

## Perennial arguments about intelligibility and rationality in the philosophy of the social sciences.

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I focus on that aspect of Peter Winch's work for which he is most notorious and which is most directly relevant to these proceedings, namely his supposed reflections on 'understanding other cultures'. At a recent meeting, Gavin Kitching delivered a heartfelt protest against Wittgensteinians who endlessly witter on about the Azande, which they do because of Winch's use of that tribe's magical practices [or, at least, Edward Evans-Pritchard's description and evaluation of these in his *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (1937)] as an example in 'Understanding a primitive society' (1964). It is not just Wittgensteinians who repeatedly invoke this example, for it is at least as often invoked by critics of the supposed implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy and/or Winch's applications of it for the philosophy of social science, very commonly in the context of arguments about 'relativism'. More than half-a-century after publication, Winch's paper is still debated, though the intervening years have seen little real progress. Whilst Winch's work is cited as a source of contentious views, the argument over it only seldom discusses directly and in detail the issues that Winch raised. If so, then despite Gavin Kitching's protest (not then directed at me), it may be worth reminding what Winch's concerns actually were, compared with those commonly attributed to him through much of the now extensive – though characteristically superficial – literature.

First, two things need to be recognised. One, the derivation of Winch's thought from his understanding of Wittgenstein's philosophy, and two, that the paper

'Understanding a primitive society' was intended to explain further the arguments from the book *The Idea of a Social Science* (1958). It is also worth bearing in mind that Winch's discussion of the Azande case is part of a reply to Alasdair MacIntyre's criticism of the book. With these things in mind, I will do my best to dispel the idea that Winch's thought was about method in the social sciences, a legislative prescription of a correct procedure for sociological researchers, when it was essentially *descriptive* of what people-in-society commonly do. Insofar as 'understanding' is the issue, then Winch tries to draw attention to what counts as 'understanding' in various contexts of human life. One such context is that of understanding (or failing to understand) people whose ways are impossible for us to accept and difficult to comprehend (which is where the example of the Azande comes in, but not as an instance of any necessarily generic problem of understanding one culture from the point of view of another<sup>1</sup>). Far from drawing out how the difference between someone else's concepts and ours makes it difficult for us to grasp those concepts, Winch is in fact more concerned with how such difficulties can be compounded by gratuitous philosophical preconceptions. Both Evans-Pritchard and MacIntyre are accused of misunderstanding the Azande's magical practices, and in each case, Winch's argument is not that those misunderstandings arise from the inherent difficulty in following the ways in which

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<sup>1</sup> If there is a general problem in the background, I'd suggest it is more with the idea of a 'scientific' obtuseness to the meaning of religious language (cf. 'Darwin *Genesis* and Contradiction'; Winch, 1987, pp. 133 – 39)

the Azande's distinctive magical practices work, but are self-inflicted, produced more by misconceptions about the *home* culture than by intrinsic opacities in the forms of magical practice. Indeed, they are not genuine problems at all, but rather philosophical confusions. This should explain what would otherwise be ironies about Winch's work: he, with no first hand experience of Azande life, would be trying to put right an anthropologist who had at least lived among them; even more strangely (given his supposed relativism), he would be trying to put the anthropologist *right* about the place of some magical practices in the lives of their users.

Here is where the connection with Wittgenstein's philosophy comes to the fore. Though often packaged up with others involved in the great reaction against positivist (mis)conceptions, Winch is not, like most of them, arguing for an alternative form of empirical inquiry to one modelled on natural science, but is arguing that in the key respects that concern him, the 'social studies' (as he would prefer) are not empirical at all.

For Wittgenstein the difference between philosophy and 'science' (broadly construed as empirical investigation) is in the nature of their problems. There is empirical content to scientific questions, but none to philosophical ones which, as mentioned above, are not really questions at all, but have only superficial resemblance to genuine (factual) questions. Philosophy involves no factual investigations, since philosophical investigations arise not from ignorance but from lack of a clear view. Facts do figure in the untangling of philosophical confusions, but those facts are already known and must be uncontroversial (otherwise there would be room for empirical inquiry, meaning the problem wasn't a philosophical one). Philosophical confusions are compounded by the

mistaking of philosophical for empirical problems and consequent attempts to solve them through (inappropriate) empirical investigations. One way of untangling a philosophical confusion is by rearranging uncontested facts in order to display them perspicuously and show them as less puzzling than they have come to seem. Whatever facts those are, they cannot be proprietary to the philosopher because philosophy has no fact-gathering methods of its own.

Understood as an application of this conception of philosophy, Winch's work on the social studies *just can't* propound any doctrines (let alone any doctrines about the nature of reality) and so *just can't* be either the idealism or the relativism for which it has so often been condemned as (any more than Wittgenstein could espouse or imply the 'linguistic idealism' attributed to him)<sup>2</sup>.

There is plenty of factual matter in Evans-Pritchard's (1937) anthropological report on 'witchcraft, oracles, and magic among the Azande' which goes, as it must if the previous paragraph is correct, uncontested. Winch must depend on the factual details of Evans-Pritchard's account if he is to challenge Evans-Pritchard as he does; not least because rearranging some of those details shows that the objectionable elements in Evans-Pritchard are inconsistent with his own materials. Thus, Winch *just can't* be assuming, implying or concluding that each society lives within its own closed circle of intelligibility, inaccessible to the understanding of all but its fully fledged members.

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<sup>2</sup> In another attempt (Winch, 1987, p. 194) to explain to some of his more severe critics how badly they had got him wrong, Winch wrote 'It is one thing for a man to think something is so and quite another thing for what he thinks to be so', then shortly he appends: 'however, it is considerably easier to recognize this as a truism than it is to understand exactly how it is to be applied in different areas of human thinking' (p. 195).

Best, perhaps, to think of the paper's title, 'Understanding a primitive society', not as voicing a general problem of understanding *any* society with a culture differing from 'our own', but as asking a specific question, how is a specific society, i.e. *this one*, to be (correctly) understood?

At least for purposes of discussion, just assuming that his fieldwork was sound, Evans-Pritchard successfully understood what I'll call 'the mechanics' of Azande practices, down to a detailed understanding of which ritual rattle is used and when; has understood when and where witchcraft accusations are made; what the causality of bewitchment is; how witches are identified by the oracle, amongst many other things (the full edition is some 550 pages long!) Winch's criticism is focused on a section of the book where Evans-Pritchard creates a problem for himself. Evans-Pritchard, unlike some of his predecessors, did not suppose that engaging in 'primitive magic' was a symptom of some comparative mental deficiency. He assumed, rather, the tribe's intellectual equivalence. It was thought that 'primitive magic' revealed an inability to comprehend causal connections amongst empirical phenomena, the symptomatic form of mental inferiority, but the Azande showed as good a grasp of basic ideas of empirical causality as we do<sup>3</sup>. Nor were they any less intellectually questing than we are, for their magical practices were to be understood as expressing the same desire for an understanding of the fundamental nature of reality as our own sciences express.

Here is where Evans-Pritchard finds his problem: given that these people are no less intelligent than we are, why can they

not see, as we so plainly do, that their practices cannot possibly work? How can they go in for these practices with a straight face when it is apparent that in many cases they will be let down? Compatible with the assumption of their intelligence, the explanation is to be found in the structure of the beliefs organizing the magical practices. Evans-Pritchard divides these into two kinds, those stating the central principles of witchcraft, the nature of the witchcraft substance and its capacities to cause harm, and those protecting those core beliefs against empirical refutation by explaining away (through the system's terms) those occasions when the practices let people down.

Note that 'Understanding a primitive society' gets down to its business with an opening statement that 'like many other primitive people, the African Azande hold beliefs that we cannot possibly share and engage in practices which it is peculiarly difficult for us to comprehend' (p. 307), so Winch *just can't* be trying to persuade us that there is no limit to our capacity to understand their magic, and his disagreement with Evans-Pritchard (and with Alasdair MacIntyre) is over the nature and location of that limit. In his valedictory return to the topic in 'Can we understand ourselves?' (1997) Winch regretted that his chosen example had misled so many of his readers, giving the impression that he was interested primarily in the problem of understanding other cultures by putting that to the fore. As a result, his commentators and critics had taken the key words in 'understanding another culture' to be 'another culture' whereas that identity was incidental to the main purpose which was with (the concept of) 'understanding'. That there are, *sometimes*, problems in understanding another culture is uncontroversial, and Winch's argument neither requires nor entails more than that. Nor does it suppose the absence of comparable problems within one and the

<sup>3</sup> It would be tiresome for writer and reader to keep putting 'them', 'us', 'our', 'their', 'they' and 'we' in scare quotes, though that is where they often should go, so I will largely refrain from doing so and assume that readers will understand where the use of quotes would be appropriate

same culture. On the contrary.

Winch thinks that Evans-Pritchard's mistakes are with respect to assessing the place of magical practices within the lives of the Azande; the mistakes derive very much from Evans-Pritchard's philosophical confusion about the place of science in our own society. If Winch is right in this, then it *just can't* be that Evans-Pritchard has run up against some intrinsic obstacle in understanding the alien culture, for he has put the obstacle there himself. Evans-Pritchard is in a familiar philosophical morass, the confusion of thinking that the question 'What is the relationship between language and reality?' can be intelligible *as a general question*.

There is something of an inconsistency between the different criticisms of Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy, if not within some of these criticisms. On the one hand, this philosophy is damned for only talking about nuances in the use of words at the expense of a concern with reality itself. On the other, it is damned for purveying false doctrines about the nature of reality (idealism, for example). If, though, the question 'What is the relationship between language and reality' makes no sense if asked in a general way, that it can't be given any sensible general answer., So if idealism is a supposedly general answer to the general question, then it can't have genuine sense either. Consequently the argument can't be that Evans-Pritchard has given the wrong general answer to the question, leaving the way open for Winch to produce the right one.

One of Wittgenstein's therapeutic moves is to bring the ordinary words that are seemingly so troublesome to philosophy back to their home environment, that of their use in ordinary affairs. