

# THE IDEA OF A WELTANSCHAUUNG AND ITS RELATION TO PHILOSOPHY

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(rough draught)

## I. Winch's Argument

1. Early readers of *The Idea of a Social Science* tended to respond to the book in ways that missed its philosophical import, perhaps partly because Peter Winch himself did not see the need to forestall this kind of response. They thought the book offered a kind of *Weltanschauung*, an outlook on human life and its relation to science, a reading that seems to have made the book attractive to some of them and repellent to others. Geert-Lueke Lueken seems to be, on the whole, favourably disposed, but in his reading too I seem to detect a response of this type. I hope that by showing in what ways such a reading misses the mark I shall be able to point a way out of some of the problems that Lueken encounters in trying to understand Winch.

Lueken starts out by summarizing what he takes to be Winch's view on the methodology of the social sciences, with which he seems to be in basic agreement. He then goes on to argue that Winch's position is problematic in as far as it commits him to a form of relativism. In the third section, Lueken proposes his own solution to the problem of relativism, invoking the open character of language games and social practices, and in the final section he criticizes Winch's second thoughts about the nature of human interchange and its relation to force in the new preface to *The Idea of a Social Science*. I shall, discuss these sections in turn, except the third with which I find myself in agreement. As far as possible, I shall let Winch speak on his own behalf by quoting his words.

2. According to Lueken, Winch was putting forward a substantive description of what social scientists *are* doing, or, alternatively, a substantive recommendation as to what they *should be* doing: in order properly to identify the human practices they are studying, they must begin by getting clear about the concepts the participants themselves use in talking about the practices. Lueken talks here of

participation in the practice being studied and, at least potentially, communication with the ... actors. Field research in the social sciences is a necessary condition of social scientific knowledge ... because the ... participation and communication is a condition and test of an adequate identification of the activities under investigation.

he reason for this is that social phenomena are essentially different from natural phenomena: they are constituted as what they are by community agreement. The ultimate basis for this view is a conception of the nature of linguistic meaning. Following Wittgenstein's lead, it is held, Winch argues that what constitutes following a rule is determined by agreement among members of the community in which the rule is upheld. This entails, among other things, that the meaning of linguistic expressions is socially determined.

This also means that the social scientist ought to defer to the authority of those she is studying as far as the understanding of their practices is concerned. Unlike the situation in natural science, a conception of what is going on is already part of the reality facing the student of social affairs. Hence there are limits to the degree to which she may question or disagree with the participants' own account of what they are doing. This, in turn, puts a damper on the opportunity for cross-cultural criticism, a point which has brought down charges of relativism on Winch. While Lueken appears on the whole to agree with Winch as he reads him, on this score he seems inclined to join the critics: he argues that Winch is not wholly successful in countering these charges, but cedes too much to the authority of the participants.

3. Now I would contend that it is an obvious misunderstanding of Winch's intentions to suppose that he was trying to describe the specific procedures adopted by social scientists, let alone trying to prescribe a procedure. He himself made this explicit in responding to a critic of his work: 'I was not advocating any particular procedure ("First grasp the concepts and then apply these to the actions"), but saying something about the character of certain sorts of investigation ...'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'Mr. Louch's Idea of a Social Science', *Inquiry* 7 (1964), p. 207.

It is sometimes thought that the philosopher of science is engaged in the business of helping the scientist hone his tools, developing new approaches for the scientist to employ, or maybe suggesting worthwhile lines of research. I would like to suggest a more fruitful perspective: the aim of philosophical reflection about the sciences is to get clear about the relation between a form of investigation and its object by virtue of which the investigation can be said to be *concerned with* ('about') that object. Thus, in discussing the nature of social phenomena we will at the same time be discussing what it would mean for something to *be an investigation* of social phenomena. The point, then, is not that in order to study social phenomena we have to *start* by studying the participants' concepts before going on to study what they do, but rather that *in* studying what they do we *will*, among other things, be studying their concepts (or as I should prefer to put it, their understanding of themselves).

This leaves the question of procedure open: as Winch puts it in the essay from which I just quoted:

Perhaps it would be clearer to say that I was investigating the concept of the social: that is, trying to bring out some of those features of a state of affairs that we have in mind when we call it a social state of affairs. ... when we have determined what will and will not count as an explanation of a certain kind of phenomenon, we still have the task of finding the best methods for producing examples of what will so count.<sup>2</sup>

Still, though Winch is not taking sides here in favour of one group of social scientists against another, his discussion, by advancing their self-understanding, might nevertheless be taken to have had an effect on the conduct of inquiry by removing certain prejudices, thus for instance freeing social scientists from the obligation to try to emulate natural scientists (or rather, to emulate their idea of what natural scientists are doing).

