mere *conventions;* rather, they are inescapable presuppositions' (*ibid.:* 89). Yet if anything involves a 'performative contradiction' it is surely this: a fundamental moral principle which is not actually a moral principle at all (it is somehow 'deeper' than a moral principle). An unfortunate consequence of this 'performative contradiction' is that the fundamental moral principle is *not* itself amenable to argumentative justification by lay persons themselves– here we just encounter the incontrovertibility of the expert professional social/ political theorist. Against this omniscience which 'dares not speak its name', I issue this Wittgensteinian 'reminder': Habermas's moral/political views are *just* his (and, indeed, many others') moral and political values. If he were to admit that his fundamental moral/political principle of discourse ethics is inherently dependent on his liberal value-perspective it would be possible to enter into argumentation with him on its validity. But whilst he insists that this principle is literally beyond question (because it is the presupposition of all rational argumentation), it is not possible, apparently, to argue with him (see Tully [1989:186–92] for a related critique).

As well as distorting the 'grammar' of social and political criticism, Habermas's strongly cognitivist theory of discourse ethics is, in my view, equally distorting in its representation of the phenomenology of basic ethical values– what Habermas (1990) calls 'moral consciousness'. According to Habermas, 'moral consciousness' consists essentially in the ability of the individual 'actor' to 'adopt the perspectives of *all others* in the balancing of interests' (*ibid.:* 65). The ability to 'universalise' in this manner is not just a practical procedure of argumentation, it is also said to be constitutive of 'the moral point of view' (*ibid.:* 120) –that is, 'moral consciousness'. This picture of 'the moral point of view' is diametrically opposed to any account of moral life that seeks to 'protect a dogmatic core of fundamental convictions from all criticism' (*ibid.:* 88).

However, I would argue that one would actually be exceedingly shallow in moral fortitude if one were really prepared to make one's 'fundamental convictions' contingent upon being able to raise and defend successfully their claims to validity in argumentative discourse–by agreeing to be bound by 'the unforced force of the better argument' (Habermas 1993:163). The logic and rationality of a 'fundamental conviction' consists precisely in it *not* being open to argumentative refutation–that is what makes it a *fundamental* conviction. As a matter of pragmatic logic, one cannot keep providing reasons to justify one's convictions; there comes a point when 'I can…give no *grounds* for my way of going on. If I tried I could give a thousand, but none as certain as the very thing they were supposed to be grounds for' (Wittgenstein 1975:§307).

Thus, for example: as a vegetarian, I can offer various arguments and reasons to explain and justify my practice, but none of them would be as certain as my basic 'fundamental conviction' that it *just is* wrong to kill animals for food.[16] The idea that all beliefs rest upon (good or bad) reasons exemplifies the paradoxical infinite regress of a rule for interpreting a rule (Wittgenstein 1968:§86) –or 'a reason for a reason'. Habermas's (1990:197) insistence that 'only those norms may claim to be valid that could meet with the consent of all affected in their role as participants in a practical discourse', simply fails to do justice to the phenomenology of 'moral consciousness'. Must I accept that, because my 'fundamental conviction' regarding the killing of animals for food is very much a minority belief, the norm that I follow is therefore *invalid*?

VII Conclusion: return of Hegelian 'critical critique'

Throughout this book I have drawn attention to the Kantian form of critical social theory–its emphasis on universal and transcendent rules, structures and mechanisms, and its method of transcendental theoretical analysis. And in this chapter I have tried to demonstrate the extent to which both first- and second-generation 'critical theory' is rooted in Kantian ontological pictures of subjectivity and agency. In this conclusion I now wish to point out how strikingly similar Habermas and critical social theory is to the Hegelianism ('critical critique') that Marx attacked.

Marx (1963:210) complained that Hegel's solution to alienation, despite its claim to radicalism, was actually extremely conservative, and consisted in 'merely *apparent* criticism'. In Hegel's philosophy, 'objective reality' is an inherently human creation, consisting essentially of social, political and cultural institutions. The objective world is the product of human self-creation and is the embodiment of reason. However, throughout history this self-created objective world has been experienced by individuals as an alien world of otherness—they do not recognise the product of their own creation and so are alienated from it. Alienation is eventually to be overcome at the level of Absolute Knowledge (i.e. Hegel's philosophical system). At this point, individuals become fully self-conscious; they recognise that objective reality is their own creative production. Thus what was hitherto experienced as an external world of 'hard unyielding reality' and a barrier to self-consciousness, is taken 'back into itself so that it is in communion with itself in *its* otherness as such' (Hegel 1977: §§484, 788). This resolution of alienation (the reconciliation of self and other) is, in Marx's view, merely a 'theoretical', not a *real* resolution and reconciliation. Simply through recognising the objective social, political and cultural world as the result of their own work, individuals supposedly cease to be alienated from it; 'in thus knowing it [self-consciousness] has immediately risen above it' (*ibid.:* §788). Marx interprets this as meaning that individual self-consciousness changes, but the 'objective reality' remains the same. Thus 'reason is at home in unreason as such' (Marx 1963: 210).

Hegel's narrative of the human self-creation of 'objective reality' is very much like Habermas's, and the other critical social theorists', notion of the skilful, communicative production of social order. Like Hegel, Habermas wants to show that individuals are not just passive play-things of alien forces: the lifeworld is 'a sphere in which processes of reification do not appear as mere reflexes' (Habermas 1989: 391). Critical social theory, like Hegelian 'critical critique', constructs a theoretical system which shows that people are 'always already' knowledgeable, rational, critical, reflexive agents, who skilfully produce and reproduce the social conditions in which they live. Again like Hegel, critical social theory wants to show that people are this way, but false and distorting theories prevent them from having an adequate self-conception of their true situation. This 'false consciousness' can be overcome with the aid of a (critical) social theory which corrects other theoretical misrepresentations, and which represents the essential features of individual subjectivity and social reality as it really is—albeit at a high level of abstraction (Absolute Knowledge?).

My judgement on Habermas concurs with Marx's verdict on Hegel: critical social theory is profoundly an-critical of substantive social, political and economic reality. Like Hegel (or rather Marx's rendition of Hegel), it exudes a latent 'uncritical positivism and uncritical idealism' (Marx 1963:201). Habermas's critical social theory is animated by a 'negative dialectic' which works in much the same way as it did in the original Critical Theory. Adorno's and Horkheimer's Critical Theory started out with a neo-Marxist critique of 'bourgeois' political economy and culture, and degenerated into theoretical contemplation on the nature of

instrumental reason as a universal, pathological attribute of individual subjectivity as such. Despite his criticism of Critical Theory's 'negative dialectic' and 'philosophy of the subject', Habermas ends up in pretty much the same position. The 'negative dialectic' of Habermas's critical social theory is quite similar, in that it is fixated on the contemplation of supposedly universal, necessary preconditions of 'communicative action' and social order as such; and it has merely modified the 'paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness' into the paradigm of the philosophy of *tacit* consciousness. In both cases 'critical theory' becomes purely theoretical contemplation in lieu of substantive social and political critique. And 'reason is at home in unreason as such'.

9
CONCLUSION

Having devoted individual chapters to critical analysis of the theoretical systems of Giddens, Bhaskar and Habermas, I shall now, in conclusion, seek to draw together their shared assumptions regarding the nature of 'critical theory'. I will then end with some general observations on Wittgenstein's philosophy, and the 'idea of a critical social theory'.

I The 'critical' social theory of Giddens, Bhaskar and Habermas

There are some differences between the kinds of politics explicitly espoused by Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar, which I shall briefly review. My concern here –as throughout this book–is with the *critical theory* which underpins their moral and political values.

Habermas, as we saw in the previous chapter, now subscribes to a kind of Rawlsian liberalism which prioritises 'the right [or just] over the good'. Giddens's political ideals are broadly similar to Habermas's; Giddens advocates a 'Third Way', between 'Left and Right',[1] which also amounts to a kind of social-democratic liberalism. Although Giddens (1994b:115) is critical of what he regards as Habermas's attempt to ground 'dialogic democracy' immanently, in linguistic practice as such, he is in full agreement with Habermas's emphasis on the political importance of discourse and dialogue. Giddens agrees with Habermas's basic conception of critical theory, if not his programme of transcendental philosophical justification for it. Corresponding to Habermas's discourse ethics, Giddens (*ibid.:* 114–15) talks of the 'democratization of democracy', and the 'extension of dialogic democracy'. Giddens's favourite examples of social and political pathologies which could be ameliorated through 'dialogic democracy' include male violence against women, social and economic inequality, and religious fundamentalism. His diagnosis of gender violence as 'a refusal of communication in social conditions where patriarchal traditions are under threat' (*ibid.:* 48), indicates that his own position is actually much closer to Habermas's than he cares to acknowledge.

