

# PHILOSOPHY AS THE ART OF DISAGREEMENT

## On the Social and Moral Philosophy of Peter Winch

Lars Hertzberg

If I light an electric torch at night out of doors I don't judge its power by looking at the bulb, but by seeing how many objects it lights up.

The brightness of a source of light is appreciated by the illumination it projects upon non-luminous objects.

Simone Weil<sup>1</sup>

Make visible that which, but for you, might not have been seen.

Robert Bresson

Peter Winch's<sup>2</sup> work spans most of the main areas of philosophy. His early work dealt with the philosophy of the social sciences and with the problem of understanding alien cultures. Later on he returned to these issues on only a handful of occasions. Winch's later work concerned itself, most prominently, with moral and political philosophy, but also with the philosophy of mind and language, epistemology, and the philosophy of religion. One of his most widely noted essays of later years is one in which he discusses the intelligibility of the suggestion that an object might

---

<sup>1</sup> *First and Last Notebooks* (Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 115-6. Quoted in Peter Winch, *Ethics and Action* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 222.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Winch was born in London on 14 January, 1926, and died in Champaign, Illinois, on 29 April, 1997. He was a student at Oxford in the late 1940's. His most important influence during that time was Gilbert Ryle. Wittgenstein was then still living in Cambridge, but Winch never met him.

From 1951 to 1964 Winch taught at Swansea. It was during this period that he received his most formative impulses. The main source of these was Rush Rhees; Winch reported that a letter Rhees wrote to him in 1954 commenting on a talk he had given was crucial to the development of his philosophical outlook. (This letter has since been published as "Religion and Language" in Rush Rhees, *Without Answers* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); it is reprinted in D.Z. Phillips (ed.), *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).)

Through Rhees Winch gained a closer acquaintance with Wittgenstein's work. Rhees also kindled Winch's interest in the thought of Simone Weil. Among Winch's contemporaries at Swansea were Cora Diamond, İlham Dilman and Roy Holland, while D. Z. Phillips was his best-known student.

From Swansea, Winch moved first to Birkbeck College and then to King's College, University of London, and from there, in 1985, to the University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign.

For an overview of Winch's life and work, see Colin Lyas, *Peter Winch* (Teddington: Acumen, 1999.)

simply cease to exist.<sup>3</sup> At the time of his death, he was at work on a monograph on political authority.<sup>4</sup>

Most of Winch's work can be seen as an engagement with the philosophy of Wittgenstein. Among other things, he edited a collection of essays, called *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*<sup>5</sup>, presaging what came to be an influential approach to the *Tractatus* and the continuity of Wittgenstein's thought. On the death of Rush Rhees, he joined the group of Wittgenstein's literary executors. But Winch also wrote essays on classical philosophers like Spinoza, Hobbes, Rousseau and Kierkegaard, as well as a book on Simone Weil<sup>6</sup> (he planned, but never got around to writing, a book on Plato).

While Winch made original contributions on a number of questions, it may well turn out that his most lasting contribution will be to moral philosophy. I would not hesitate to consider Winch the most important writer on moral problems in the English language since World War II, although it can be argued that his work in moral philosophy has not to date reached its full impact.

### *Two pervasive issues*

For all the variety of themes addressed by Winch, his work is characterized by a marked unity of perspective. One way of articulating this unity is suggested by the words he uses to describe philosophy, in the introduction to *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*<sup>7</sup>, "as an enquiry into the nature of man's knowledge of reality and into the difference which the possibility of such knowledge makes to human life".

In grappling with the question of the nature of our knowledge and its role in our lives, we may feel that there are two interconnected problems that press for a solution. On the one hand, seeing that individuals and societies may have ways of thinking about reality that diverge widely from our own, how are we still able to regard those other ways of thinking as forms of *thought*? And on the other hand, in the judgments people make, how are we to separate the contribution made by the judger from that made by reality itself? Our way of thinking about these issues, Winch

<sup>3</sup> See "Ceasing to Exist", in *Trying to Make Sense* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987). This collection will henceforth be referred to as *TMS*.

<sup>4</sup> It is not known at present how far he got with the manuscript. He was concerned with the theme throughout his career. For his more recent thoughts on it, see "Certainty and Authority" in A. Phillips Griffiths (ed.), *Wittgenstein Centenary Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), and the posthumous "How is Political Authority Possible?", *Philosophical Investigations* 25 (2002), 20-32.

<sup>5</sup> London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.

<sup>6</sup> *Simone Weil: "The Just Balance"* (Cambridge University Press, 1989). At one time, he had had the idea of combining Spinoza and Weil as the theme of a book.

<sup>7</sup> London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958, p. 24.

thought, tends to be distorted by misconceptions. Throughout his work, he was concerned with drawing attention to the different ways these misconceptions made themselves felt in connection with a variety of philosophical problems.

Consider the way in which the first of these questions arises. To regard something as a *form of thought* is evidently to consider it as embodying a concern with the truth (using the word in an inclusive sense). For us to be able to recognize it as such, however, it should be sensitive to the sorts of consideration that in our judgment are relevant to the matter at hand. But if it diverges from our own ways of reasoning about things, that means that it will be lacking in that sensitivity. How then is the idea that some alien form of thought is deeply misguided or out of touch with reality compatible with our considering it a form of *thought*? Or, turning the question around, how are we to reconcile the recognition that other forms of thought are possible with the trust we have in the authority of our own thinking?

In Western philosophy, the standard response to this problem has been to mark a more or less clearcut contrast between two ways in which our thought may engage with reality. On the one hand, there is objective thought which is concerned with truth, is amenable to rational argument, and tends gradually to converge in a unified conception of reality. For instance, it is thought that the methods of natural science will assure that the conceptions we form of the phenomena of nature are as fully responsive to the nature of those phenomena, and as independent of our perspective, as possible. On the other hand, there is subjective thought with respect to which the possibility for variation is unlimited, and in the case of which we have no ultimate recourse in the face of disagreement. Matters of aesthetic appraisal have been considered prime instances of this. Whether we find some object aesthetically appealing or not, for instance, is wholly determined by who we are. There is no issue concerning which of the two responses is truer to the nature of the object.