Indeed, if we take a look at the sort of procedure attributed to Winch, it should be obvious that the whole idea is incoherent. To suggest that we should start

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<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 203. I am not sure whether Winch would have described his view of the task in precisely these words later on, but I am sure he would have stuck to the main point.

our inquiry into an alien culture by entering into communication with the natives, as Lueken does, is to assume that the problem has been solved from the start, for in order to judge that we are indeed succeeding in communicating with them we already need to have a measure of understanding.<sup>3</sup> This point is connected with a misunderstanding of the sense in which linguistic meaning is a community matter. If this is taken to entail that issues of meaning are to be resolved by identifying a certain range of reactions in the community of speakers, this would involve us in a logical circle, since we should have to understand the language before we can tell *what* reactions are relevant, and what *kind of relevance* they have.

It seems to me evident that, in his discussion of rule-following, Winch is not laying down a procedure for settling issues about meaning and rule-following, but rather *showing a place* for talk about rules. Thus, when he writes,

one has to take account not only of the actions of the person whose behaviour is in question as a candidate for the category of rule-following, but also the *reactions of other people* to what he does (p. 30)<sup>4</sup>,

he is addressing the question *what it might mean to say* that someone is following a rule, not suggesting how one can tell what rule he is following or what is the correct way of following it. Reactions do not determine meaning, rather the context in which meanings are talked about is one in which certain reactions are taken for granted.

4. Acknowledging this point will help us avoid the conundrum of whether, say, the social anthropologist studying the life of the Azande should or should not defer to the natives' authority concerning their own lives. To think of the issue in these

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<sup>3</sup> In fact, Lueken wavers a bit on this point, in talking about 'potential communication' as a method for the social scientist. It is hard to see how potential communication could be a scientific procedure. It is not something we do. This may give a hint that Lueken has doubts about the idea that Winch is in fact attempting to lay down a procedure.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. also pp. 32, 39. Winch's book appeared in 1958, before the issue of rule-following and the community view had become the sort of flogging horse they are today. Otherwise he might have been at greater pains explicitly to rule out this misunderstanding (thus, he might have been more cautious about using an expression like 'established standard' (p. 32) in connection with the notion of following a rule).

terms is to misunderstand what is involved in taking the natives' understanding into account. A common error is to take this to mean that the anthropologist must treat the natives' claims as truth-conditions for his own judgments about them: for his account of their lives to be correct, on this understanding, is a matter of its being consistent with what they would say about themselves. But this again, of course, presupposes that he is already clear about the sense of their utterances, and it is precisely this question that the anthropologist should be concerned with.

The misunderstanding involved here is analogous to the one that Wittgenstein is trying to forestall in the following oft-quoted remark in *Philosophical Investigations*:

'So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?' [he imagines someone asking, and he answers] It is what human beings *say* that is true and false, and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.<sup>5</sup>

What the anthropologist should strive to understand is, of course, the natives' form of life. Now it is true that agreement in form of life and agreement in opinions are not independent matters. Wittgenstein goes on to concede that '[i]f language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but (queer as this may sound) in judgments', and that 'what we call "measuring" is *partly* determined by a *certain* constancy in results of measurement'<sup>6</sup>. We could not make out how language enters the lives of the natives unless we could find substantive agreement among them, including of course agreement in judgments. But neither must we forget that a large part of human communication concerns matters on which people *disagree*. Since disagreement is only possible against a background of agreement, our conflicts too will show what we agree on. Actually, the natives' understanding of things will often more eloquently show itself in their disagreements, in the ways they correct themselves and one another, in the conflicts of opinion that arise between them, etc.

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<sup>5</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, § 241.

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., § 242. My italics.

Lueken represents Winch's view by comparing the anthropologist's relation to the natives to that which holds between competing scientific communities.