By way of solution to these conflicts, Giddens (*ibid.:* 248) advocates 'the creation of a range of social pacts, including that between affluent and poor but also

especially between the sexes'. Thus, for example, the poor's side of the bargain would require the development of 'self-reliance, integrity and social responsibility'; the rich, for their part, however, would not be expected to participate in 'the direct transfer of wealth' (*ibid.:* 195). Considering the staggering banality of these 'solutions', Habermas's insistence that the programme of discourse ethics can make no substantive moral or political contribution looks, in comparison, eminently wise. Giddens's suggestion that 'the poor', or 'the male sex', are collective actors/subjects capable of entering into dialogue with their opposite (collective) number flies in the face of his earlier incisive critique of functionalist-Marxist pictures of agency and action–'societies have no "reasons" or "needs" whatsoever; only the actors do' (Giddens 1982b:180). It seems that Giddens should include himself amongst 'those who have declared their opposition to functionalism in principle', but 'are themselves prone to employ functionalist arguments in practice' (Giddens 1979:7).

Bhaskar's political identification diverges sharply from that of Habermas and Giddens in that he subscribes to a more traditional Marxist-inspired socialism. The key to the claimed criticality of Bhaskar's critical realism (as with Giddens and Habermas) is its much vaunted anti-positivistic theoretical representation of the structures and mechanisms of social and individual life, and the idea that an explanatorily correct social theory is *ipso facto* a critical theory. Like Frankfurt School Critical Theory, critical realism attacks the positivist fact-value distinction; 'explanatory social science necessarily has emancipatory implications' (Bhaskar 1989a:56).[2] Because of the 'knowledgeability' and 'agency' possessed by individuals, and the 'transformational' nature of all social activity, 'explanatory theories' are always directed at changing what they describe, where this consists of false belief, irrational practices, or malevolent social structures. In opposition to the positivistic aims of social description, prediction and control, critical realist-informed social science/theory is always oriented towards emancipation–emancipation from 'those unnecessary, undesired and oppressive (including exploitative) structures of power, domination and distorted need-recognition, opportunity and communication' (*ibid.:* 187).

Like the first-generation Critical Theorists (see chapter 8, section II), Bhaskar's 'critical realism' appeals to a Marxist critique of ideology and political economy for an example of a substantive critical theory of modern social conditions. Nevertheless, Marxism merely plays the role, for Bhaskar, of an *example* of a substantive social science that is *compatible* with critical realism. Other, quite different, social sciences might also be compatible with critical realism; 'realism is not, nor does it license, either a set of substantive analyses or a set of practical policies' (Bhaskar 1989b:3). This follows from Bhaskar's (1978:30) distinction between 'a philosophical and a scientific ontology'–Marxism is a 'scientific ontology', and critical realism as such is a 'philosophical ontology'. The distinctiveness of critical realism–that in virtue of which it is supposed to be a *critical* social theory –consists in its transcendental analysis of individual 'agency' and social 'structure' (see chapter 6), not its endorsement of Marxist social science.

Bhaskar's reticence in identifying critical realism with a substantive critique of social order means that critical realism is no more normatively proactive than Habermas's theory of communicative action and discourse ethics. Critical realism is compatible with any social theory/science which espouses commitment to the existence of individual agency and transcendent social structures, and which seeks emancipation from any malevolent social structures and mechanisms that it identifies. The consequence of this is that even social theorists so politically opposed to socialism as Hayek can be considered 'critical realists': 'it is perfectly logically possible to combine [critical] realism with right-wing or middle-of-the-road politics' (Collier 1994:200). In fact, a number of critical realist-informed studies have demonstrated that Hayek developed a theory of knowledge and ontology which accords very closely with the principles of critical realism (see chapter 5, section 1). Hayekean social theory can, and does, claim to be just as interested in criticising false beliefs, promoting transformation of malevolent social structures and replacing these with 'empowering sources of determination' (*ibid.:* 6), thereby facilitating greater autonomy and freedom. Of course, Hayek has a rather different idea to Bhaskar as to which structures *are* malevolent and which enabling–but critical realism as such can offer no resources to criticise Hayek's political programme. Bhaskar can do nothing *qua* critical realist to ensure that substantive social science does not endorse a Hayekean view of socio-political order.

My criticism of the critical social theory of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar throughout this book has been directed at their conception of social and political critique, and not as such at the specific content of their social and political values. The main components of their Idea of 'critical' social theory can be summarised as follows:

1 It is vital to have a correct 'ontological picture' of the true nature of individual human beings and their relationship to social 'structure' and the social 'system'. In this picture individuals are knowledgeable, reflexive, active agents–not 'cultural' and 'judgemental dopes'–and they 'skilfully accomplish' social order.
2 Seeing people in this way *ipso facto* constitutes a *critical* social theory.
3 Critical social theorists derive from their 'ontological picture' the transcendental presupposition that social and political theory/science has an inherent 'double hermeneutical' relation to people's action and consciousness (Giddens 1976:158; Bhaskar 1989a:155; Habermas 1991:110).
4 Because of this 'double hermeneutic', formulating the above 'ontological picture' into a theoretical system is not just a theoretical exercise, but also, at the same time, a practical (critical) intervention into social and political life.

The upshot of this is that a *critical* social theory is just a correct theoretical representation of 'how things are' with individual agency and social structure at the ontologically deepest level of reality. My main objections to this Idea of a critical social theory are the following:

1 Far from being a rejection of positivism, critical social theorists' quest for correct theoretical representation is an exemplification of the primary positivist desideratum. This may seem like a contentious claim, but it is not really so contentious if positivism is distinguished from empiricism, as I maintain that it should be. Whereas empiricism is a particular theory of knowledge, and perhaps also (as Bhaskar [1978:16] argues) a particular theory of ontology, positivism is fundamentally a commitment only to the possibility and desirability of 'positive' (scientific) knowledge of reality (natural, social and psychological). Empiricism is very frequently associated with positivism, but I contend that this is only a fairly regular correlation, not a necessary relationship. Critical social theory clearly is not empiricist, but I aver that it *is* positivistic by reason of its commitment to the supreme virtue of accurate theoretical representation.

2 The most pervasive manifestation of positivism in critical social theory is its adherence to the 'name-object' model of language–world relations (see chapter 2, section II). Underlying the belief that a 'correct' theoretical representation leads directly to transformative action is a 'primitive' picture of language–that 'naming' an object or a state of affairs with a theory is a kind of baptism which by the very act of naming serves to bring that object under rational (theoretical) control. Whereas religious baptism consists in giving a (Christian) name to a person, thereby making them a member of the church, critical social theory names theoretical objects so as to incorporate them into a coherent, logically ordered, theoretical system. But there is a fundamental difference between these two kinds of baptism: in the context of the appropriate religious ceremony, the utterance of certain forms of words does indeed *ipso facto* generate that which is named (for example a christened child, or a married couple). The grammar of critical theory, though, cannot produce this kind of automatic outcome; there obviously is no such entailment between the utterance of a supposedly correct social theory and transformative action in accordance with that theory.

3 The idea that a 'critical' theory consists solely in transcendental theoretical depiction of the essential nature of individual action and social structure embodies a very strange meaning of the term 'critical'. Critical social theory is only critical of other theoretical pictures of 'the individual' and 'the social' as such–it is not critical of actual social and political conditions. Such a conception of 'criticism' is strongly redolent of the 'critical critique' of the Young Hegelians against which Marx railed.

4 The notion of an inherent 'double hermeneutic' connecting social theory/science to people's action and consciousness is question-begging. I would certainly agree that theories of people's behaviour *can* feed back into that behaviour, thereby becoming a factor in sustaining or changing it. But this should be seen as an empirical connection, not a transcendental, ontological presupposition. It can reasonably be concluded that the critical social theory of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar, is not amongst those theories which

have exercised a powerful influence on large numbers of people's minds and actions. Indeed, it is quite ironic that although Giddens is currently able to exercise some real political power, this power comes not from any 'double hermeneutical' effects of his critical social theory, but from enjoying a 'positivistic' relationship with the British Government and its policy-making bodies.[3] Giddens's current influence does not derive from the effects that his critical social theory exercises on the consciousness of the people to whom it refers; rather, the influence is solely from his enjoying the role of 'expert' advisor to high-ranking policy makers. And this effect is really no different from an expert scientist advising the government on what should be done on the basis of what Horkheimer (1972) called 'traditional theory'. Giddens's current relationship to government exemplifies the old positivistic idea that social science relates to social policy in much the same way that engineering technology relates to 'pure science'.

5 The 'ontological pictures' of individual agency, knowledgeability and transcendental rules which are constructed by critical social theorists are subject to the same sorts of incoherence and conundrums as the pictures (in the 'paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness') that they are supposed to supersede. The 'craving for generality' which motivates the construction of these pictures is, I suspect, a 'reaction formation' to the widespread acceptance, in twentieth-century intellectual culture, of the doctrine of fallibilism. As I have observed at various points in preceding chapters, critical social theorists react to this by seeking to combine epistemic fallibilism with 'ontological' *infallibilism*–thereby claiming that we can achieve certainty at the most abstract, transcendental level because things *must* be the way that their theories depict.

II Wittgenstein and the Idea of a critical social theory

In the course of my critique of critical social theory I have endeavoured to observe Wittgenstein's strictures against philosophical theory, explanation and generalisation. This observance has rendered my critique entirely 'immanent' in that I have deliberately refrained from seeking recourse to any allegedly superior theoretical standpoint from which to criticise critical social theory. My aim has been to reveal the confusion and incoherence contained in Giddens's, Habermas's and Bhaskar's Idea of a critical social theory–not to specify a more adequate model of critical social theory as such. I have adopted this stance not merely as an intellectual exercise, but because I believe that there simply is no need for a general account of the essential nature of a critical theory. To paraphrase Popper's (1966: 370) remark on the concept of 'truth': everybody knows what 'critical' means so long as they do not dwell on its supposed 'essential' meaning in abstraction from particular cases.

