an astronomer predicts that a comet will appear over Britain in January 1974, the fact that he or she, as an expert, thinks that this is so, is a good reason that a layman can have for thinking that the comet will appear. As a layman, the reasons which the astronomer has for thinking this do not enter into the formation of his beliefs; those reasons are rather subject to criticism from fellow members in the community of astronomers who are sufficiently familiar with the theory on which the prediction was based. The natural scientist reasons about nature and with scientific colleagues, and his or her conclusions constitute the rational grounds for many of the layman’s beliefs about the natural world. If the social world is reduced to the natural one, considerations like these come into play structuring the way in which a theorist like Downs thinks about his object of study. If one is to escape from the constraints imposed by a technocratic ideology it is essential that one concede that when dealing with human societies, the object of study comprises groups of rational interacting human beings, who can both be reasoned about and reasoned with. This implies that the community of social scientists can, potentially at least, be expanded to embrace the members of society themselves, and with this socialisation and democratisation of knowledge the distinction between layman and expert is progressively eroded. Along with it the opinion of the ‘expert’ loses its sacrosanct character and no longer serves in itself as a rationally adequate ground for the layman’s beliefs about society.

Considerations like these provide us with some idea of the sense in which an ideology may be said to ‘reflect’ a material base. For it is now clear that the technocratic mode of thought derives its plausibility from the fact that it is grounded in a social system which is characterised by a rigid division of labour, and by a corresponding fragmentation, specialisation and hierarchisation of knowledge, which is taken to be of the ‘natural order’ of things. As a consequence of these divisions the utterances of those who wield power are set up as if they were not to be questioned by the masses, who are always confronted by jargon whenever they attempt to penetrate beyond the claims of those in authority. As such the ideology not only ‘reflects’ a social system, it also legitimates and reinforces it, precisely by posing questions which presuppose its basic divisions rather than undermining them. What is more, as we have seen above, a technocratic ideology also serves as a basis for the reproduction and intensification of these divisions from which it springs to the extent that it is embodied in institutions which no structure society that conflicts between ‘multiple goals’ are not ‘allowed’.

Explanations of this kind do not exclude explanations for the tenacity of ideological discourse which appeal to bias, like those which were presented in the earlier part of this paper. As was suggested there, the occurrence of bias has itself to be explained in terms of a particular kind of social structure, and what we have done here is to unravel some of the characteristics of that structure. What has emerged is that the cleavages which underpin liberal democratic ideology and the related technocratic ideology can be woven into the very framework of a social formation, shackling in the first instance the minds of the intellectuals who reflect on it. Nothing short of a revolution in consciousness is required of them if they are to free themselves from the limits it imposes.

Notes


2 I am grateful to Roy Edgley and John Menham for an extensive criticism of an earlier draft of this paper.


4 L. Althusser, ibid., pp127-186.


7 N. Girvan, Copper in Chile, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1972, p60.

8 This is discussed in more detail in my 'Copper: The Chilean Experience', of which I have a few copies available.

9 Subversion in Chile: A Case Study in U.S. Corporate Intrigue in the Third World, Spokesman Books, 1972. Figures in brackets in the text refer to page numbers in this selection from the Anderson papers.


Wittgenstein and bourgeois philosophy

KT Fann

Most Marxist philosophers dismiss Wittgenstein as a typical bourgeois philosopher whose philosophy is essentially reactionary. It is strange that these same Marxist philosophers find it perfectly permissible for Marx to learn from the arch-idealist-conservative philosopher Hegel but do not permit themselves the benefit of learning from a philosopher of Wittgenstein’s stature. Just as Marx had to settle his philosophical accounts with Hegel, modern Marxist philosophers must settle their accounts with Wittgenstein.

It is true that the formalism, solipsism, and mysticism of the early Wittgenstein was bourgeois philosophy at its logical extreme. Precisely because of this, Wittgenstein’s later attack on his early philosophy constitutes a major attack on bourgeois philosophy in general. The later Wittgenstein was a fighter against bourgeois philosophy from within. His attack on formalism, solipsism and skepticism, his characterization of traditional philosophy as a kind of disease to be cured, his branding of metaphysical statements as nonsense, and his urging his students to quit academic philosophy and do something useful - all this and more can only be regarded as a progressive movement within bourgeois philosophy. Like the proverbial child who called attention to the king’s nakedness Wittgenstein called attention to the emptiness of bourgeois philosophy.