For the difficulty does not just obtain between different scientific communities. In the social sciences it may even arise between the scientist and his object... The community being investigated is in a sense a third party, whereas the objects investigated in natural science are not a party at all.<sup>7</sup>

Though he does not attribute to Winch the view that the anthropologist should automatically defer to the natives, he still seems to regard the issue along similar lines: as though there were a competition between the anthropologist and the natives concerning the correct account of their lives, as though the matter had to be negotiated between them, the natives having a say even if not the final say. But I would suggest this entire way of looking at the issue is misguided, since any idea of pairing off our opinions against theirs would presuppose that the problem itself, that of understanding the terms in which they think about these matters, has been resolved: it is only to the extent that we have understood the others that we can be taken to be agreeing or disagreeing with them.

Deferring to the natives' judgments would be the anthropological analogue of the sort of scissors-and-paste history denigrated by R. G. Collingwood in *The Idea of History*: the idea that the historian should simply transpose the assertions contained in his sources into his own text. Today we have something very much like scissors-&-paste social science. I believe we are all familiar with the uncritical use of questionnaires by contemporary sociologists and behavioural scientists. Thus, to consider a blatant example, suppose it were suggested that one could measure the preponderance of racist attitudes in a community by asking a representative sample of the public 'Are you a racist?'. A minute's reflection should make one highly suspicious about the way this question is likely to be understood and the way answers to it are likely to be meant (quite apart from the question of the respondents' sincerity). For instance, many of those who hold white supremacist

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<sup>7</sup> Pp. 3, 4.

attitudes would probably deny being racists, justifying their opinions by invoking their belief that members of all other races just *happened* to be inferior to whites in certain crucial respects, and hence according a privileged position to whites could be shown to be rational. And on the other hand, someone who was genuinely appalled by racial inequality might well respond to the question by confessing her fear that, for all she knew, she might still have a residual tendency to respond in racially conscious ways in certain situations. Accordingly, she might 'admit' to having racist tendencies.

Whether asking the subjects themselves is a wise choice for the student of social affairs depends on the case at hand. In any case, in doing so one must be prepared to take a reflective stand on the relation between the participants' own words and the social reality one is studying. Only so can the social scientist uphold the claim that what he is engaged in is a serious intellectual pursuit. Winch himself says, in *The Idea of a Social Science*, 'I do not wish to maintain that we must stop at the unreflective kind of understanding of which I gave as an instance the engineer's understanding of the activities of his colleagues', adding 'I do want to say that any more reflective understanding must necessarily presuppose, if it is to count as genuine understanding at all, the participants' unreflective understanding.'<sup>8</sup> Even so, one might wish Winch had devoted more attention to this issue in his book. In any case, attributing to Winch the opinion that the social scientist should defer to the participants' authority presupposes that one takes him to have been advocating a certain type of scientific procedure, and this assumption, which I have tried to argue, is misguided.

## II. Relativism

5. While Lueken acknowledges that Winch does not consider himself a relativist, he argues that certain aspects of his position lay him open to that charge, and claims that Winch is not entirely successful in countering it. Though Winch does not reject concepts like that of reality, correspondence with reality, objectivity, rationality, consistency and truth, Lueken says, these concepts, on Winch's account, "cannot provide a solid ground or measure by which uses of language can be judged". The

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<sup>8</sup> P. 89.

reason for this, on Lueken's reading, is that the correct application of these words, like that of all words in the language, is a matter of communal agreement. Hence, Lueken concludes, different languages are incommensurable, and there are no common points of reference by which we can establish the correctness of translations from one language to another. Different communities, in a sense, live in different worlds.

Philosophers who discuss the issue of relativism often regard being a relativist as a form of intellectual sin to which one may be tempted, and one's ability to withstand the temptation as a measure of philosophical virtue. Winch himself was clear about this. Thus he wrote, in 'Ethical Relativism':

The word 'relativism' is used, probably more often than not, as a term of abuse; and discussions of the issues involved are apt to be bad-tempered. Part of the reason for this is, no doubt, that certain extreme forms of relativistic position seem ... to undermine the very possibility of honest argument. But not all those who have been attracted by relativistic positions have been dishonest; and there are perfectly genuine and important difficulties to which they have been trying to draw attention.<sup>9</sup>

I should like to say that what was distinctive about Winch's treatment of relativism throughout his work was the concern with defusing the issue, with 'deconstructing' it if you like, by suggesting that we do not have any clear idea of what it means to espouse relativism or to reject it. He wanted us to overcome the feeling that matters of deep concern turn on one's position on this issue. As he went on to say in the passage I just quoted:

If we wish to be clear about these difficulties, it seems to me important that we should not treat the word "relativism" as a slogan, or as the introduction to a manifesto we are going to feel obliged either to attack or to defend.