Thus, although it might at times have seemed otherwise, my intention was far from wishing to argue that there 'can be no such thing as a critical social theory'.

On the contrary, my view is that there is no particular difficulty in the notion of a critical social theory–but there are very deep problems embedded in the belief that it *must* assume a 'general form', which can be discerned through transcendental analysis of individual and social 'ontology'. Moreover, the quest to uncover the general form of critical social theory merely sets off a 'negative dialectic' which brings Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar to a point at which they advance a social theory which is utterly *uncritical,* and quite *unrealistic* in its celebration of the supposedly active, knowledgeable, skilful powers of the individual as such.

I pointed out in chapter 1 that it is a mistake to interpret Wittgenstein's rejection of 'explanatory', philosophical theory as a rejection of *all* theory. Any such attempted rejection would encounter an insuperable 'performative contradiction' of the kind that Wittgenstein's observations are designed to forestall in the first place. And the same holds true of my critique of critical social theory–I reject a certain kind of critical social theory, namely that which tries to present itself as simply a theoretical reflection of 'the way things really are', transcendentally, at the 'deepest' ontological level, and which thereby (implicitly) renounces any specifically *critical* content. My aim, then, is not to reject the very idea of a critical social theory, but to expose the impotence of Giddens's, Habermas's and Bhaskar's idea of a critical social theory predicated on an 'ontological picture' of transcendental structures, mechanisms and powers buried in individual (tacit) consciousness and abstract social space. If I really wanted to reject the very idea of a critical social theory, as such, I would unavoidably need a highly generalised, transcendental theory which could claim to show that the nature of individuals and the nature of social structures and systems is such that no critical social theory is possible. In other words, I would need to construct or invoke a philosophical social theory of precisely the kind that I have been arguing against throughout this book.

I have argued that the quest to specify the 'general form' of critical social theory is not a sensible project, and I have also renounced any desire to reject critical social theory *as such*–but should I not at least be prepared to offer an *example* of a genuinely critical social theory? This seems like a reasonable request. As a matter of fact I have already discussed, at some length (in chapter 7) just such an example –one which is strikingly different to the critical social theory of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar. Milgram's obedience experiments are conventionally categorised as a paradigm of positivist social science, but I suggest that his work exemplifies many attributes that can reasonably be expected from a critical social theory. Let us reconsider those aspects of Milgram's work that make it a plausible candidate for the status of critical social theory.

Approximately 1,000 subjects participated in Milgram's obedience experiments, and many of these reported gratitude for the opportunity to gain significant self-knowledge and insight into the nature and conditions of human action. Those who did not express any gratitude were, arguably, nonetheless similarly enlightened, even though the knowledge and experience may have been stressful. But the number of people who may have learnt from the experiments through

study at school, college and university is inestimably larger. What makes this investigation so powerful as *critical* social theory is the extent to which it encourages everyone who encounters it to ask themselves searching questions of the kind: 'how would I behave in those or similar circumstances?' And it does go some way to shedding some light on the most shockingly unanswerable question of the twentieth century, namely: how could perpetrators of the Holocaust (and of course, perpetrators of more recent and current atrocities) do what they did? Part of the answer to this question, in the light of Milgram's work, is that we may be deluding ourselves if we think that people who commit such atrocities are radically different from 'normal people' like ourselves.

Thus Milgram's obedience work is most powerful as *critical* social theory—or as I would prefer to describe it, 'critical social reflection'—for the very reason that it stimulates autonomous processes of critical self-examination and reflection on taken-for-granted social conditions. This is exactly what a critical social theory, according to its classical and contemporary proponents, is supposed to do, but which it manifestly fails to achieve, so I have argued. Unlike the critical social theorists whose theories I have analysed in this book, Milgram's work has genuine potential as a stimulus to critical reflection. Recall that, according to Habermas (1989:436 n.62), critical social theory 'names those to whom the theory is addressed, who can with its help gain enlightenment about themselves and their emancipatory role in the process of history…', and it

> understands that its claims to validity can be verified only in the successful process of enlightenment, and that means: in the practical discourse of those concerned. Critique renounces the contemplative claims of theories constructed in monologic form.

Yet because of its complexity, abstruseness and forbiddingly technical language, neither Giddens's, nor Habermas's, nor Bhaskar's—nor the Frankfurt School's – critical social theory has much realistic chance of being 'verified…in the practical discourse of those concerned'. Milgram's reports, on the other hand, present no such obstacles to intelligibility or understanding for the averagely competent reader, and the significance of the work is readily graspable.[4] Moreover, it is well documented that most readers of Milgram's investigations find it a rather disturbing experience being confronted with a bleak insight into ordinary people's (and perhaps their own) potential for malevolent conduct. In contrast, readers of Giddens's, Habermas's and Bhaskar's critical social theory are presented with a rosy, not to say complacent, picture of the inherent knowledgeability, skilfulness, and agentive powers of the ordinary individual.

Another theorist whose work might be seen to encourage critical social reflection is Zygmunt Bauman. In his book *Modernity and the Holocaust,* Bauman argues that it is self-deluding to view the Holocaust as an aberration from modern civilisation, a brief but terrible regression to barbarism which was caused by psychopathic individuals in a society neutralised morally by the pathological Nazi State. Bauman

countenances the dreadful suspicion that this attitude to the Holocaust may actually be symptomatic of the way it came about. That is, by failing to see that far from being an aberration, the Holocaust is in a sense *intrinsic* to the modern technology and social sophistication of modernity, we have a self-preserving tendency to absolve ourselves from moral responsibility for acts of mass human destruction (which continue to be a distinctive feature of twentieth-century social life). To put it bluntly, Bauman (1991:19) claims that the knowledge we have of the Holocaust suggests that 'most of the perpetrators of the genocide were normal people', and 'the institutions responsible for the Holocaust…did not deviate either from established standards of normality'.

I am not claiming that Bauman or Milgram incontrovertibly reveal for us 'the way things really are', nor that they provide a paradigm which all other social theorists ought to follow. My main point is that their work serves as a striking 'grammatical reminder' that a critical social theory should be *critical,* not *celebratory,* of substantive social, political and moral existence, and that it should serve this critical function (as Habermas says) directly, through the understanding of 'those to whom it is addressed'. Rather than celebrating our ordinary, self-complacent view of ourselves and our social conditions, Bauman and Milgram confront us with a more 'sceptical' view of 'human nature' –they *force* us to ask ourselves hard and uncomfortable questions (which is what Wittgenstein's philosophy aims to do to philosophers). Each of them seeks to *change our way of looking at things,* and most importantly, *change our way of looking at ourselves.* In stark contrast, even if critical social theorists were basically correct in the way they depict subjectivity and social organisation, and even if their 'ontological pictures' were not vitiated by the incoherence that I have diagnosed, they still wouldn't have a *critical* theory, because these theories do not force us to ask ourselves any hard questions (other than how professional theorists should represent abstract individual capacities and social structures). In chapter 2 I made a distinction between transcendental philosophical *theory,* to which Wittgenstein was implacably opposed, and philosophising as an *activity* in the sense of critical, reflective thought on issues that are of interest and importance, for which Wittgenstein had great respect. I would now extend this distinction to social and political thought: critical social theory, as transcendental social *theory,* is in my view impotent and incoherent, but critical self- and social reflection, as encouraged by work such as Milgram's and Bauman's, might make a valuable contribution to 'enlightenment'.

Finally, one last question arises: what, specifically, does Wittgenstein have to do with my critique of the critical social theory of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar, and what significance, if any, does he have for critical social theory more generally? My critique of critical social theory was not *derived* from Wittgenstein's philosophy; after all, I have argued that Wittgenstein has no substantive alternative view of 'the way things really are' with which to replace the philosophical pictures that he 'deconstructs'. Where I have followed Wittgenstein most closely is through the extension of his arguments against a certain form of philosophical explanation, namely that of transcendental reasoning. The basic form of this type of reasoning

involves the postulation of various mechanisms, powers, structures, etc. at a level which is logically unexperienceable because it supposedly constitutes the very conditions of possibility of experience. These transcendental entities are then taken to be, in a sense, more 'real' than the reality which can be and is known; the former is understood to generate the latter. In critical social theory this form of reasoning issues in a conjunction of theoretical assertions which purport to explain how people do what they do, how social order is sustained, and how social change is possible. Critical social theory is respectably fallibilist about *particular* kinds of knowledge-claim, but assumes infallible authority over *generalised* transcendental knowledge-claims. Wittgenstein tried to show that the transcendental form of reasoning is delusory and unsatisfactory because it ultimately does not provide the kind of understanding that we (as philosophers) hanker after. And I have sought to show (which is really only a 'reminder' of what we already know) that transcendental knowledge of transcendental entities is just irrelevant to *critical* self- and social reflection.

Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar have all drawn quite substantially, directly and indirectly, on Wittgenstein's philosophy. But they have either ignored or dismissed his critique of transcendental philosophical reasoning, and instead tried to render what they see as his unsystematic and hazy 'ontological insights' into a precise theoretical framework. In so doing they have failed to perceive that Wittgenstein's philosophy is profoundly subversive, not supportive, of the kind of 'ontological' projects that they champion.

However, although Wittgenstein teaches us to be sceptical about the epistemic power and ontological revelation of our theoretical models and pictures, the obverse of this scepticism is that philosophy 'leaves everything as it is' (Wittgenstein 1968: 124). This statement is invariably cited as definitive evidence of Wittgenstein's 'conservatism' (for example Habermas 1990:11); but in my view it simply says that (transcendental) *philosophy* leaves things as they are. It does not mean that everything *should* be left as it is, or that social and political problems and controversies are thereby dissolved, or shown to be unreal. Wittgenstein just says (or implies) that these problems will not be resolved through transcendental philosophical theory. Philosophy, as an *activity,* might still be able to help 'improve [one's] thinking about the important questions of everyday life' (Wittgenstein, quoted by Malcolm 1958:39). But it is the importance of the problems themselves that really matters, not the elegance or sophistication of the transcendental theory. The kind of philosophy practised by critical social theorists serves only to obscure the nature of real social and political problems by attempting to solve them through transcendental theoretical representation. This mode of explanation seems to suggest that problems cease to be problems when they are accurately represented in a theoretical system. Wittgensteinian deconstruction of pseudo-explanations is merely the prolegomenon to thinking about urgent social, political and ethical issues.

NOTES

1 WITTGENSTEIN AND CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

1 My use of this term should not be taken to imply any reference, or indebtedness, to 'post-structuralist' philosophy. It is simply a particularly apt antonym to the 'reconstructive' theoretical models of critical social theory.

2 The suggestion by Rossi-Landi (1981) that one should put to use, rather than search for the meaning of, Wittgenstein's philosophy, is entirely within the spirit of Wittgenstein's work.

3 I take it that by 'we' Wittgenstein means 'we philosophers'—not *everyone*. This is an important qualification (see chapter 2, section III).

4 Although critical social theorists are anxious to avoid charges of 'scientism', their theoretical practice seems to me to be modelled on theoretical physics. Physicists seek to explain the observable features of physical objects by identifying their underlying atomic and sub-atomic structures and processes; likewise, critical social theorists seek to explain the observable features of individual life and social organisation by identifying their underlying structures and mechanisms (compare Kitching 1994:25–9). Thus, whereas classical social theory often drew upon the 'life sciences' for their models and analogical reasoning, critical social theorists draw upon physics in much the same way. I am tempted to observe: positivism is dead—long live positivism!

5 See Bhaskar (1978) for his transcendental realist philosophy of science, and Giddens (1979:63, 1982a:14) for his endorsement of 'realist epistemology' in general and Bhaskar's version in particular.

6 Bhaskar (1986:6—original emphases) explains elsewhere that the task of a theory of ontology is to elaborate 'what the world must be like *prior* to any empirical investigation of it and *for* any scientific attitudes or activities to be possible'. Hegel exposed this kind of Kantian thought as the absurd desire to 'know before knowing'. Wittgenstein's frequent objection to the philosopher's claim that certain states of affairs *must* pertain is, I believe, similarly motivated against Kantian philosophy (see chapters 3 and 4).

7 Ironically from my point of view, Habermas (1990:7) criticises Popperian 'critical rationalism' for allowing 'a weak version of the Kantian justificatory mode to sneak into its inner precincts through the back door'.

8 Invoking his famous metaphor, Wittgenstein's philosophy can be seen as a ladder which one climbs, and then having climbed it, one 'must, so to speak, throw away the ladder' (Wittgenstein 1988:6.54) when one goes on to think about serious substantive issues in social, political and moral life.

2 DOES WITTGENSTEIN MEAN WHAT HE SAYS?

1 I am alluding here to Wittgenstein's famous *Tractatus* distinction between 'what *cannot* be said', but '*can* be shown' (Wittgenstein 1988:4.1212). My 'attitude' towards Wittgenstein's philosophy has been influenced by Edwards (1982: ch. 4), who argues that Wittgenstein never fully relinquished his distinction between 'saying' and 'showing', and that he transformed it from a metaphysical distinction into a practical imperative.
2 This view of Wittgenstein's philosophy, particularly amongst social and political theorists, owes much to Gellner (1959).
3 This is precisely what Winch–widely regarded as the principal exponent of authentic Wittgensteinian social/political theory–does; that is, he propounds a theory of these notions 'as such and in general' (Winch 1990:8). For this reason, I argue in the next chapter, Winch provides a seriously distorted view of Wittgenstein.
4 Miles and Rhees (in Wittgenstein 1979a:9) use 'presentation' for *Darstellung* in their translation of Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough,* which is where paragraph 122 of *Philosophical Investigations* seems to have originated.
5 I do *not* mean that I will treat him as a hermeneutical *theorist* (see chapter 3, section II). Another way of putting it is that I will apply Wittgenstein's (1968:§66) injunction 'don't think, but look!' to his own text, to see what he actually says, in his own terms. Recalling the distinction that I made in chapter 1, this is better characterised as an *attitude* rather than an *interpretation:* 'what has to be overcome is a difficulty having to do with the will, rather than with the intellect' (Wittgenstein 1980:17).
6 Other influential versions of this picture include Wittgenstein's own *Tractatus* theory of the essential structure and function of language, and also Saussurean structuralism.
7 Wittgenstein's discussion of naming an 'object' or a quality of an object, and the method of 'ostensive definition' (Wittgenstein 1968: §§26–50), shows ('reminds' us) that the seemingly simple and trivial practice of naming or referring to something is actually anything but simple. The complexities and confusions are compounded with the idea of 'naming' a mental (or abstract) 'object' such as a sensation, which Wittgenstein investigates in his famous argument against 'private language' (*ibid.:* §§243ff.).
8 Rorty (1989:74) describes 'the metaphysician' as someone who 'assumes that the presence of a term in his own final vocabulary ensures that it refers to something which *has* a real essence'.
9 For example, in her exegesis of Wittgenstein's 'way of seeing', Genova (1995:120) claims that Wittgenstein used the notion of 'use' as 'an explanation of how words mean'.
10 Like Giddens, Genova (1995:119, 120) also reads Wittgenstein through the prism of Derrida's 'anti-metaphysical' metaphysics, asserting that Wittgenstein held the view that 'language' is a 'virtual machine formed by its use'; it is 'not a thing, either artificial or natural, but a space'.
11 Rorty is also implacably opposed to the philosophy, though not the politics, of Habermas's critical social theory (1989:61–8).
12 Rorty uses the term 'poet' to cover all fields of human excellence, including great philosophers, novelists, political activists, and scientists such as Galileo, Newton and Darwin.
13 Although Habermas claims that his philosophy is 'post-metaphysical', he means by this the disavowal of claims to *epistemic* certainty and *epistemological* foundationalism–

but he simply displaces this certainty and foundationalism onto an 'ontological' level (see chapter 8, section V. i). His theories clearly are metaphysical in the (usual) sense of referring to transcendental reality and in their claims to universality and necessity.

14 'We have been told by popular scientists that the floor on which we stand is not solid, as it appears to common sense, as it has been discovered that the wood consists of particles filling space so thinly that it can almost be called empty' (Wittgenstein 1972:45).

15 Speaking for myself, rather than condemning the philosophies of Descartes *et al.* as absurd and ridiculous (as does Rorty and many other modern theorists), I would prefer to compare them to the creations of Monet and other great innovative artists–as productions of great beauty and vision, but not either failed or successful revelations of 'the way things really are'. In my view, Rorty is too quick to dismiss Descartes, Kant and other historical figures as hopelessly confused and mistaken–thereby betraying his claims to 'historicist' and 'hermeneutical' credentials. ('What you have primarily discovered is a new way of looking at things. As if you had invented a new way of painting; or, again, a new metre, or a new kind of song' [Wittgenstein 1968: §401].)

16 See chapter 4, section VII for an elaboration of Wittgenstein's important distinction between 'following a rule' and (merely) being said to be 'in accordance with a rule'.

17 My understanding of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy has been influenced by Edwards's (1982) chapter: 'Showing and saying in the later work'. However, I do not accept his claim that Wittgenstein's later philosophy was animated by a 'moral vision' and a 'conception of the sound human understanding' (*ibid.:* 4) –such a claim, in my view, entails the 'performative contradiction' from which I seek to absolve Wittgenstein.

18 See Edwards (1982:188–95) for a similar characterisation of Wittgenstein's private language argument.

19 Adapted from Edwards's (1982:6) phrase: 'rationality-as-representation'.

20 Commentators usually assume that Wittgenstein intends the notion of 'family resemblances' to apply to *all* words and concepts. If this is correct, then presumably 'family resemblances' would be an *essential* characteristic of all words and concepts, and Wittgenstein would have a general theory of meaning and reference. However, he does not make this universal theoretical claim; the discussion of 'family resemblances' is occasioned by the objection of his interlocutor, who complains that Wittgenstein has not formulated 'what the essence of a language-game and hence of language, is: what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language' (Wittgenstein 1968: §65). The discussion of family resemblances follows directly from this objection, and applies to 'all that we call language' *(ibid.)*–not necessarily to all uses of individual words and concepts.