Engels remarked somewhere that those who employed the Hegelian method became revolutionaries and those who followed the Hegelian system became reactionaries. Wittgenstein made a significant contribution to the philosophical method which may well prove to be an important contribution to the
Wittgenstein's conception of language

Wittgenstein's major criticism of traditional philosophy is directed at the metaphysical conception of language as typified by his own youthful work. The youthful Wittgenstein assumed that the function of language was to picture facts. According to this traditional conception of language, the individual words in language name objects, the mental cramp. The great part of Wittgenstein's later work is directed against this conception of language. Wittgenstein starts the Blue Book with the question: 'What is the meaning of a word?' This question, the like of questions 'What is time?', 'What is truth?', 'What is beauty', etc, produce in us a mental cramp.

We feel that we can't point to anything in reply to them and yet ought to point to something. (We are up against one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: a substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it). [BB, p1]

The phrase "the meaning of a word" exercises a certain spell which results in the idea that there must be a thing (either an object or a quality) corresponding to each noun and adjective, that this thing is the meaning of the word, and is named by it as an individual is named by a proper name. To break this spell Wittgenstein first suggested that instead of asking 'What's the meaning?' we should ask the more fundamental question: 'What is a word?'. [BB, p1]. He made the famous recommendation: Don't ask for the meaning, ask for the use. One advantage of this slogan is that 'use' carries with it no suggestion of an object corresponding to a word. Another is that 'use' cannot be understood merely by looking at the word, it can only be understood in contexts. This is why Wittgenstein suggests that instead of comparing the relationship between the word and the meaning to that between the money and the cow that you can buy it with, we should compare it to the relationship between money and its use [PI, sec.120]. The use of money is not an object separable from the money, and the specific use of money to buy things (cf. the specific use of words to name things) is only a part of, and makes sense only in, a larger and more complicated system. Thus Wittgenstein provides this rule of thumb in the Investigations: 'For a large class of cases - though not for all - in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be explained thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language'. [PI, Sec.43]

Wittgenstein then compares words in a language with tools in a tool-box. 'Think of words as instruments characterized by their use' [BB, p67]. 'Think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a ruler, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screws. - The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects [PI, Sec.11]. A word is characterized by its use just as a tool is characterized by its function. This analogy aptly reminds us that words are used for different purposes. Sentences as well as words may be understood as tools or instruments. When we become confused about the sense of a sentence, Wittgenstein offers us the following advice: compare the sentence as an instrument, and at its sense as its employment' [PI, Sec.421].

'Ask yourself: On what occasion, for what purpose, do we say this? What kind of actions accompany these words?... In what scenes will they be used; and what for?' [PI, Sec.409]. It is in this way that we come to see how words and sentences are instruments used to accomplish certain purposes. Thus, for Wittgenstein, 'To understand a sentence is to be prepared for one of its uses. If we can't think of any use for it at all, then we don't understand it at all'. The use of language ordinarily has a point just as instruments are usually made for some purposes. But there is no single point of the practice of language as a whole. It is not one practice or one instrument, having one mental function and serving one essential purpose. Language is not one tool serving one purpose but a collection of tools serving a variety of purposes. Language is not defined for us as an arrangement of words expressing one definite purpose. Rather "language" is for us a name for a collection' [Z, Sec.322].

What emerges is an instrumentalist (or pragmatic) conception of language. 'Language is an instrument. Its concepts are instruments' [PI, Sec.569].

So far we have directed our attention to the practical aspect of language. However, Wittgenstein was interested in reminding us of another important feature of language, i.e. its social nature. The point is made whenever he compares languages with games, or whenever he speaks of, and constructs, different 'language-games'. Wittgenstein compared language with a chess game and looked at a word as a piece in chess and an utterance as a move in chess.

'The use of money is a phenomenon of language, not about some non-spatial, non-temporal phantasm... But we talk about it as we do about the pieces in chess when we are stating the rules of the game, not describing their physical properties. The question "What is a word really?" is analogous to "What is a piece in chess?"' [PI, Sec.108].