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<sup>9</sup> In *Trying to Make Sense* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 181.

Both critics and defenders should resist the inclination to regard relativism as a kind of *Weltanschauung*; as a matter on which sides are to be taken rather than as an occasion for clearing up philosophical bewilderment.

6. Someone encountering ways of thinking and living that differ radically from those of her own society might come to see them as challenges to her view of things. She might feel the need to establish neutral standards by which her own ways of thinking can be shown to be superior to alien forms of thought; otherwise, she wonders, what guarantee is there that her own conception of things is not radically mistaken? For how could one go on, for instance, trusting in scientific procedures if at the same time we should have to acknowledge that under a different set of circumstances one might have put a similar trust in an entirely different set of practices?

I might be thought to be the task of philosophy to lay this worry to rest. However, those who share this worry may feel Winch has no consolation to offer; on the contrary, what he has emphasized is that any form of scientific or scholarly inquiry is a human activity, carried out in a specific context, and hence subject to the contingencies of individual temperament and cultural change. Lueken, as we have seen, seems to share this disappointment.

Now the unspoken assumption underlying this view of the matter is that different ways of thinking are in fact in competition with one another. But in fact I may, of course, recognize a radical difference in outlook or life-style between the members of another community and those of my own without getting any sense of a competition or challenge. And besides, even where I do feel the challenge of a different life-style, I may not regard the tension I sense between their way of life and my own as something that could be resolved by a common standard of measurement. To ask whether different languages and the activities connected with them are commensurable or incommensurable is to suggest that the relation between them is to be construed somewhat on the model of competing scientific theories: in saying that two accounts are incommensurable we are suggesting that something which should be possible is in fact impossible. Thus, in a case in which we have to choose between different methods of pursuing some result, no resolution is to be had concerning which is the best method. (Very often this means that our purposes

are complex and that one method is superior with respect to one purpose, inferior with respect to some other.)

Where there is no need to choose or where the whole idea of choosing makes no sense, the issue of commensurability simply does not arise. The feeling that there ought to be a common standard by which different languages can be compared, then, presupposes that there is some common purpose that different languages are meant to serve, and that we should ideally be in a position to decide whether one language does that job better than another. Now it might be thought, for instance, that languages are to be thought of as different ways of describing reality. This position is taken by Roger Trigg, who, in commenting on 'Understanding a Primitive Society', worries that Winch's view excludes the possibility of comparing different languages with respect to their success in describing the same reality. He concludes, "'Reality' is made relative to a language, and if different languages portray the 'world' differently, then there must be different worlds."<sup>10</sup>

Winch rather elegantly exposes the confusion involved in Trigg's thought. He imagines someone arguing that those who use the word 'pain' and mean the same thing by it must therefore also share some belief; say, the belief that the world contains such a thing as pain. He continues:

But if it is possible to affirm that there is such a thing as pain, it ought to be possible to deny it too. The language in which the denial is couched must be meaningful; and it must mean the same as the language in which what is denied might be affirmed ... So to deny that there is such a thing as pain, I must mean by 'pain' just what someone who affirms that there is such a thing means by 'pain'. Hence we are still both speaking the same language and still, according to Trigg's way of thinking, offering the same 'description of reality'. This incoherence illustrates how important it is to recognize that the grammar of a language is not a theory about the nature of reality...<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Roger Trigg, *Reason and Commitment* (Cambridge University Press, 1973) p. 15, quoted in Peter Winch, 'Language, Belief and Relativism', in *Trying to Make Sense* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 195.

<sup>11</sup> Winch, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

Once we realize that 'describing reality' cannot meaningfully be thought of as a purpose of *language* (though we might, at a stretch, call it one of our purposes *in* using language), the notion that there is such a thing as *the* purpose of language goes by the board. (Perhaps it will be suggested that the purpose of language is to make communication possible, but then one may ask: is there a way of defining 'communication' which is not dependent on a prior understanding of the sorts of things we do with language; and besides, do all uses of language fit comfortably under the heading 'communication'?) Hence, when Lueken complains that Winch does not allow for any common measure for comparing languages, it is not clear his worry is.