21 O'Neill considers himself to be expositing, not correcting, Wittgenstein's ideas.

22 O'Neill maintains, in line with critical social theory, that theories of the essential nature of markets are fallible knowledge-claims just like any other scientific proposition: 'essence precedes investigation and requires investigation' (O'Neill 1995:259).

23 O'Neill uses terminology from the register of Bhaskar's 'transcendental realism' (for example, 'the capacities and powers of objects' [O'Neill 1995:266]). His predilection for using the term 'real' as a predicate of his theoretical concepts also has a distinctly Bhaskarian pedigree (see chapter 6, note 6). I suspect that those inclined to philosophical realism would insist that 'family resemblances' are caused by an underlying 'deep structure' (Bhaskar 1978:110)–DNA in the case of human family resemblances. My Wittgensteinian retort to this is that DNA plays no part in the *meaning* of 'family resemblances', and does not enter into the criteria for their identification and usage.

24 I certainly do not agree that this question 'makes perfect sense'. Engagement in the game of professional football, I would have thought, can have very different effects on 'moral character' than engagement in the game of tiddly-winks. Indeed, is the latter likely to have any effect on 'moral character' at all?

3 WINCH, WITTGENSTEIN AND CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

1 Giddens (1979:4) does say: 'I consider Wittgenstein's later philosophy to be exceptionally important for current problems of social theory, but not in the ways in which that philosophy has characteristically been understood by the "post-Wittgensteinians".' However, although Giddens offers a number of criticisms of Winch, none of these seems to have any bearing on Winch's reading of Wittgenstein. Moreover, immediately following the sentence quoted above, Giddens continues: 'I take the significance of Wittgenstein's writings for social theory to consist in the association of language with definite *social practices*'–yet this, on any reasonable reading, is precisely what Winch advocates. Giddens's understanding of Wittgenstein is more reliant on Winch than he admits–or perhaps more than he realises.

2 I mean 'productive' in Gadamer's (1977:24) sense of a reading or interpretation that 'takes on something of the character of an independent productive act'.

3 Despite the title to his book, Winch prefers the term 'social studies' over 'social science' –because of the positivistic connotations of the latter term. Critical social theorists do not follow him on this, and one of their central aims is to show that Winch's theory of social ontology (suitably modified) is fully compatible with, indeed essential to (an adequate conception of) social *science*.

4 Most of Winch's critics, including my three critical social theorists, have either misunderstood or misrepresented his position on social criticism. Winch (1964:83) carefully and unambiguously states that he is not committed to

> 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.

In a later article, 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 purposes of Winch's original (1964) article had been to point out–to 'remind' philosophers and social theorists/scientists–that 'there are more kinds of criticism than one' (Winch 1987:207). This lesson has evidently fallen on deaf ears.

5 Habermas (1988:204 n.41) acknowledges that his understanding of Wittgenstein 'relies heavily on Apel's studies'.

6 One attitude Wittgenstein clearly does share with Winch and Gadamer–in stark contrast to critical social theorists–is a sense of 'the increasing self-alienation of human life in our modern epoch' (Gadamer 1977:25; compare Winch 1964; Wittgenstein 1980).

7 Gadamer suggests that there is considerable congruence between Wittgenstein's philosophy and 'Heidegger's analytic of everyday Dasein' (Gadamer 1977:176, 127), but he proceeds to point out significant differences between Wittgenstein's and the hermeneutical conception of philosophy and language (*ibid.:* 177).

8 Habermas (1988:127) refers to 'the linguistic grounding of interpretive sociology that Peter Winch, following Wittgenstein, undertakes'.

9 Counterpoised to the 'purely *a priori* reasoning' to be found in 'Hegel's amateur pseudoscientific speculations' (Winch 1990:7), which is not legitimate.

10 Similarly, Winch (1990:42) describes himself as an 'epistemologist', whereas I suggest that the term 'social theorist' is a more appropriate occupational description. But it should be noted that 'social theory' as a distinct academic discipline is a relatively recent development, which has arisen subsequent to Winch's main writing. (Winch [*ibid.*: 41] talks of 'the theoretical part of general sociology and the foundations of social psychology'. This way of speaking seems somewhat convoluted nowadays, compared with the economical term 'social theory'.) It is my conjecture that Winch was an important formative influence on the rise of social theory, in the modern sense. Although the 'classics' such as Marx, Weber and Durkheim are often described as 'social theorists', this description, I believe, is a retrospective projection of the concerns and interests of contemporary social theorists.

11 'With minor reservations both supporters and critics alike see *[The Idea of a Social Science]* as a faithful development of Wittgenstein's thought' (Bloor 1983:168).

12 Three notable exceptions to this trend are Pitkin (1972), Rubinstein (1981) and Bloor (1983). But although these writers all reject Winch in favour of Wittgenstein, they also treat Wittgenstein as a proto-social theorist, thereby conforming to the spirit, if not the letter, of Winch's rendition of Wittgenstein. See also note 1.

13 For example, Hekman (1986:117–29), in a section entitled 'Gadamer and Wittgensteinian social science', refers to Wittgenstein, Winch and 'Wittgensteinians' synonymously, as if they denote one and the same author.

14 Winch (1990:43) says that 'the central problem of sociology, that of giving an account of the nature of social phenomena in general' is a problem that 'belongs to philosophy', and which is 'therefore mishandled, as a species of scientific problem'. Yet although Bhaskar (1989a:151), Giddens (1976:51) and Habermas (1988:129) object, in various ways, to this 'philosophisation' of social science, this is precisely the way their critical social theory is conducted.

15 I must say that I find many of Genova's propositions quite bizarre and nonsensical; she operates in a completely different scholarly league to Winch.

16 Genova (1995:114) says that a map of a form of life is 'a miniaturised projection of how things stand'. But Wittgenstein explicitly rejected his earlier Tractarian idea that 'the general form of a proposition is: This is how things stand' (Wittgenstein 1988: 4.5). His later view was that when we issue philosophical generalisations such as this, we think we are 'tracing the outline of the thing's nature', but in fact we are 'merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it' (Wittgenstein 1968:§114). In other words, we become entrapped by our own 'ontological pictures', whether they be of the 'general form of a proposition', or a 'map of a form of life'.

17 Strictly speaking, there is no need for a criterion if *all* 'specifically human behaviour' is, as Winch contends, '*ipso facto* rule-governed'. In this formulation, the rule-governedness of human behaviour has been predecided analytically, or perhaps is a Kantian *'synthetic a priori'* truth.

18 It is important to note that Winch's expression 'rule-governed' does not mean (as Bhaskar [1989a:141] interprets it) that individuals are 'governed' by rules in any deterministic sense. This might be implied by Winch's qualification that individuals need not be aware of, nor able to formulate, the rules that they follow. However, Winch clearly sets up a contrast between social 'rules' and natural 'laws', and he stipulates that 'the notion of following a rule is logically inseparable from the notion of *making a mistake*' (Winch 1990:32). For Winch, it is inherent to a rule that individuals could violate it or deviate from it, instead of following it. Therefore, to use the language of contemporary post-empiricist philosophy, the phrase 'rule-generated' is more appropriate to Winch's meaning.

19 Indeed, Bhaskar (1989a:134) goes so far as to herald this as Winch's 'great insight' – that is, that 'social life does not exist independently of the concepts in terms of which agents think their own existence'.
20 'The phenomena being investigated present themselves to the scientist as an *object* of study; he observes them and notices certain facts about them' (Winch 1990:85).
21 Kuhn (1977:xiii) has remarked that physicists and historians alike 'are all practitioners of the hermeneutic method'.
22 'Sociology *is* a scientific discipline in the sense that it involves systematic methods of investigation, the analysis of data and the assessment of theories in the light of evidence and logical argument' (Giddens 1989:21–2). Giddens conveniently overlooks the consequence that this definition of science would not exclude practices such as astrology and alchemy.
23 It is sometimes suggested that Habermas retains the epistemological distinction between a logic of empiricism for the natural sciences, and a hermeneutical conception of the social sciences (for example Giddens 1979:259). But this is not—or at least not any longer—the case. Habermas's theory of 'discourse ethics' (see chapter 8) is based on the contention that 'normative claims to validity' in the intersubjective social world 'are *analogous to truth claims*' (Habermas 1990:56—original emphasis). Hence, 'the social fact that a norm is intersubjectively recognised' *(ibid.)* must be distinguished from 'its worthiness to be recognised' (*ibid.*: 61); establishing the former is a 'hermeneutical' task, whilst the latter requires the guidance of critical social theory. As I argued in chapter 1, Habermas subscribes to an 'ontological realism' which is similar in form to that of Bhaskar and Giddens.