The exact terms in which this division has been conceived have varied. It has been thought of as a distinction between factual judgments and value judgments, between theory and practice; Karl Popper has spoken about it in terms of a dualism of facts and decisions; Charles Stevenson in terms of a dichotomy of beliefs and attitudes.<sup>8</sup>

Now, if some such clearcut dichotomy is accepted, the problem of divergent forms of thought seems to disappear. In the case of thinking of the first kind, the problem has a

---

<sup>8</sup> For discussions of this, see "Particularity and Morals" in *TMS*; on Popper's distinction, see "Nature and Convention", in *Ethics and Action* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) – henceforth *EA* ; on Stevenson's distinction, see "Eine Einstellung zur Seele", *TMS*. (On a couple of occasions, Winch would somewhat confusingly use German quotations from Wittgenstein as the titles of essays in English.)

straightforward answer, in the case of the second, there *is* no problem: issues such as aesthetic merit are not, strictly speaking, objects of thought.

Winch's concern, however, is to reorient our understanding of these dichotomies. The problem of divergent thought is dissolved, though not by dividing it in two but by rejecting its presuppositions. The reason for rejecting them, I would propose, can be presented as follows (these are not Winch's exact words but they are, I hope, true to his intentions)<sup>9</sup>. To regard someone as making a judgment is to respond to her words as expressing a certain kind of engagement with a situation. What kind of engagement we take her to be expressing depends on our understanding of her and of the situation. Each of these illuminates the other: thus, how we see her engagement will in part be a reflection of how *we* understand the situation; and again, what we take the situation to be for her depends in part on how we understand her engagement with it.<sup>10</sup> These considerations form the context in which her words will be taken in one way or another.

To ask what *contributions* the different elements of the situation make is to suppose that the judgment has an identity independently of those elements. However, if we consider an utterance apart from its context of human activity, we are reducing it to "an exercise in sentence construction"; it will then no longer be something the truth of which could be an object of concern.

We can see then that "concern with the truth" does not mark a specific area of human striving, but rather indicates a general form that various types of human endeavour may have in common. We might say that what it means to have "knowledge of reality" is constituted by *the difference it makes* whether we know a thing or not. Accordingly, the terms used by Winch to define the object of philosophy, "the nature of man's knowledge of reality" and "the difference which the possibility of such knowledge makes to human life", are not to be understood as referring to two separate areas of inquiry but rather two aspects of the same thing.

This is not to deny that we do distinguish between the subjective and the objective, and that appeals to the distinction has an important part to play in our disagreements. In the course of a discussion, I may argue that what you say is merely a reflection of your particular perspective on things, or then again I may admit that your appraisal of the problem under discussion is realistic. In doing so I am expressing my disagreement or agreement with you *as part of* the discussion we are engaged in, and the grounds I might give are dependent on the particular issue at hand. However, my claim is not one that is to be grounded *a priori*, in philosophy.

---

<sup>9</sup> Cp., for instance, "*Im Anfang war die Tat*", in *TMS*, and "True or False?", *Inquiry* 31 (1988), 265-76.

<sup>10</sup> This theme is particularly prominent in the essays "Human Nature", in *EA*, as well as "Text and Context" and "*Eine Einstellung zur Seele*", both in *TMS*.

In emphasizing our practical engagement with the objects of our thought, Winch places himself in the tradition from Wittgenstein, in which it is a central notion that thought and its expression in action are inseparable. Of course, the critique of the idea that human knowledge is formed through the passive reception of sense impressions had a long history in Western philosophy before Wittgenstein. The deepest and most fundamental criticism of it had been formulated by Immanuel Kant.<sup>11</sup> However, Kant's criticism was deepened in the later work of Wittgenstein, in which the traditional view of the relation between thought and action is reversed, or rather, dissolved.<sup>12</sup> Wittgenstein argued that the relation between our thoughts and their objects is mediated by our actions; or better, my actions are constitutive of what I think and mean.

The identity of a form of thought, then, is bound up with its role in a human life. Accordingly, I may come to see an affinity between an alien way of thinking and one with which I am familiar because I see them as embodying a similar concern, even where the methods of inquiry differ. This means that commonalities of meaning may show themselves in the ways we disagree as much as in the ways we agree. Actually, the relation between different forms of thought is indeterminate: where we draw the line at which the distance becomes too great even for talk of disagreement to be meaningful will be an expression of our own relation to the dispute.<sup>13</sup>

In what follows, I shall present some of the ways in which the issues I have outlined here get expressed in Winch's work.

### ***Understanding society***

In writing about Winch it is not possible to bypass the early fame he attained with his book *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (1958)<sup>14</sup>. The book appeared when Winch was 32. It came to have a huge success, was translated into ten languages, and for a time Winch's name became a household word not just among philosophers, but even more so among social scientists. The book brought a higher level of sophistication to the debate about the social sciences; on the other hand, it may have clouded out some of Winch's more mature work.

---

<sup>11</sup> In this connection, the influence of Thomas Reid, on whom Winch did some early work, might also have played a part.

<sup>12</sup> Winch discusses this relation in his essay "*Im Anfang war die Tat*". One might argue about the Kantian elements in Winch's thought. A Kantian attitude, it appears, is the most clearly discernible in "Ceasing to Exist".

<sup>13</sup> On this, see for instance Winch's essay "Darwin, *Genesis* and Contradiction", in *TMS*.

<sup>14</sup> Op. cit. The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, with a new preface, was published by Routledge in 1990. The book originally appeared in the series *Studies in Philosophical Psychology* under the editorship of R. F. Holland, its title, with its echoes of Collingwood's *The Idea of History*, having been proposed by Holland.

In *The Idea of a Social Science*, Winch was concerned to show how our conception of the study of social phenomena is distorted by its being modelled too closely on the natural sciences. Whereas a physicist learns her profession by mastering the activities and concepts of the scientific community she is joining, the sociologist, political scientist or economist, he argued, will also need to grasp the activities and concepts of the social group whose life she is studying. In saying that a society, say, practices ritual slaughter or polygamy, or has a monetary system, or something we can call art, what one is claiming is that these descriptions are compatible with (do justice to) the way members of that society understand their own practices. We cannot resolve which of their practices belong together, or what counts as doing “the same thing”, without taking account of the cultural context in which those activities occur. Winch has sometimes been understood to be arguing that the social scientist has to accept the terms in which the participants express their activities at face value. But this was not his point. Rather, whatever description the social scientist may put forward, that description, unlike the physicist’s description of physical phenomena, will inevitably stand in some sort of logical relation to the self-understanding of the participants: it may, to a greater or lesser extent, agree with it or be in tension with it. When the latter is the case, the scientist’s ability to sustain her reading would depend on her ability to show that the participants’ understanding of the activity in question is deficient or illusory in some way; this, in turn, requires showing that their presentation of it is in conflict with other aspects of their self-understanding. In other words, it is only by being responsive to questions concerning the consistency of her account with what the natives take themselves to be doing that she can uphold the claim to be saying something about *their* life.<sup>15</sup>

This realization becomes particularly important when we are up against the concepts with which people in alien cultures or living in other periods of history articulate their concerns. In such an investigation, comparisons based on superficial resemblances can be misleading if one ignores the conceptual context in which the action is embedded.