Wittgenstein then compares words in a language with tools in a tool-box. 'Think of words as instruments characterized by their use' [BB, p67]. 'Think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a ruler, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screws. - The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects [PI, Sec.11]. A word is characterized by its use just as a tool is characterized by its function. This analogy aptly reminds us that words are used for different purposes. Sentences as well as words may be understood as tools or instruments. When we become confused about the sense of a sentence, Wittgenstein offers us the following advice: compare the sentence as an instrument, and at its sense as its employment' [PI, Sec.421].

'Ask yourself: On what occasion, for what purpose, do we say this? What kind of actions accompany these words?... In what scenes will they be used; and what for?' [PI, Sec.409]. It is in this way that we come to see how words and sentences are instruments used to accomplish certain purposes. Thus, for Wittgenstein, 'To understand a sentence is to be prepared for one of its uses. If we can't think of any use for it at all, then we don't understand it at all'. The use of language ordinarily has a point just as instruments are usually made for some purposes. But there is no single point of the practice of language as a whole. It is not one practice or one instrument, having one mental function and serving one essential purpose. Language is not one tool serving one purpose but a collection of tools serving a variety of purposes. Language is not defined for us as an arrangement of words expressing one definite purpose. Rather "language" is for us a name for a collection' [Z, Sec.322].

What emerges is an instrumentalist (or pragmatic) conception of language. 'Language is an instrument. Its concepts are instruments' [PI, Sec.569].

So far we have directed our attention to the practical aspect of language. However, Wittgenstein was interested in reminding us of another important feature of language, i.e. its social nature. The point is made whenever he compares languages with games, or whenever he speaks of, and constructs, different 'language-games'. Wittgenstein compared language with a chess game and looked at a word as a piece in chess and an utterance as a move in chess.

'We talk about what a piece in chess is one must understand the whole game, the rules defining it, and the role of the piece in the game. Similarly we might say, the meaning of a word is its place in a language-game. Use and characteristic is, thus, analogous to making a move in chess following the rules. Wittgenstein put it this way:

... a move in chess doesn't consist simply in moving a piece in such-and-such a way on the board... but in the circumstances that we call 'playing a game of chess', 'solving a chess problem', and so on. [PI, Sec.31] Such a move is comparable to making utterances in a language: Can I say 'lububu' and mean 'If it doesn't rain I shall go for a walk'?... It is only in language that I can mean something by something. [PI, p18e note].

Thus we cannot call anything a word or a sentence unless it is part of that kind of a rule-governed activity which we call a language. A language, we may say, is a set of activities (or practices) defined by certain rules.

In order to be clear about the social nature of language Wittgenstein analysed the concept of following a rule: What does the activity called 'following a rule' consist in? To start with, Wittgenstein asks, 'Is what by the rule something that it would be possible for only one man to do, and to do only once in his life?
of thing he means by 'methods' are, for example: imagining or inventing language-games or forms of life to loosen up a mental cramp; calling attention to some well-known facts which are forgotten when philosophical questions are 'confusions', 'vexations', 'intellectual discomforts', or 'mental cramps' comparable to some kind of mental illness. He also said that philosophers were in a muddle about things; that they ask certain questions without understanding what those questions mean; that the asking of those questions results from 'a vague mental uneasiness' like that which leads children to ask 'Why?'. Hence, 'A philosophical problem has the form 'I don't know my way about'.' [PI, Sec.123]

A person caught in a philosophical perplexity is compared to a man who wants to get out but doesn't know how, or a fly in a fly-bottle. Philosophy, as Wittgenstein conceives it, is 'a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.' [PI, Sec.109] His aim is - 'To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.' [PI, Sec.309].

The metaphorical description of philosophical problems in psychological terms is an appropriate characterization of Wittgenstein's own methods and aim of philosophy. 'The philosophical treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness' [PI, Sec.255]. Just as there is not one conclusive therapy for all mental illness; 'There is not one philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies.' [PI, Sec.313]. The sort

Photograph of Wittgenstein as an Austrian army officer, from his army identity card, June 1918. From Wittgenstein by William Warren Bartley III, reviewed below.
is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to. The one that gives me philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring itself in question. The clarity that we are aiming at is indeed complete clarity. But this simply means that philosophical problems should completely disappear." [PI, Sec.113]. Wittgenstein makes it quite clear what he was doing. 'The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumbs that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language.' [PI, Sec.119].