4 WITTGENSTEIN'S RULE-FOLLOWING REMARKS AND CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

1 The evocative phrase 'always already' is frequently used by Habermas. He uses it in a quasi-transcendental manner, meaning: that which is (tacitly, implicitly) presupposed as the 'condition of possibility' for a mode of action—for example: 'validity claims are "always already" implicitly raised' (Habermas 1979:97; see chapter 8 below); 'the inescapability of the general presuppositions that *always already* underlie the communicative practice of everyday life' (Habermas 1990:130). Habermas takes the phrase from the phenomenological and hermeneutical tradition emanating from Husserl.
2 Habermas refers to this twentieth-century theoretical development as a change from the 'paradigm of the philosophy of the subject (or consciousness)', to the 'paradigm of communicative action' (see chapter 8).
3 Although Winch used the expression 'rule-governed', not 'rule-generated', the latter expresses his meaning better than the former because he did not mean to imply that rules 'govern' in any deterministic sense (see chapter 3, note 18).
4 Laws are just a type of 'objective' rule; 'rules, so far as they are objective, and therefore necessarily depend on knowledge of the object, are called laws' (Kant 1964:147).
5 These terms are basically synonymous; when I use one on its own it can generally be assumed that its cognates would suffice equally well. The expression 'tacit knowledge' was introduced by Polanyi (1967), and the expression 'know-how' was coined by Ryle (1945–6).
6 These two poles are represented in purest form by Descartes, who asserted that he knew his 'self' with greater immediacy and certainty than anything else in the world, and Hume, who asserted the very opposite—that he could perceive no such thing as his 'self' at all. Despite contradicting one another, Descartes's and Hume's introspections both take place in 'the theatre of consciousness'.

7 Along with Wittgenstein, Ryle is typically credited with bringing the phenomenon of tacit knowledge to philosophers' attention. But a careful reading of Ryle's (1945–6) article suggests that his meaning and intention is much more compatible with my reading of Wittgenstein than it is with Polanyi's theory of tacit knowledge. Ryle did not characterise 'know-how' as an epistemic power, and he regarded the notion that an individual 'has "implicit" but not "explicit" knowledge of the rules of right conduct' as a theoretical 'shuffle' *(ibid.: 7)*.

8 According to Collins (1985), scientists also cannot give full explicit descriptions of what they are able to *do* experimentally and technologically.

9 I do not think that any of the theorists mentioned by Turner–nor Giddens, Habermas or Bhaskar–use the term 'practice' or its cognates to mean 'a "hidden collective object" shared among a certain set of persons' (Turner 1994:102). The 'object' of his critique looks like his invented object.

10 Many philosophical commentators on Wittgenstein also project the concept 'tacit knowledge' onto Wittgenstein's philosophy (for example Janik 1989:214–17; Schwyzer 1990: 113–61; Genova 1995:200).

11 'Practical consciousness refers to tacit knowledge' (Giddens 1982b:180).

12 Bhaskar's TMSA espouses a very similar 'stratified' model of 'the agent' (Bhaskar 1986: 126).

13 'The redescription of a context of action in the concepts of social science might represent what is going on in ways different from those with which the agent is familiar' (Giddens 1984:341).

14 Habermas's (1991:335) depiction of 'the prereflective form of taken-for-granted background assumptions and naively mastered skills' is synonymous with Giddens's notion of (tacit) 'reflexive monitoring'.

15 'Resources…"exist" only in the capability of actors, in their capacity to "act otherwise"' (Giddens 1982a:11).

16 Actually, Giddens's objection is ambiguous; it could mean either (1) 'meaningful action' is *not* equivalent to '"rule-governed" conduct', or (2) Winch's treatment of this equivalence is inadequate.

17 Malcolm's (1993:81) translation.

18 However, Wittgenstein (1968:§31) suggests that even here 'one can also imagine someone's having learnt the game [of chess] without ever learning or formulating rules'.

19 As Rosen (1983:114–15) aptly puts it: 'the equation of meaning and rules is so widespread –and so little supported by explicit argument–as to suggest that it is, in Wittgenstein's terms, a philosophical *picture:* a view which, though explanatorily empty, nevertheless grips philosophers with its vividness and appeal to "common sense"'. See also Schatzki (1991) for a similar view.

20 I owe this example to Mark Peacock.

21 One would not expect to find cognitivist theory in an avowedly anti-theoretical reading of Wittgenstein, but Genova (1995:198) claims that 'in order to play chess, for example, or even ask questions about chess, one must recognise chess as chess'. (See Wittgenstein [1968:206]: 'I cannot try to see a conventional picture of a lion *as* a lion, anymore than an F as that letter.')

22 Kant is mercilessly ridiculed by Nietzsche (1990:41) for claiming to have '*discovered* a new faculty in man'.

23 Nietzsche (1990:41) jibes that Kant's formidable logic of transcendental deduction amounts to the utterly tautologous assertion that consciousness works *'by means of a faculty'*. I am grateful to one of the publisher's referees for the reference to Nietzsche.

24 See Latour and Woolgar (1986:174–83) for a fascinating account of the way in which 'artefacts' and 'facts' emerge from scientific practice; see also the discussion of experimental replicability in chapter 7, section VI.

25 Garfinkel (1984:68) actually asks the antonymous question, namely: 'how is an investigator *doing* it when he makes out the member of society to be a judgemental dope?' (see chapter 7).
26 Although many Wittgensteinian philosophers have (invariably surreptitiously) treated Wittgenstein's notion of 'language-game' as a 'real' feature of the human world, and the basis of an alternative ontology, Wittgenstein himself said that the notion is not a kind of discovery or insight, but a methodological device for highlighting phenomena of interest. Wittgenstein (1968: §§130–1) emphasised (his italics) that 'language-games are…set up as *objects of comparison*', and not 'a preconceived idea to which reality must correspond'.
27 Baker's and Hacker's conception of (Wittgensteinian) philosophy concurs with that of Winch (1972:83): 'one of our primary concerns is precisely to distinguish sense from nonsense'.
28 I see no reason why an advocate of 'tacit knowledge' should not rejoin to Baker and Hacker that their concept of 'grammar' makes no sense and is a metaphysical extravagance. How could such a dispute be settled? Through an appeal to 'grammar'?! As Wittgenstein (1975:§611) says: 'when two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and heretic'. I agree with Popper's (1966:297–8) suggestion that the term 'senseless' is 'better fitted for giving vent to one's personal indignation about metaphysicians and metaphysical systems than for a technical characterisation of a line of demarcation'. Edwards (1982: ch. 4) has an illuminating discussion of the way that Wittgenstein changed his use of the term 'nonsense' from denoting a metaphysical demarcation in the *Tractatus,* to a pragmatic judgement, made for a particular purpose, in the later work.

5 HAYEK'S AND GIDDENS'S EPISTEMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT AGAINST SOCIALISM

1 Despite his neo-Marxist background, Habermas's political stance is now located on the liberal ground occupied by Hayek and Giddens. In a recent interview, Habermas (1996:7) states that 'it is right to aim at retaining the effective steering and the incentives to innovate which are a part of a market economy'. There are also many similarities between the theoretical systems of Hayek and Habermas, for example their Kantian conception of justice and morality, their social evolutionism, and their methodological 'reconstruction' of 'abstract rules'.
2 Although Polanyi is well known for his philosophical theory of tacit knowledge, it is perhaps less well known that he extended this theory politically in exactly the same direction as Hayek: 'there exists no radical alternative to the capitalist system. "Planned production for community consumption" is a myth' (Polanyi 1951:138).
3 Hayek is presumably alluding to the Saint Simonian slogan (repeated by Marx 1938: 14): 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!'
4 However, despite his rejection of any form of socialism, Giddens (1994b:68) does acknowledge that there is sometimes a need to 'protect situations or values that the market is likely to destroy'. Hayek has no such qualms.
5 See Peacock (1993) for a somewhat different comparison and contrast to mine.
6 Nyíri (1988:22) claims that there is an affinity between Hayek's preoccupation with practical knowledge and Wittgenstein's later philosophy. And Gray (1984:13) claims that the influence of Wittgenstein on Hayek 'runs deep'. As I argued in the previous chapter, the ontological pictures of tacit knowledge and omnipresent orders of rules originate with Kant, hence Hayek might well have derived his theories from this source (as he himself says), and not Wittgenstein. If, on the other hand, Gray is

right, and Hayek did not reveal the influence of Wittgenstein on his thought, then Hayek read Wittgenstein through the same Kantian spectacles as Giddens.

7 In fact, Hayek concurs with Giddens's distinction between rules and (tacit) knowledge of how to apply them.

8 Social science and social theory are said to be at the forefront of modes of expert knowledge: 'the discourse of sociology and the concepts, theories, and findings of the other social sciences continually "circulate in and out" of what it is they are about' (Giddens 1990:43). Expert knowledge in general, and the social sciences in particular, are 'quite fundamental to the reflexivity of modernity as a whole' (*ibid.*: 40).

9 Giddens (1990:41) offers the following example of the way in which access to expert knowledge is mediated through practical consciousness:

> the lay individual cannot necessarily provide formal definitions of terms like 'capital' or 'investment' but everyone who, say, uses a saving account in a bank demonstrates an implicit and practical mastery of these notions.

Thus modern Western individuals know no more (perhaps less) about their banking system than Zande individuals know about their system of witchcraft and oracles (see Winch 1964).