One reason we may be inclined to consider the lack of a common measure a problem is that our thinking about these matters is coloured by a cognitivist or intellectualist bias. Thus, we suppose that differences between human cultures are above all to be accounted for in terms of differences in knowledge: Azande beliefs in oracles and witchcraft is due to their deficient understanding of the way things in the world operate. What this perspective ignores is that the attitude of the Azande towards these practices is altogether different from that of a Western experimental scientist; the practices are not based on a failed attempt to discover causal connections between events. If we wish to acquire some sort of perspective on what the Azande are up to, Winch, suggests, we had better compare it to other aspects of our own culture (e.g., our ceremonies and rituals) rather than to our science.<sup>12</sup> (As Winch points out in the essay 'Language, Belief and Relativism', part of what confuses us here is the different ways in which we may distinguish between different languages: in speaking about a difference in language we may, on the one hand, have in mind a difference like that between English, German and Finnish, and on the other hand that between the languages of science, religion, and morals. When we compare 'our' language to that of the Azande, however, these two kinds of

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<sup>12</sup> Concerning this whole discussion see also the interchange 'Understanding and Explanation in Sociology and Social Anthropology' between Peter Winch and I. C. Jarvie, in Robert Borger and Frank Cioffi (eds.), *Explanation in the Behavioural Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 1970).

difference tend to be intertwined in a complicated way, thus giving plausibility to the demand for a common measure by which to compare them.<sup>13</sup>)

The inclination to compare the practices of other cultures to our science is connected with the deep-rooted philosophical inclination to assume that the difference between different forms of life is ultimately grounded in differences in ways of thinking. As Winch puts it:

This particular comparison [between Zande magical thought and our own scientific theories] is one which forces itself on our attention not merely because of the dominant position occupied by science in our culture, but also because of certain general ideas about the relation between thought and reality which we may find philosophically attractive and of which we may think (mistakenly) science provides a clear paradigm.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, it will be thought that the reason the Azande conduct their lives on the basis of the pronouncements of the poison oracle is the fact that they have a different picture of the world (a different 'ontology', perhaps) than we do, one that contains oracles, witches, etc. It is this difference in thought that makes the difference in living intelligible. It was exactly this picture that Winch was trying to reverse,

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<sup>13</sup> Op. cit., pp. 196 ff. In fact, using examples like that of the Azande may give us a simplified view of the notion of a different culture. Here we have a community of people living in their own more or less remote and exotic part of the world, speaking a radically alien language, dressing in strange ways and devoting themselves to unfamiliar pursuits. We are then told that they are preoccupied with certain obscure ideas, ideas that are very distant from those that are central to our ways of thinking. So they seem an obvious case of a different, indeed alien culture. The gap between the cultures is so huge that the question of what *exactly* is meant by calling theirs a different culture does not even arise. But how is the concept of a 'different culture' to be applied in the case of people who share many of our central ideas, who live in conditions similar to ours or who live among us, who speak our language or one similar to ours, who are subject to the same laws as we are, participate in the same institutions, etc? In short, when exactly are people to be said to belong to 'the same culture'? In fact, once we consider the whole gamut of cases, the notion of a different culture seems to dissolve itself, and along with it *the* problem of cross-cultural understanding: maybe after all there is not one over-all philosophical problem, but a whole range of particular problems arising in specific circumstances. This is the theme of one of Winch's last essays on the subject, 'Can We Understand Ourselves?', *Philosophical Investigations* 20 (1997), pp. 193-204.

<sup>14</sup> 'Language, Belief and Relativism', p. 199.

arguing instead that it is by taking note of people's ways of acting and responding that we can learn to interpret their words and thoughts. This insight, above all else, forms the core of his discussion of the understanding of human behaviour. I would suggest that this is the point of his remark, frequently quoted and almost as frequently misunderstood: 'Reality is not what gives language sense. What is real and what is unreal shows itself in the sense that language has.'<sup>15</sup>

Once the idea that a culture is grounded in a way of thinking is given up, the anti-relativist's worry dissolves itself: if a culture is not in itself anything like a set of beliefs about the world, the fact that people in other societies (or, indeed, in our own society) live differently from the way we do does not show that either we or they must be 'wrong' in some fundamental sense.

I believe there is another strand of argument that might be developed here, based on remarks in Winch's essays 'Text and Context'<sup>16</sup> and 'The Expression of Belief'<sup>17</sup>. This line of argument would focus on the assumption of those who share the worry about relativism that for someone to hold a belief is for her to believe something about her own state of believing.