*The Idea of a Social Science* was followed six years later by the essay “Understanding a Primitive Society”, in which Winch questioned certain prevalent ideas about the relation between a scientific world view and the outlook of an African tribe relying on oracles and witchcraft. A central point of his essay was that the difference could not be brushed off simply by maintaining that the African Azande were blind to the workings of the world or that they were deficient in their powers of reasoning. On the contrary, we may assume them to be just as astute in applying their powers of judgment as Westerners are. It is just that the framework in which their judgments are

---

<sup>15</sup> Op. cit., see esp. pp. 86 ff.

made is different from ours. If this led the Azande to be wrong in many of their ideas, and there is nothing to prevent our saying that they were, this does not entail that they must have been generally deficient in their capacity for thought. As we might put it: they got things wrong simply because they happened to be on the wrong track.

The wide acclaim that greeted *The Idea of a Social Science* and “Understanding a Primitive Society” was connected with the way these texts seemed to mesh with the spirit of the times. Many readers welcomed the *Weltanschauung* they thought they found expressed in them; Winch, it appeared, was exposing the universalist pretensions of Western science and rationality – while others, of course, criticized Winch as an advocate of cultural relativism and hence as a traitor to the scientific world view, a treason that was found particularly heinous since it originated in the very bosom of analytical philosophy.<sup>16</sup>

These reactions were hardly what Winch had envisioned. It was not so much that they were at odds with his aims, as that his discussion moved on an entirely different level of philosophical engagement. Nothing could have been further from his conception of philosophy than the idea that the philosopher should take up the cudgels for one side or the other in the ideological controversies of his times. He was trying to make a logical point, not to advocate a choice of method, least of all an ideologically motivated choice. He 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>17</sup> He also wrote:

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. ... [W]hen we have determined what will and will not count

---

<sup>16</sup> Some of the main contributions to this debate are to be found in Bryan Wilson (ed.), *Rationality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970). See esp. the essays by Martin Hollis and Alasdair MacIntyre. Also, consider the debate between Winch and I. C. Jarvie in R. Borger and F. Cioffi (eds.), *Explanation in the Behavioural Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 1970); H. O. Mounce, “Understanding a Primitive Society”, *Philosophy* 48 (1973), 347-62; Kai Nielsen, “Rationality and Relativism”, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 4 (1974), 313-31; M. Hollis and S. Lukes (eds.), *Rationality and Relativism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982). For more recent contributions, see Nigel Pleasants, *Wittgenstein and the Idea of a Critical Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 1999), Berel Dov Lerner, *Rules, Magic, and Instrumental Reason: A critical interpretation of Peter Winch’s philosophy of the social sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002). I have written on these questions in “Winch on Social Interpretation”, in *The Limits of Experience* (Helsinki: Acta Philosophica Fennica, 1994). Among Winch’s later contributions to the debate, we may note “Language, Belief and Relativism”, *TMS* (first published in 1976), “Apel’s ‘Transcendental Pragmatics’”, in S. C. Brown (ed.), *Philosophical Disputes in the Social Sciences* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979), and “Can We Understand Ourselves?”, *Philosophical Investigations* 20 (1997), 193-204.

<sup>17</sup> “Mr. Louch’s Idea of a Social Science”, *Inquiry* 7 (1964), p. 207.

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>18</sup>

Still, though Winch is not taking sides here in favour of this or that group of social scientists, his discussion nevertheless could have a salutary effect on the conduct of inquiry by removing certain prejudices, thus for instance freeing social scientists from their imagined obligation to emulate the natural scientists (or rather, to emulate their own idea of what natural scientists are doing).

In outlining the aims of his book, Winch criticized Locke's conception of the philosopher as underlabourer, as someone whose task it was to clear the path for the advance of science. This notion suggests that the philosopher is on top of things, that he has a grasp of the logical structure of various concepts and is in a position to help others get straight about them. But as Rhees had emphasized, the confusions the philosopher is trying to disentangle are not confusions that happen to arise concerning this or that particular expression but bewilderment about language as such, about what speaking is and about what it is for expressions to mean what they mean. And this is a bewilderment that we all share, the philosopher no less than the scientist or the layman.

In the introductory chapter, Winch had written, "the day when philosophy becomes a popular subject is the day for the philosopher to consider where he took the wrong turning" (p. 2). He was anticipating that his criticism of the extra-scientific pretensions of science would be unpopular. Given that the outcome was rather the opposite of this, one might wonder whether he asked himself whether *he* had taken a wrong turning somewhere. In fact, we find an answer of sorts in Winch's preface to the second edition of his book, written after a time lapse of more than 30 years. Here, he details both some of the things he thinks should have been expressed differently, and what he considers a shortcoming of his central argument: the fact that, in comparing social relations to an exchange of ideas, he had given too idyllic a picture of what an exchange of ideas may be like. Commenting on his own suggestion that "social interaction can more profitably be compared to the exchange of ideas in a conversation than to the interaction of forces in a physical system", he wrote:

The trouble is ... that I was too single-mindedly concerned with the negative side of the claim, with the result that I never seriously followed up my own suggestion to look at the comparison between social life and the exchange of ideas in a conversation.

---

<sup>18</sup> Op. cit., p. 203.

Had I done so, I might have been struck by the *fragility* of the ethico-cultural conditions which make such an exchange of ideas possible... This does not just constitute a gap in the argument, but results in serious distortions ...

To take the comparison seriously would be to ask such questions as: what role in such an interchange of ideas is played by strategies of deceit, blackmail, emotional bullying, punches on the nose, etc... The nature of the contrast [between human relations ruled by ideas of justice and those governed by force] is important to the subjects discussed in the book; but the book itself, unfortunately, has nothing to say about them.<sup>19</sup>

In this connection, Winch refers to Simone Weil as a writer who “has done more than anyone to reveal the depth of such issues”. Clearly, however, he did not think that this oversight impugned the central line of argument in the book.