10 Solomon (1970) has shown that Kant's postulation of the 'transcendental unity of apperception' (Descartes's *cogito*) degenerates into extreme scepticism as a direct result of Kant's own transcendental philosophy. Kant makes the 'I think' a necessary transcendental presupposition of any possible experience, and thereby not itself experienceable. The consequence of this transcendental argument is that 'because "I think's" cannot be individuated by individuating persons, it is possible, on Kant's analysis, that I share a *Transcendental Ego* with others, or that there are several subjects occupying "my" body…' (Solomon 1970:658).

Because tacit knowledge has the same transcendental status as Kant's unity of apperception (see previous chapter), it is subject to the same sceptical puzzles.

11 Wittgenstein's critique is directed at classical scepticism, idealism and G.E.Moore's 'commonsense realism'.

12 Wainwright (1994) reports that Hayek's libertarian political economy has directly influenced political reformers in the old Eastern bloc countries, leading to the paradoxical situation whereby his economic theory is being used as the model for extensive social engineering. This is paradoxical because Hayek's social theory warns against large-scale 'rationalist' intervention in the established social order.

13 In *The German Ideology,* Marx and Engels (1974) define one aspect of ideology as the presentation of a particular (class-based) political interest in the form of a claim to represent the general, universal, interest of all.

14 Most [television] series amount to advertisement for a consumption-centred version of the good life…the incessant commercials…convey the idea that human aspirations for liberty, pleasure, accomplishment and status can be fulfilled in the realm of consumption' (Gitlin, quoted by Bellah *et al.* 1985:280).

15 According to Marris and Mueller (1980:58), 'the corporate R & D laboratory…along with corporate advertising and marketing departments dictate consumer demand'. If I exaggerate the social determination of individual consciousness and action here, it is surely no more of an exaggeration than Giddens's (1994b:93) contrary description of modernity as 'a society of clever people'.

16 Although Popper may seem like an unlikely critic to invoke against the epistemological argument, he was extremely concerned about the modern cult of the expert, the 'obscurantist faith in the expert's special skill, and in his personal knowledge and

authority' (1972:23). I suggest that Popper's concern applies to entrepreneurs and managers just as much as it does to scientists.

17 A recent study found that the modern fishing industry generates 'up to 10lb of dead, discarded fish and 6lb of dead bottom-living creatures–starfish, worms and shellfish –for every marketable pound of sole caught', which has the consequence of 'wiping out the food chain' (*Daily Telegraph,* 27 March 1995).

18 Conversely: 'the amount of time spent in meetings in modern capitalist economies should not be underestimated. North (1984) has suggested that in the advanced capitalist countries as much as half of GNP may be accounted for by transaction costs arising from increasing division of labour and organisational complexity, and the growth of alienation, self-interested behaviour and policing associated with antagonistic social relationships' (Adaman and Devine 1996:534–5).

19 Roemer (1994:3) goes so far as to say that 'large capitalist firms are centrally planned organisations'.

6 'FREE TO ACT OTHERWISE'?

1 See Kennedy (1992) for a fascinating discussion (in relation to the dichotomy between 'illusion' and 'reality') of the way that intentionality and responsibility is operationalised in legal process.

2 Bhaskar's *Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom* is devoted to criticising Rorty.

3 Bhaskar (1989a:18) identifies the origin of the hermeneutical tradition in Kant's phenomenal/noumenal dichotomy, which gave rise to the later hermeneutical distinction between causal explanation *(Erklären)* for natural phenomena and interpretive understanding *(Verstehen)* for human action and consciousness. More recent carriers of the tradition include post-Wittgensteinian theorists such as Anscombe, Dray, Taylor and Winch, and 'continental' hermeneuticians such as Gadamer and Apel *(ibid.)*.

4 Bhaskar (1989a:45) says that 'the objects of social inquiry…only ever manifest themselves in open systems', which moreover, 'cannot be experimentally closed' (see next chapter).

5 The classic statement of this thesis was formulated by Davidson, who sought to 'defend the ancient–and commonsense–position' ([1963] 1982:3) that 'reasons' are 'causes'. Davidson's defence was occasioned by the writings of a number of post-Wittgensteinians (including Winch) who had rejected the position. But Davidson, unlike Bhaskar, accepts that compatibilism entails determinism.

6 Bhaskar frequently uses the prefix 'real' when referring to an entity whose enquiryindependent existence has been questioned by other theoretical traditions–for example, agency, mind, society, cause, relation, structure, etc. Adapting the doctrine of 'emotivism' (see chapter 4, above), when Bhaskar qualifies reasons, etc., as 'real', he is doing nothing more ontologically profound than if he were to assert the unqualified term with pronounced emphasis, or 'with the addition of some special exclamation marks' (Ayer 1970:107). As Wittgenstein (1975:§30) says, 'certainty is *as it were* a tone of voice in which one declares how things are, but one does not infer from the tone of voice that one is justified'.

7 McGinn (1991) coins the notion of 'cognitive closure' to cover this possibility.

8 Bhaskar (1989a:x) labels his theory of mind and agency 'synchronic emergent powers materialism'.

9 See also Nagel's seminal essay 'What is it like to be a bat?', where he argues, along Kantian lines, that we just do not have the conceptual apparatus to make sense of the mind-body relation: 'we have no conception of what an explanation of the physical nature of a mental phenomenon would be like' (Nagel 1979:166).

10 Bhaskar (1989a:12) posits a 'causal' criterion for ascribing reality to doubtful entities, which 'turns on the capacity of the entity whose existence is in doubt to bring about changes in material things'. Thus if the (unperceivable) hypothesised entity produces perceivable effects then it is 'real'. But this so-called 'criterion' is just a tautology; it says no more than 'if X exists it is real'. Nobody could sensibly deny that an entity which causes changes in material things is real (such a denial would be self-contradictory). Bhaskar's 'causal criterion' is really an analytic statement, not a *real* criterion. What he needs– *per impossible*–is a criterion that can be used to decide *which* (if any) of the competing hypothesised entities is responsible for producing the observed effect.

11 A favourite example of philosophers, quoted by Giddens (1976:73) and Bhaskar (1989a: 82), is Wittgenstein's (1968:§621) question: 'what is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?'. Not surprisingly, Wittgenstein does not attempt to answer his question.

12 Bhaskar (1989a:125) himself complains about the emptiness of 'Humean causal laws' –because they are 'analytically, that is, definitionally, true'.

13 Similarly, Giddens (1984:341) asserts that 'new knowledge in the social sciences will ordinarily have immediate transformational implications for the existing social world'. And likewise, Habermas (1989:436 n.62) assures us that, once equipped with critical theory, people can, 'with its aid…gain enlightenment about their emancipatory role in the process of history' (see chapter 8 for critical analysis of Habermas's theories).

7 MILGRAM VERSUS GARFINKEL

1 'Constructive analysis' refers generically to the practices of professional social theory and social science (Garfinkel and Sacks 1986:162).

2 Garfinkel does not use the phrase 'reflexivity of the actor', and Heritage's 'cognitivist' account of Garfinkel and ethnomethodology has been criticised by some ethnomethodologists (Button and Sharrock 1993:21 n.7). Nevertheless, I think that the phrase 'reflexivity of the actor' *is* an appropriate description for the picture of the individual which is presented in Garfinkel's *Studies*. See section VIII in this chapter.

3 Along with the 'constructionist' sociology of Knorr-Cetina (1983), Collins (1985), Mulkay (1985) and Latour and Woolgar (1986), ethnomethodology has been at the forefront of ethnographic investigation of experimental practice–see in particular Lynch, Livingston and Garfinkel (1983).

4 Garfinkel (1984:69) himself describes the results of his investigations as 'findings'.

5 Milgram (1974:209n) himself suggests that his experiments resemble Garfinkel's, both in terms of methodology and phenomena revealed.

6 Milgram (1977:98) prefers the term 'technical illusion' over 'deception'.

7 'A person who comes to the laboratory is an active, choosing adult, capable of accepting or rejecting the prescriptions for action addressed to him' (Milgram 1977:145).

8 Bloor (1992:269) asserts, on the basis of his interpretation of Wittgenstein's rule-following remarks, that, contrary to Garfinkel, 'the actor must be some form of cultural or judgmental dope'. But this, to repeat, is not Milgram's view.

9 Critics of Garfinkel invariably object that his investigations focus on 'trivialities' which reveal nothing that any sensible person does not already know about social existence (which is, ironically, very largely Garfinkel's point about social studies). However, one prominent sociologist has criticised the ethics of Garfinkel's studies– with a degree of outrage to match that which Milgram's experiments frequently elicit. Gouldner (1971:393) complains that, far from exhibiting a 'dispassionate and detached attitude towards the social world', Garfinkel displays 'a readiness to use it

in cruel ways. Here, objectivity and sadism become delicately intertwined'. I am grateful to one of the publisher's referees for this reference.

10 Milgram (1977:140), by contrast, maintains that 'the extreme stress induced in some subjects [in the obedience experiments] was unexpected', and he points out that 'before conducting the experiment, the procedures were discussed with many colleagues, and none anticipated the reactions that subsequently took place'.

11 '74 percent [of subjects] indicated that they had learned something of personal importance as a result of being in the study', and only '1.3 percent stated that they were sorry to have participated' (Milgram 1977:121 n.3).

12 Button (1991b:6), an ethnomethodologist, also states that in 'practical everyday' life, psychologists' 'random orders to administer people with electric shocks would be regarded with some scepticism'.