### III. Conversation and War

7. Lueken says he cannot understand Winch's after-thoughts in the new preface to *The Idea of a Social Science*, his distancing himself from what he calls 'the rather cosy picture suggested by the way I had compared social relations to a conversational interchange' in the book (p. xviii). Lueken suggests that Winch is now proposing to reverse his original account, and to regard war as a more adequate paradigm of social relations – a paradigm which will then also give conversation a more warlike appearance (p. 16).

I do not read these remarks the way Lueken does, as the expression of an unaccountable whim. To me they seem to be in line with a gradual deepening of

Winch's thought, one that is closely connected with his rejection of the debate between relativists and anti-relativists, and that was perhaps inspired in part by the responses to his earlier work. The theme of this deepening is connected with the contrast between an exchange of ideas and an interaction of physical forces to which he refers in the preface (p. xvii). Though he still thought this contrast was important, he had, I believe, come to feel uncomfortable about the underlying suggestion of a straightforward dualism. He underscores what he calls 'the *fragility* of the ethico-cultural conditions which make such an exchange of ideas possible' (ibid.), saying that the failure to come to grips with the problems created by this 'results in serious distortions'. I believe this is connected with his having developed a profoundly skeptical attitude towards the notion that those elements of a discussion that can be considered part of an 'exchange of ideas' can, even in principle, be distinguished from those that reflect the personal and local contingencies of a particular situation; the idea, in other words, that what is internal to the rationality of an interchange can be distilled, as it were, from the accidental features of the speakers and their circumstances. Winch, we might say, was trying to distance himself from what Cora Diamond has called the 'most pervasive illusion' of contemporary philosophy, 'the idea of knowledge independent of any particular perspective'.<sup>18</sup>

8. A theme which is in some respects closely similar to this is actually raised in Winch's essay 'Apel's "Transcendental Pragmatics"'<sup>19</sup>, an important essay that has, I feel, been unjustly overlooked. Here Winch criticizes Apel's notion that the ideal to which any serious interchange of ideas must aspire is 'an esoteric community of scientific investigators' in which 'the communication-partners must consider each other as pure subjects of thought and speech'.<sup>20</sup> Apel, as Winch reads him, supposes

<sup>15</sup> 'Understanding a Primitive Society', *Ethics and Action* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 12. Also, see *The Idea of a Social Science*, pp. 54 ff; as well as 'Can We Understand Ourselves', pp. 196 f, concerning the idea that we can understand a person's behaviour if we know the beliefs and desires that guide his actions.

<sup>16</sup> In *Trying to Make Sense*.

<sup>17</sup> *The Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (1996), pp. 7-23.

<sup>18</sup> Cora Diamond, Review of Lars Hertzberg and Juhani Pietarinen (eds.), *Perspectives on Human Conduct, Philosophical Investigations* 14 (1991), p. 91.

<sup>19</sup> The essay, which is part of an interchange with Karl-Otto Apel, appears in S. C. Brown (ed.), *Philosophical Disputes in the Social Sciences* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979). The original symposium took place in 1977. - For a discussion of related issues, see Winch's Introduction to Ian MacLean, Alan Montefiore and Peter Winch (eds.), *The Political Responsibility of Intellectuals* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 12 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Winch, op. cit., pp. 54 f.

that human communication at large is directed towards the same kinds of end [i.e. arriving at consensus about the truth-value of some assertion] and is to be judged by the same standards as professional communication between scientists and philosophers, differing from this only in respect of the fact that sociological and psychological constraints prevent it from achieving those ends with the same degree of success.<sup>21</sup>

The constraints in question are the 'alienating' conditions imposed by the specific personal relations, the conflicts and difficulties that obtain between the partners. Winch considers Apel's view grotesque, pointing out, on the one hand, that human conversation does not very often take the form of inquiring into the truth of something or other, and, on the other hand, that 'the form taken by discussion and inquiry cannot be understood apart from the difficulties and problems peculiar to the relationship'; hence 'not all "idiosyncratic constraints" on communication can properly be understood as "alienating"'.<sup>22</sup> Besides, even where discussion does take the form of inquiry, the fact that the interlocutors do not find it possible to agree need not show that they were insincere or that the discussion was somehow deficient. On the contrary, as Winch points out, 'a background of sometimes irresolvable diversity of outlook and judgement makes an essential contribution to our understanding of what such judgements *are*'.<sup>23</sup> In fact, such constraints may obtain even in scientific and philosophical discussion. On a characteristic note, Winch makes the following confession:

I find myself, in my professional life, surrounded by many people of high intelligence, intellectual seriousness and honesty, and philosophical competence, with whom I nevertheless know that I shall never have a genuinely profitable philosophical discussion.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Op. cit., pp. 70 f.