One problematic feature of *The Idea* (as of much of Winch’s work) is its deceptive simplicity; one needs to read the text over a number of times in order to realize precisely what is and, even more, what is *not* being said. But whatever the problems of interpretation and whatever the occasional shortcomings, the role of the book in changing the course of debate in the philosophy of the social sciences is unquestioned.

### ***Undermining the dichotomy***

Much of Winch’s work could perhaps be summarized by saying that he was consistently seeking to undermine the subject-object dichotomy by drawing attention to *possibilities* of variation in the “theoretical” realm, and to the *limits* of variation in the “practical” realm. Thus, *The Idea of a Social Science* and “Understanding a Primitive Society” served to draw into question the idea of inevitable convergence on the factual side: the world in which we live, he made clear, does not impose any logical constraints on the language we may use.

This dual line of attack is made explicit in the essay “Nature and Convention” from 1960<sup>20</sup>. Karl Popper had claimed that justice – as distinct from our knowledge of physical reality – “is conventional in all its branches”, since “all norms of human behaviour are akin to decisions”. Against this, Winch pointed out, on the one hand, that our understanding of physical nature is subject to change just like many of our norms of conduct, and, on the other hand, that certain aspects of morality cannot be understood to be conventional, but rather are presupposed by any

---

<sup>19</sup> *The Idea of a Social Science*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. xvii f.

<sup>20</sup> Reprinted in *EA*.

possible conventions. More specifically, his argument is that we could not coherently conceive of a society in which speaking the truth were not a norm.

In a critical commentary, however, R. F. Holland argued that this line of thought – what he called “the life-form argument” – could only take us so far: it could not account for what might be called the *inwardness* with which an individual may experience the demand for truth, and which could make her hazard all her prospects for its sake. In response Winch admitted that he had been wrong in supposing that his argument “was sufficient to establish that truthfulness must be regarded as a *moral virtue* in any possible human society”. All the same, he pointed out that there are important conceptual connections between what an individual can consider significant and the institutions of the society in which he lives.<sup>21</sup>

Winch once mentioned in conversation that he thought this essay constituted an important advance in his thinking, and regretted the absence of this perspective from *The Idea of a Social Science*. I assume that he was thinking about the constitutive role of a conception of morality for our understanding of a human society. This theme was given a different emphasis in the conclusion of the essay “Understanding a Primitive Society”. Counterbalancing its theme of cultural variation, there is a passage in which Winch attempts to indicate some of the limits to cultural relativity. He writes:

... the very conception of human life involves certain fundamental notions – which I shall call “limiting notions” – which have an obvious ethical dimension, and which indeed in a sense determine the “ethical space” within which the possibilities of good and evil in human life can be exercised. The notions ... correspond very closely to those which Vico made the foundation of his idea of natural law, on which he thought the possibility of understanding human history rested: birth, death, sexual relations. Their significance here is that they are inescapably involved in the life of *all known human societies* in a way which gives us a clue where to look, if we are puzzled about the point of an alien system of institutions. The specific forms which these concepts take, the particular institutions in which they are expressed, vary very considerably from one society to another; but their central position within a society is and *must be* a constant factor. In trying to understand the life of an alien society, then, it will be of the utmost importance to be clear about the way these institutions enter into it...

---

<sup>21</sup> See R. F. Holland, “Is Goodness a Mystery?”, *The University of Leeds Review*, May 1970; reprinted in his book *Against Empiricism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980). For Winch’s response, see the introduction to *EA*, pp. 4 f.

I speak of a “limit” here because these notions, along no doubt with others, give shape to *what we understand by “human life”*; and because a concern with questions posed in terms of them seems to me constitutive of what we understand by the “morality” of a society. In saying this, I am of course disagreeing with those moral philosophers who have made attitudes of approval and disapproval, or something similar, fundamental in ethics, and who have held that the *objects* of such attitudes were conceptually irrelevant to the conception of morality.<sup>22</sup>

Some critics have found this passage puzzling. It seems as if Winch were, after all, laying down certain limits *a priori* to the forms human society might possibly take, as well as recommending certain procedures of investigation based on those limits, thus going against his own previous claims. On this reading, what he is saying is that in all collectives formed by members of the species *homo sapiens*, the facts of birth, copulation and death will of necessity be matters of central concern.

To be sure, the passage is somewhat problematic, and an apriorist reading undoubtedly seems close at hand (consider, e.g., the use of “must be”). However, granting that Winch may have expressed himself carelessly here, there are ways of reading his remarks that would not put them at odds with his general outlook. For one thing, he can be understood to be drawing attention to the fact that, even though there are indeed no *a priori* limits to cultural variation, there is *no known group of homo sapiens* for which Vico’s triad does not play a part. In light of this contingent circumstance, the fact that we usually do, in practice, succeed in reaching some measure of understanding across cultural divides should not be considered surprising. Then again (as is suggested by the ensuing discussion), he is drawing attention to a limit to what we would be prepared to consider a *human life* or a *morality*. He is, in other words, asking us to consider to what extent we could relate to a society in which birth, copulation and death are not held to be crucial events, as a *human* society in the first place, in view of the huge differences in relations between individuals, in attitudes toward one’s own life, etc, that such an absence would entail. (Winch may not have been clear that there were these different readings.)<sup>23</sup>

On such a view, the relation between Vico’s triad and the concept of a human society would be internal rather than external. Here the use of the word “human” is conditioned by the depth of

---

<sup>22</sup> *EA*, pp. 42 f. All italics mine except the last one.

<sup>23</sup> It might also be suggested, in tune with Wittgenstein’s discussion in *On Certainty* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969) that the line between the *a priori* and the empirical here is not an absolute one; that our understanding of conceptual possibilities is conditioned by experience.

the relation we can enter into with the other. Winch returns to this theme in the essay “Who is my Neighbour?”, written years later, where he considers the case of the man-shaped Yahoos and the horse-like Houyhnhnms in *Gulliver’s Travels* by Jonathan Swift. The point of the example, as I read it, is to bring out the deep challenge involved in trying to imagine a world in which creatures with equine bodies are more “human” than creatures with human bodies.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, Winch is criticizing the idea that morality can be understood as entirely constituted by its form, i.e. that we could recognize something as an attitude of “moral” approval or disapproval regardless of the kind of object at which it is directed. Thus, he is pointing out that it would be confused to *call* a concern with just anything, such as the length people wear their hair, a “moral concern”, no matter how passionately it was felt; or better perhaps, that it would require quite peculiar circumstances for such a description of it to be intelligible.

### ***The significance of my actions***

In the two essays we have been discussing, Winch’s concern was with the constitutive role of moral perspectives for human society<sup>25</sup>. However, while he was writing them his thinking about moral philosophy was undergoing another change of focus, as he points out in the introduction to *Ethics and Action*. He turned to questions concerning “the kind of moral significance a man can attach to his own acts, as distinct from the significance to him of other men’s acts” (p. 6). Thus he had already been moving in the direction called for by Holland in the critique mentioned above. Perhaps the most distinctive expression of this change of focus is found in the essay “Moral Integrity”.<sup>26</sup>

The central point of the essay is brought out in a discussion of Leo Tolstoy’s story “Father Sergius”, an account of the spiritual odyssey of Sergius from a man of the world to a monk and hermit. Sergius achieves fame as a holy man, but under the admiration of the pious, his spirituality gradually erodes and turns into a mere pose. Sergius’s career reaches its moral low point when he succumbs to an erotic temptation, but he finally manages to regain his peace of mind by fleeing into the anonymous life of a beggar monk. Winch describes the exteriorization of his moral perspective in the following terms:

---

<sup>24</sup> In *TMS*. Swift’s point is evidently a different one. He seems to be arguing that the Yahoos bring out something essential about human nature.

<sup>25</sup> “Man and Society in Hobbes and Rousseau” (1971, in *EA*) also dealt with this theme.

<sup>26</sup> “Moral Integrity” was originally published in 1968. See also the essays “Can a Good Man be Harmed?” (1966), “Wittgenstein’s Treatment of the Will” (1968), “Ethical Reward and Punishment” (1970) and “Trying”

If one looks at a certain style of life and asks what there is in it which makes it worth while, one will find nothing there. One may indeed describe it in terms which bring out “what one sees in it”, but the use of these terms already presupposes that one does see it from a perspective from which it matters. The words will fall flat on the ears of someone who does not occupy such a perspective even though he is struggling to attain it. If one tries to find in the object of contemplation that which makes it admirable, what one will in fact see is the admiration and applause that surrounds it. So one will see oneself perhaps as a prospective object of such admiration. “What was internal becomes external.”<sup>27</sup>

According to Winch, what most traditional accounts of morality have missed is precisely the internality of the moral demand. He discusses the predominant conceptions in moral philosophy, pointing out the way in which they disregard this aspect or misrepresent it. The reason most moral philosophers fail to recognize this, Winch argues, is that they share a confused idea of action. On this view, acting means initiating a change in the world. In order to initiate a change, the agent must be presented with reasons for acting. One such set of reasons is moral reasons. Moral reasoning is

---

(1971), all in *EA*. – For a valuable account of this phase in Winch’s ethical thought, see D. Z. Phillips, “The Presumption of Theory” in his *Interventions in Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> “Moral Integrity”, p. 190. The last sentence is a quotation from Tolstoy’s story. A couple of observations may be in place here. For one thing, we should beware of over-simplifying the contrast between the internal and the external invoked by Winch and Tolstoy. As Winch makes clear, the admiration directed at Father Sergius would hardly have moved him unless he had taken it to be directed at something he found important. And of course, Sergius is hardly someone to whom a concern, say, for goodness or uprightness is *totally* external in this sense. When Winch writes “the use of these terms already presupposes that one does see it from a perspective from which it matters”, one needs to realize – and Winch is hardly forgetting – that even if someone is presently insensitive to a certain perspective she may still be able to discover, or recover, that perspective. In fact, that is what Sergius finally does. He would, it seems, be most aptly described as a victim of self-deception: unnoticed by him, the focus of his concern is shifted from the people he is attempting to help to his own moral perfection – a shift which is facilitated by the admiration he inspires. (More on this below.) His corruption reaches its peak when, in the face of an erotic temptation, he finds himself wondering why being a certain kind of person should matter.

Marie’s question “What does it matter?” invited a judgment explaining why religious purity is more important than the satisfaction of lust, a comparison, as it were, between two objects. And no such judgment was possible. I do not mean that earlier, at the time of his strength, Sergius *could* have answered the question; the point is that, from that earlier perspective, the question did not arise for him. (P. 189.)

Winch goes on to argue that “the thought of something as really worthy of admiration is indeed involved when anyone takes pleasure in being admired” – only we need to distinguish between corrupt and non-corrupt *forms* of admiration. This is perhaps overstating the point. It would be true to say that we enjoy the admiration of others to the extent that it confirms that we are what we *wish* to be. But this is not necessarily something worthy of admiration. In the case of certain objects, such as worldly success in its various forms (fame, wealth, power), there is nothing that would qualify as a non-corrupt form of admiration; still, people do tend to admire those who possess them.

meant to help us overcome the moral difficulties inherent in a situation. However, at this point the whole business is beginning to seem paradoxical:

Morality, we are told, is a guide which helps [an agent] round his difficulty. But were it not for morality, there would be no difficulty! This is a strange sort of guide, which first puts obstacles in our path and then shows the way round them. Would it not be far simpler and more rational to be shot of the thing altogether?<sup>28</sup>

Plato's Glaucon thinks he has an answer to this question (in Book II of *The Republic*): morality is actually useful; it is a kind of social lubricant, instituted for the smoother running of human affairs. If you ignore the moral conventions of your time and place, you are probably headed for trouble sooner or later. So in *ordinary* circumstances honesty is the best long-term policy. The problem, however, is that it is not hard to imagine *extra-ordinary* circumstances in which your own interests might be better served by a reckless disregard for your fellow man. Glaucon, in short, is perfect grist for Holland's mill. As soon as we ask, "What advantage does morality bring?", we are looking outside morality for something to recommend it; but then morality is no longer valued for its own sake, but rather its value is made out to be dependent on its relation to that other thing.

John Stuart Mill tried to overcome this limitation by stipulating the common good as the goal of morality independently of the agent's self-interest. But this leaves us without an answer to the question what will move the agent to act morally. In fact, Mill is getting the worst of both worlds: he makes the value of morality contingent on external goals and yet loses the idea of something that could motivate the agent to respect its demands.

