

WINCH, WITTGENSTEIN AND CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

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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 misconstrued. 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 (mis)understanding 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 students³ 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 *Wissenschaft* 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 intricately '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'). 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 priori* 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 priori*, 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 diversity 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 traditions – 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 constructing them', and 'theory conceals differences and overgeneralises'. Yet, just like Winch, in the course of her exposition on Wittgenstein's anti-theoricism, 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)

'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 naïve 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

argumentation (see chapter 4). They object to Winch's 'linguisticification' 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 impassioned 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' (*Erklärung*) 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 intractably 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 – 'individual 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 pretension (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 positivist-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.

- 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 Vj). 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 'historical' 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: 'rationally-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 exposing, 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 *making* 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'. Disengagement in the game of professional football, I would have thought, can have very different effects on 'moral character' than engagement in the game of tidily-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, innately 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.4) 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). 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 pseudo-scientific 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; Schwitzer 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: 831) 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, any more 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'.