<sup>22</sup> P. 71.

<sup>23</sup> P. 61.

<sup>24</sup> P. 69.

In short, as Winch concludes: 'The fact of the matter is that there is *no such thing* as "communication as such". There is only communication between particular people in particular circumstances.'<sup>25</sup>

9. There is an obvious similarity between this position and that taken in the preface to *The Idea of a Social Science*: to put it briefly, in both cases Winch makes the point that our perspective on human conversation is bound to be distorted if we neglect the constraints to which it is subject. Undeniably, there are also significant differences between the two discussions. The argument in the preface is somewhat vague on the question whether what Winch calls the fragility of the conditions under which an interchange is possible is internal to the nature of human conversation, the way the constraints discussed in the essay on Apel are said to be. Winch, in speaking of 'the enormous *contrast* between human relations ruled by ideas of justice and those governed by force', seems to be suggesting that in this case, a clear separation is possible. We should keep in mind that this whole discussion is extremely brief. However, if I may venture a surmise as to Winch's view of the nature of that contrast, I should like to suggest that for him, the judgment that a certain human relationship is ruled by ideas of justice or is governed by force is itself an expression of a moral understanding of that relation. In other words, the role that force may be said to play in an interchange is not to be settled independently of an understanding of the justice of the matter, and analogous considerations apply to the question whether a certain constraint is to be held to be 'alienating' or not. If I am right about this, the two discussions are at one in rejecting the idea that there is a procedure for deciding whether a given stretch of conversation is reasonable and fair, a procedure the application of which is wholly independent of who the particular people are who propose to apply it.

The two essays also differ in the attitude taken to the matter discussed. The essay on Apel has two strands: not only does Winch consider Apel's notion of an ideal conversation unintelligible, he also (somewhat inconsistently, it might be thought, but I shall not be able to get into that question here) makes clear that he does not consider a society in which there were no irreconcilable human conflicts desirable; such a condition, he declares, would constitute a great impoverishment of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



the potentialities of human life. (We can see that he does not at least share the anti-relativists' dark view of human diversity. This is one point, I would suggest, where he can be said to be giving vent to a personal opinion, though I do not believe he would have liked to think he was here expressing anything so solemn as a *Weltanschauung*.)

In the preface, of course, his attitude is more pessimistic. It goes without saying that he considers the extent to which brute force enters into human relations regrettable. Yet I think he would have thought it utopian to envisage a condition of human affairs in which force no longer plays a part in human interchanges, and he would probably have thought it utterly naïve to believe that philosophy could contribute to establishing such a condition.

### **Conclusion**

Peter Winch, I have been arguing, did not side with any one way of doing social science against certain other ways. He did not lend sustenance to those who felt the need to prove the intellectual superiority of the achievements of Western civilization, but neither did he argue that all forms of human culture must be regarded as equally worthy of respect. He found the use of repression and brute force in human interaction regrettable, but he did not think that he as a philosopher was in a privileged position to determine which was the most desirable course for the development human affairs or how it was to be achieved. In short, in discussing these issues, he did not think of himself as taking sides on matters on which various alternative views were equally conceivable, positions that were expressive of one's personal outlook. Rather, he was trying to make us attend to the things we were inclined to overlook in discussing these problems. If he did provoke opposition, that was mainly because these were things that we do not really want to attend to: in philosophy the main resistance that has to be overcome is usually that of our own will.

This way of doing philosophy is in a sense inevitably *ad hominem*. And Winch's way of doing philosophy was intensely personal. His intellectual temperament came through in the sorts of question on which he turned his attention and the nature of the attention he turned on them. Some philosophers could not 'find their feet with him'. In fact, the spirit in which he carried out his work was and

remains far removed from that of the main stream of analytic philosophy. For my own part, I found his temperament congenial. I was continually learning from him and I go on doing so.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> I wish to thank Olli Lagerspetz for his comments on a draft of this paper.