Immanuel Kant, on the other hand, sees the need for an account of morality that does not render its value dependent on something external. His solution lies in arguing that the only morally valuable form of action is one that is performed *for the sake of* morality. Hence for a father to play with his child out of a sense of duty would have moral worth, while doing so because he enjoys it would not. But this is surely getting things upside down. On the contrary, if a father is unable to enjoy playing with his child, he would probably regard this as a shortcoming on his part, even if he still does so out of duty. This does not mean that a morality of respect for the moral law is simply to be replaced by a morality of spontaneity: one would of course often go wrong in giving way to one's spontaneous impulses. The example does not make some general claim about morality (that would just mean falling into the opposite trap from Kant); it simply reminds us of the nature of a

---

<sup>28</sup> Op. cit., pp. 172 f.

father-child relationship, thus bringing across the point that there is no distinctive mark of “the moral” that can be identified independently of the case at hand. (Obviously, there are cases in which enjoying doing the right thing would be a form of corruption – say, the case of a father who finds pleasure in telling his child he has been grounded every time he has done some reckless thing.)

At the same time, in another respect, the Kantian conception lets in too much, by neglecting the distinction between *acting from a sense of duty* and *making it one’s goal to be dutiful*, thus failing to acknowledge that for a person’s motives to be pure they must be free of any consideration of his or her own moral perfection. We find an influential contemporary instance of the failure to make this distinction in Charles Taylor’s account of moral motivation. Taylor attempts to ground the notion of moral responsibility in a distinction between what he calls weak and strong evaluation, i.e. between simply acting from some motive I have and acting from a motive *because I consider it worthy*.<sup>29</sup> His account seems to be an instance of what Winch is criticizing: clearly, having worthy motives is not a matter of *judging* one’s motives to be worthy.

Making explicit a point that seems to be implicit in Winch’s argument, something has already been lost when we pose the issue of moral motivation in terms of conflicting interests. Suppose that, in attending to your needs, I tell myself that doing so involves a sacrifice of my own interests in favour of yours (and thus, that my action gives me a claim on your gratitude). Thus I see myself as having had a choice between being selfish and unselfish. Morality is then reduced to a competing consideration (as it was for Sergius). This does not mean, of course, that helping the other under such circumstances would have no worth, but simply that this perspective does not offer us a vantage point from which the nature of pure generosity can be understood. True generosity means that the question of interests is held in abeyance.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> See Taylor’s essay “What is Human Agency?” in *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> Winch once referred to a story from *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoevsky to illustrate the logic of generosity: “Once upon a time there was a peasant woman and a very wicked woman she was. And she died and did not leave a single good deed behind. The devils caught her and plunged her into the lake of fire. So her guardian angel stood and wondered what good deed of hers he could remember to tell to God; ‘She once pulled up an onion in her garden,’ said he, ‘and gave it to a beggar woman.’ And God answered: ‘You take that onion then, hold it out to her in the lake, and let her take hold and be pulled out. And if you can pull her out of the lake, let her come to Paradise, but if the onion breaks, then the woman must stay where she is.’ The angel ran to the woman and held out the onion to her. ‘Come,’ said he, ‘catch hold and I’ll pull you out.’ He began cautiously pulling her out. He had just pulled her right out, when the other sinners in the lake, seeing how she was being drawn out, began catching hold of her so as to be pulled out with her. But she was a very wicked woman and she began kicking them. ‘I’m to be pulled out, not you. It’s my onion, not yours.’ As soon as she said that, the onion broke. And the woman fell into the lake and she is burning there to this day. So the angel wept and went away.” (Trans. Constance Garnett.) – Holland expresses a similar perspective in “Good and Evil in Action”, op.cit.

The quality of a person's motives does not lie only in what she puts into words; the meaning of what she says is made manifest in the way she lives. We do not become what we are through being persuaded by reasons; rather what will come to constitute reasons for us is ultimately an expression of who we are. Though argument may play a part in moral disagreements, it will not do so by showing us that, like it or not, we are committed to a certain stance because of certain principles we have already accepted. Rather, if it is effective, it is so by making us see the issue in a different light. Winch quotes Jean-Paul Sartre in this connection:

... Sartre said, perhaps with exaggeration but still with point, that when I come to deliberate – to consider reasons for or against doing something – “*les jeux sont faits*” (“the chips are down”).<sup>31</sup>

And he goes on to say:

Let me express this point by saying that a situation, the issues which it raises and the kind of reason which is appropriate to a discussion of those issues, involve a certain perspective. If I had to say shortly how I take the agent in the situation to be related to the perspective I should say, as I think would Sartre, that the agent *is* his perspective. I should not follow Sartre much further here. I think he is led badly astray by his failure to see clearly that the *possibility* of there being a certain perspective on a situation cannot be led back to any agent's choice.<sup>32</sup>

The shortcoming of conventional accounts of morality (including that of Sartre) is, I think, connected with the idea of a “moral conviction” and its relation to action. Philosophers talk as if people had various moral convictions, which means that they *project* certain values or principles, a “moral theory”, onto a world which is, “in and of itself”, morally neutral. (The theory may consist in a scale of values by which alternative ways of acting are to be compared to one another, or of a set of prescriptions declaring certain ways of acting to be obligatory, permitted or prohibited.) This notion renders the very notion of a moral perspective incomprehensible, since it entails that,

---

<sup>31</sup> Winch, *op. cit.*, pp. 177 f.

<sup>32</sup> P. 178. - In one of his last essays, Winch distances himself from expressing the relation between different moral outlooks as a difference between “perspectives”, suggesting that this makes light of the kind of conflict that may arise between them. See “Doing Justice or Giving the Devil his Due”, in D. Z. Phillips (ed.), *Can Religion be Explained Away?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 171 and n. 14. I would place his response to

however one judges a situation, it might have been judged differently. This means that ultimately any judgment becomes gratuitous. (To point this out is not to deny that one may *respect* judgments that differ from one's own.)

### ***Reasons and reason***

In this connection, we may be led astray by a flawed understanding of the distinction, profoundly important as it is, between reasons and causes. A simplified account of this distinction might run as follows: in acting on the basis of reasons, one's actions can be justified through an appeal to considerations that are similarly available, as the saying goes, "to all rational agents". In as far as a person's behaviour is produced by causes, on the other hand, it is dependent on the situation in which the behaviour occurs and on the kind of influence to which the agent happens to be open. In the former case, we can understand the action by getting into the thinking of the agent; in the latter case, it is ultimately to be explained by an appeal to laws of human behaviour that have to be empirically tested.