This negative (or 'critical' in the Marxlian sense) philosophical task of uncovering or unmasking bourgeois philosophy is made abundantly clear when Wittgenstein said, 'Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems only to destroy what is supposed to exist, that is, all that is great and important...? What we are destroying is nothing but castles-in-the-air and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand.' [PI, Sec.118].

Wittgenstein conceives his philosophical task to be helping those who are obsessed by philosophical problems to achieve complete clarity, so that they are no longer tormented by those questions. Philosophy, in this sense, 'leaves everything as it is.' [PI, Sec.124]. Once this clarity is achieved, once the mental health is restored, they can go on to do other things. Like psychoanalysis, therapeutic philosophy can help afflicted individuals gain sanity. However, like psychoanalysis too, which can be of only a very limited use because it fails to deal with the underlying social causes of mental illness, Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophy can only have a limited function because it does not deal with the social causes of the philosophical disease. It would only be fair to point out that Wittgenstein seems to be aware of this when he said, 'The sickness of a time is cured by an alteration in the mode of life of human beings, and the sickness of philosophical problems can be cured only through a changed mode of thought and of life, not through a change wrought by an individual.' [PI, p27].

Wittgenstein's medicine was, in the end, import against the philosophical sickness of the time. His goal of dissolving bourgeois philosophy could not be a success. As Marx and Engels pointed out long ago, '... all forms and products of consciousness cannot be dissolved by mental criticism... but only by the practical overthrow of the actual social relations which gave rise to this idealistic humbug: that not criticism but revolution is the driving force of history, also of religion, of philosophy and all other types of theory.'

Notes


2 Compare this with Marx: 'Man is in the most literal sense of the word a non-person, not only a social animal, but an animal which can develop into an individual only in society. Production by isolated individuals outside of society - something which might happen as an exception to a civilized man who by accident got into the wilderness and already dynamically possessed within himself the forces of society - is as great an absurdity as the idea of the development of language without individuals living together and talking to one another.' A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Chicago, 1904, p268.

3 The German Ideology, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1964, p50.

Trevor Pateman

1 The significance of insignificant acts

In this book I shall criticise a variety of everyday communicational acts and omissions, including both those which occur in face-to-face situations and those which emanate from the mass media. I do so in the context of an attempt to theorise a practice or practices of intervention already carried on in opposition to such phenomena but which I think might well be developed further. It is therefore not the object of this book to contribute to any one, nor even several, academic disciplines (though I draw on a range of academic work), but rather to produce a sort of manual which might be used in the conduct of everyday life.

But why is everyday life important? Why should making it different make any difference? I answer these questions by stating and illustrating a central assumption of the book, namely, that nothing may say or do is non-significant; every action has meaning, even if that meaning is unconscious to oneself or others. In contrast to this position, when an action is taken for granted, it is treated as non-significant, that is, without meaning. Such taking for granted is habitual, probably unavoidable if we are to get on with a job in hand, but often disastrous in its consequences when it is never challenged. To take for granted is equivalent to naturalising it, that is, consigning it to the realm of nature external to Man and lacking meaning in itself. Thus the action becomes an alien thing, over and against Man, unamenable to control or change - despite the fact that it is nothing but Man's own action which is being thus reified. When generalised, such reification gives rise to a metaphysics of meaninglessness, and its practical consequences are variously theorised as alienation, privatisation and apathy. The causes of such development clearly lie not in the mind of the individual, but in the specific forms of social organisation which generate such a consciousness. And the irony is that the very consciousness which is generated by these social forms is incapable of understanding the processes which have given rise to it and, thus, unable to criticise these processes in theory, it reproduces and strengthens them in practice.

Developments in Western society - bureaucratisation, technologisation - intensify the processes of reification in everyday life. Developments in Western society - bureaucratisation, technologisation - intensify the process of reification in everyday thought and behaviour: the use of phrases such as 'I only work here' or 'I'm... This article is a slightly edited version of the first chapter of Trevor Pateman's forthcoming book, to be published by the Harvester Press in paperback and hardback in Spring 1975. The editors of Radical Philosophy are grateful to the Harvester Press for permission to print.