13 The contemporary relevance of Milgram's work has been chillingly highlighted once again by a war-crimes trial, in which Erich Priebke admitted taking the leading role in the killing of 335 Italian civilians. He pleaded in his defence that his actions constituted 'a legitimate reprisal' for Resistance attacks on German soldiers. The court accepted his plea of 'obedience as mitigation', and he was adjudged not to have 'acted in a cruel or premeditated way because he was obeying orders' (*The Guardian,* 6 August 1996:3). (This judgement was later overturned.)

14 In a follow-up questionnaire, sent out a year after the experiments were conducted, only 4 per cent of subjects claimed to be 'certain that the learner was *not* getting any shocks, while 96 per cent, in some degree or other, felt the learner was receiving the shocks' (Milgram 1977:126–7). It is difficult to see why subjects might continue to pretend to have been deceived a year after the event, and spatially isolated from the experimenter.

15 Milgram's (1974:45) report on a subject called 'Mr. Batta' hardly depicts a 'kindly citizen': 'after the 150-volt level, Batta has to force the learner's hand down on the shock plate, since the learner himself refuses to touch it'. The Nazi war-crimes defendant referred to in note 13 is also described by his lawyer as a 'good citizen'.

16 Harré (1979:105) claims that 'professional knowledge of electricity' is an important factor in knowing whether or not high-voltage electric shocks are harmful. This suggests that, despite his ontological picture of the 'knowledgeable', 'reflexive actor', Harré has an extremely low estimation of the factual knowledge commanded by *real* people.

17 'Reports were filled with accounts of astonishment, bewilderment, shock, anxiety, embarrassment, and anger, and with charges by various family members that the student was mean, inconsiderate, selfish, nasty, or impolite' (Garfinkel 1984:47).

18 Wittgenstein's 'we' refers to philosophers doing 'philosophy of mind', whereas, of course, my 'we' refers to social theorists doing social description and criticism.

19 Collins notes that Popper also drew attention to the complexity involved in the seemingly straightforward idea of replication: 'the repetition B of an event A is not identical with A, or indistinguishable from A, but only *more or less similar* to A' (Popper, quoted by Collins 1985:30–original emphasis). Popper adds that it is 'naive' in the extreme 'to look upon repetition as something ultimate or given' *(ibid.)*.

20 Collins and Mulkay are concerned with experimental replication *within* a scientific field; I am extending, or 'replicating' their discussion to the question of the 'legitimacy' of experimentation outside of natural science, in the social world.

21 Milgram (1977:143) is also critical of much of orthodox experimental psychology, with its 'cardboard procedures' resulting in a 'patently trivial and useless exercise' for subjects.

22 See Miller (1986) and Gillet and Pigden (1996) for some astute observations on the 'hermeneutical' qualities of the obedience experiments.

23 Taking Garfinkel's argument a stage further, Giddens (1994b:83) makes the extraordinary claim that in 'reflexive modernity' 'one even has to settle what one's "sexuality" is'.
24 See Pleasants (1997), where I argue that Lynch's critique of recent developments in the sociology of scientific knowledge is premised on an alternative (rather than a 'dissolved') 'general theory' of social action and social order. I also argue that Lynch makes Kripke into a 'cultural dope'–by projecting social-theoretical interests onto Kripke's (1982) reading of Wittgenstein, and by performing considerable '(re)interpretive work' on Kripke's text (i.e. respecifying Kripke's problematic as a 'social constructivist' one).
25 Note that the grammar of this phrase has very similar *a priori* connotations to Habermas's expression 'always already' (see chapter 4, note 1).

8 HABERMAS AND THE IDEA OF A CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

1 It is interesting to recall that the subtitle to Marx's *Capital* is *Critique of Political Economy* –which, according to Popper (1966:332 n.3), alludes 'unmistakeably to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*'. Popper's interpretation of the allusion is that Marx meant: 'just as Kant criticised the claim of metaphysics, revealing that it was *no science* but largely *apologetic theology,* so I criticise here the corresponding claims of bourgeois economics'. If this is right, Marx's substantive critique of social and economic conditions is perhaps more closely related to the form of Kant's critical philosophy than is generally acknowledged (see also Barker 1978; and Bubner 1982:42–4).
2 However, despite the Critical Theorists' tirade against positivism, their logical-positivist contemporaries (for example Neurath, Carnap, Hahn) were in fact committed to socialism, seeing a natural entailment between their 'scientific philosophy' and their political values. Rather like Marx, they understood the relationship between science and socialism to be 'objective' (not personal), and insisted that positivism, 'without reserve…firmly opposes the prevailing bourgeois philosophy' (Neurath, quoted by Hilmy 1987:311).
3 This rather naive optimism vanished in the pessimism of Horkheimer's and Adorno's later 'dialectic of Enlightenment' years.
4 Kitching (1994:188) explains that 'it is in their total lack of interest in economics (a lack of interest that could be perfectly rationalized as a retreat from "economism" and "crude materialism") that the Frankfurt theorists broke most dramatically with all the other traditions of orthodox Marxism'.
5 '*Everything* whose validity is at all disputable rests on shaky foundations. It matters little if the ground underfoot shakes a bit less for those who debate problems of physics than for those who debate problems of morals and aesthetics. The difference is a matter of degree only, as the postempiricist philosophy of science has shown' (Habermas 1990: 14).
6 At the beginning of his exposition of the TCA Habermas (1991:96) points outs that 'in the course of analysis it will become evident how much this concept owes to investigations in the philosophy of language stemming from Wittgenstein'.
7 *Verständigung* can be translated either as 'reaching agreement' or as 'coming to an understanding'. Clearly, the former is more difficult to achieve than the latter (see section V. ii later in the chapter).
8 Compare Giddens (1984:18): 'every competent social actor…is ipso *facto* a social theorist on the level of discursive consciousness'. Habermas and Giddens are clearly following ethnomethodology in picturing ordinary individuals as (non-professional) critical and social theorists.

9 Wittgenstein is not referring here to any *particular* language-game; he means by the term something like 'our basic way of acting and being', or simply 'our form of life'.
10 Bertram (1997:563) persuasively makes the point that the 'abstruseness and complexity' of much of contemporary political philosophy sits very uneasily with the democratic values of its (liberal and socialist) practitioners.
11 According to Popper (1966:291), who was one of the principal authors of the modern doctrine of fallibilism: 'the fact that a sentence appears to some or even to all of us to be "self-evident" …is no reason why it should be true. (The fact that we are unable to conceive of the falsity of a statement is in many cases only a reason for suspecting that our power of imagination is deficient or undeveloped.)'. Compare Wittgenstein (1975: §2): 'from its *seeming* to me–or to everyone–to be so, it doesn't follow that it *is* so'.
12 'Empiricist discourse' would not, of course, count as discourse for Habermas.
13 I hope that I am not understood to be suggesting that rational argument and agreement are not vital to scientific practice; I am only challenging Habermas's theoretical account of them.
14 Much fascinating work has been done by ethnomethodologists, sociologists, and others, in Social Studies of Science, examining actual processes of agreement and disputation in scientific practice (see Pickering 1992; Pleasants 1997 for overview). This work has been conspicuously ignored by Habermas.
15 Kant (1964:99) also maintains that 'a sufficient and at the same time general criterion of truth cannot possibly be given'. But this is held to apply only to the *content* of knowledge–transcendental logic then goes on to specify criteria for the *form* that all valid knowledge must assume; it 'expounds the universal and necessary rules of the understanding' which 'must in these rules furnish criteria of truth'. Habermas follows Kant in relinquishing authority on the content of a critical social theory and claiming authority over its form.
16 In fact Habermas has applied the perspective of discourse ethics and the TCA directly to the question of 'animal rights'. According to Habermas (1993:108–9), because animals are *partially* able to participate in communicative action with humans, we humans therefore have a 'quasi-moral responsibility' towards them. This responsibility means that animals have a right not to be abused by humans, but they do not have a right not to be killed by us. Does Habermas *really* think that this argument is capable of convincing any vegetarian that their 'fundamental conviction' is mistaken; does he really think that they *should* be so persuaded?

9 CONCLUSION

1 Giddens's two most recent publications are entitled *Beyond Left and Right,* and *The Third Way*. The political manifesto outlined in *The Third Way* is not the 'Third Way' that he denounced in *Beyond Left and Right* ('there is no Third Way of this sort') –this earlier 'Third Way' refers to 'market socialism' (see chapter 5).
2 Giddens (1984:340–original emphasis) holds much the same view: 'criticism of false belief *(ceteris paribus)* is a *practical intervention* in society, a political phenomenon in a broad sense of that term'; and Habermas also opposes the positivist fact-value distinction– for example, by grounding the fundamental principles of 'discourse ethics' in the 'fact' of linguistic activity (see chapter 8).
3 'Friends of Blair', *Times Higher Educational Supplement* 1325, 27 March 1998:20–1.
4 Miller (1986:65) draws attention to 'Milgram's articulateness, his novel use of metaphor and analogy, the sheer boldness and directness of his presentation'; and adds that this is highly 'significant in terms of the impact of his work…It is almost as if his goals, at times, were those of a playwright or film director, as much as of a social scientist'.

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NAME INDEX

SUBJECT INDEX