On this view, the only room for disagreement concerning the rationality of a course of action is one which is due to a discrepancy between the information available to different agents. This account ignores the extent to which what a person may come to see as a reason, or the force that a certain kind of reason will carry with her, is an expression of who she is. How we see the world is shaped in part by our individual backgrounds and temperaments, as well as by the ways of thought and feeling we share with those around us. The intertwinement of subject and object, individual and collective, is brought out in the following passage in the essay "Human Nature":

A child is born within ... a particular human society. He learns to speak and to engage in various kinds of activity in relation to other people. In the course of these activities he encounters problems of extremely diverse kinds, problems which change in character as he matures, and problems that bring him into new kinds of relations with other people. Along with this development there comes a growth in his understanding of what constitute problems and difficulties for them. This growing understanding manifests itself in the way he comes to treat people in his daily life ... This growth in his understanding of other people through his dealings with them is at the same time a growth in his understanding of himself, which is in turn a development of the kind of person he is. The way a person

---

his own earlier work alongside that in the preface to the new edition of *The Idea of a Social Science*. However, I do not see the necessity of taking the term "perspective" in the way he suggests.

develops in these dimensions will be influenced by the kinds of people, the kinds of situation and the kinds of problems which he finds himself confronted with in the course of his life. But of course it is also true that his growth will depend on what he himself brings to the situations he faces.<sup>33</sup>

This account, we might say, consists entirely of banalities. Its interest lies in showing how a listing of banalities is sufficient to explode the facile dichotomies (such as the “nature-nurture” contrast) in terms of which we tend to think about human thought and behaviour.

The sources of human motivation cannot be divided, once and for all, into those that involve an appeal to “the human capacity for reasoning”, and those that can only be explained by invoking psychology or neurology. The way a person applies the distinction between reasons and causes is itself a reflection of who *he* is. One man’s reasons may be another man’s causes: what is realism to me may be bitterness, or naïveté, to you. Who possesses the capacity for rational thought is not determined by God-given criteria: whether I shall agree to consider you rational will depend, in the end, on the reasons you accept. Of course, I will not demand (unless I am utterly unreasonable myself) that you must accept *my* reasons. But I should have to be able to share your perspective to the degree of being able to enter into argument with you. In fact, disagreement is an attitude I can only have to positions that make sense to me.

In fact, as was said in the introduction, the very issue of whether two individuals can be said to share a perspective or not is to some extent indeterminate. Winch himself gives too simple a construal of this issue in “Moral Integrity”. Having pointed out, in the passage quoted above, that the possibility of there being a perspective cannot be led back to an individual’s choice, he continues: “It depends rather on the language which is available, a language which is not any individual’s invention.”<sup>34</sup> This formulation, if interpreted to mean that all those who speak the same language are in a position to share a perspective, sweeps under the rug the whole question of what it means for a language to “*be available*” to an individual. It is true that the language in which I express my concerns cannot be my invention, but the way I apply it is an expression of who I am. People who conduct their lives in a shared language may yet, as it were, inhabit different parts of it; and even when they use the same words, the *spirit* in which they use them may not be the same.

Elsewhere this indeterminacy, the room there is for divergence and disagreement within what we are inclined to think of as the realm of reason, becomes a central focus of Winch’s

---

<sup>33</sup> This essay was first published in 1969. The quotation is from *EA*, p. 84.

<sup>34</sup> P. 178.

attention. He recognized the risk that, in the effort to steer clear of the Scylla of subjectivism, we might succumb to the Charybdis of moral objectivism or realism. In the essay “Particularity and Morals”, he writes, discussing the issue what kinds of constraint the facts of a situation exert on moral judgment:

Philosophers ... have sometimes spoken of a “moral reality” which exercises the requisite constraint on moral judgement. There is nothing wrong with the phrase as such and it has all kinds of perfectly good uses *within* moral discourse. But ... used in the service of a general characterization of “the relation of moral discourse to reality”, it represents a lapse into mythology. We do not have much more here than a sort of metaphysical counterpart of the Tarskian formula about truth: something which is simply used to buttress the claim that there is indeed a logical constraint on moral judgement without providing an actual account of what that constraint is...

This whole way of thinking is an example of what Wittgenstein was attacking in what he wrote concerning the distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown. We take the Tarskian formula [“‘p’ is true if and only if s”] to give us the relation between the expression in quotation marks and the world. But of course all we have on the right-hand side of the formula are more words... The sentence gets its relation to something other than words (what we are calling “the world”) only through its use, its application... We make contact with the world only through the *application* of language.<sup>35</sup>

In the recent essay “Who is My Neighbour?”<sup>36</sup>, Winch addresses the sort of divergence of understanding that is possible within a shared language. He asks what distinguishes the Samaritan who comes to the rescue of the man who had fallen among robbers from the priest and the Levite who pass the victim by (Luke 10). Winch imagines the Samaritan telling himself, “There’s a human being in distress, I have to go to his rescue”. The point is that the priest and the Levite would not have denied the Samaritan’s description if confronted with it; rather, they never came to consider it under that aspect. What distinguishes the Samaritan from the others cannot be captured in anything

---

<sup>35</sup> First published in 1983. The quotations are from *TMS*, pp. 169, 170. For a related discussion, see “The Universalizability of Moral Judgements” (*EA*). A treatment of moral realism that Winch must have found congenial is that of Cora Diamond in “Wittgenstein, Mathematics and Ethics: Resisting the Attractions of Realism”, in H. Sluga & D. Stern (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>36</sup> In *TMS*.

he might have said *about* the situation; rather, he sees something different *in* it. What mattered was the sensitivity with which they responded to this particular situation.<sup>37</sup>

But neither does this mean that what distinguished the three men was some such thing as a “moral outlook”. In other words, there is no need to imagine the Samaritan’s acting on a suppressed “ethical premise”, such as “always help human beings in distress”; one that, supposedly, the priest and the Levite happened not to share. In fact, if asked to respond to such a principle, say, in a questionnaire, the priest and the Levite might without hesitation have ticked the box “*Agree completely*”. The difference between them lay only in the fact that their response to the actual situation differed: “their attitude was the proof of their attitude” to paraphrase a remark of Wittgenstein’s.

On Winch’s view, the most direct expression in language of the difference in moral response between the Samaritan and the other two is in terms of moral necessity: the Samaritan recognized that there was something he *had* to do, whereas the priest and the Levite did not. This, again, picks up a theme from “Moral Integrity”: moral philosophy, Winch argued, has been handicapped by its preoccupation with concepts like right and wrong, duty and prohibition, etc; concepts that, as it were, express a generalized view of the demands of morality without embodying a commitment to any particular action. What characterizes the moral must, on the other hand, is that, unlike those other terms, it does not allow for the qualification “in principle”.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Philosophy and the individual***

Now if one’s view of good reasoning is partly dependent on the person one is as has been argued here, does not this risk reducing philosophy to a matter of individual idiosyncracies? On a widely shared view, whatever is dependent on the individual can have no legitimate part to play in the discipline: philosophy is an inquiry into logical issues, and therefore considerations of individual psychology must be alien to it. But if this is to be anything more than a slogan, one should be able to show how it works out in particular cases.

It is sometimes said that we should follow the argument wherever it takes us, no matter who presents it or how it is presented. Ideally, philosophical reasoning should be put forward in the form of a deductive argument, the result of which is unambiguous and independent of who presents it.

---

<sup>37</sup> Winch returned to the Samaritan example in “Professor Anscombe’s Moral Philosophy”, in L. Alanen, S. Heinämaa and Th. Wallgren (eds.), *Commonality and Particularity in Ethics* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997). For discussions of it, see D. Z. Phillips, “My Neighbour and My Neighbours”, in his *Interventions in Ethics* (op. cit.); and my essay “On Being Neighbourly”, in J. Whittaker (ed.) *The Possibilities of Sense* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

However, this misconstrues the sense in which philosophy is concerned with logic. Logical argument is not primarily a tool in philosophy (not even in the special branch of philosophy called logic), rather the aim of philosophical reflection is getting clear about the logical character of an issue. The part played in that enterprise by what by any stretch of the imagination could be construed as deductive argument is infinitesimal. Once we are able to agree on how some matter can be laid out in the form of a deductive argument (supposing that that is what we aim to do), the important issues must already have been settled: we must have reached an understanding of what the meaningful questions are, what distinctions need to be made, what types of objection are relevant and what are not, etc. What is required is a meeting of philosophical imaginations (the occurring of such meetings, of course, is a matter of degree). Getting to that point is not so easy, as witness millennia of philosophical disagreement. Above all, there can be no mechanical procedure for getting there. In fact one result of the attempt to reach a meeting of imaginations may be the agreement that such a meeting is unlikely ever to come about.<sup>39</sup>

What matters in this context are things like choice of examples, style of argument, the use of metaphor, etc, features that are in turn bound up with individual predilections and with the tradition in which one has been trained. This connects with the question in what sense we may learn from others in philosophy. According to another well-known slogan there can be no authorities in this discipline. This is not much more helpful than the previous one. Many of us have learnt philosophy not by being given persuasive arguments but by being confronted with models of what it means to be seriously engaged with the issues. Without the example set by a powerful individual we may not give some problem the attention that is required if we are to get clear about what it involves. One's passion for the subject is never entirely free of passion for those who practice it.

Of course, the influence of another can take pernicious forms: we may be under the spell of some teacher in such a way that we will swallow things we would not accept from somebody else. But again, there is no neutral criterion for separating the healthy from the pernicious. The distinction between the logical and the psychological does not work as a tool, rather it enters the discussion as an ideal giving the disagreement a form: by acknowledging this ideal we show in what sense we still see ourselves as engaged in a common undertaking. In the particular case, we have no recourse but to argue the issues.

---

<sup>38</sup> I have discussed the notion of moral necessity in an essay with that title in Raimond Gaita (ed.), *Value and Understanding: Essays for Peter Winch* (London: Routledge, 1990), reprinted in *The Limits of Experience*.

<sup>39</sup> On the nature of philosophical disagreement, see Winch's essay "Apel's 'Transcendental Pragmatics'", *op. cit.* He returned to the issue in some of his late work, e.g. in "Persuasion", in P. French, T. Uehling, Jr. & H. Wettstein (eds.), *The Wittgenstein Legacy: Midwest Studies in Philosophy XVII* (Notre Dame: University of

For better or worse, then, it is inevitable that individual temperaments will shape the course of philosophical debate. One might think here of the impact of the work of Wittgenstein on English-speaking philosophy, or, in turn, of the particular forms that that influence came to be given through the mediation of Rush Rhees and the other Swansea philosophers. I should like to end by saying something about the way I see the personality that Peter Winch brought to philosophy. It is not an uncommon failing among philosophers and people in general to take a self-centred view of our fellow human beings, in which they interest us only to the extent that they fulfil some ideal that we have established in advance (or, perhaps, as negative examples of the failure to reach up to those ideals). It seems to me that much of Winch's life and his philosophy gave expression to the importance of resisting this temptation. He saw that one could only learn about the different forms that human goodness may take by being attentive to the particular forms of goodness manifested by particular individuals. This does not mean that he would necessarily "find his feet" with everybody: Winch did not hide the distance he felt from certain manifestations of life in the culture surrounding him, including philosophy.<sup>40</sup> We are often tempted to legitimize our resentments: we feel that we cannot allow ourselves to distance ourselves from some human phenomenon unless we can prove to our own satisfaction that it is in some way contrary to reason or morality. Winch, it seems, had an uncommon ability to resist this temptation, thus he would not succumb to a simplified view of the relation between sympathy and agreement.<sup>41</sup> It need hardly be said that it is at least as difficult to resist the opposite temptation: telling ourselves we agree just because we are in sympathy with one another. That would mean overlooking one of the most important sources of philosophical insight: the kind of focused disagreement that is only possible where there is an underlying sympathy. Interchanges with Winch made one forcefully aware of this fact.<sup>42</sup>

---

Notre Dame Press, 1992), as well as in "The Expression of Belief", in T. McCarthy & S. Stidd (eds.) *Wittgenstein in America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> For examples of this, see for instance the essay "Can We Understand Ourselves?" (op.cit.).

<sup>41</sup> The importance and the difficulty of doing justice to a position from which we feel distant was the theme of "Doing Justice or Giving the Devil his Due" (op. cit.).

<sup>42</sup> I wish to thank Kevin Cahill, David Cockburn, John Edelman, Olli Lagerspetz, D. Z. Phillips, Sean Stidd and Christopher Winch, as well as the participants in the research seminar at Åbo, for a number of useful comments on earlier versions of this essay.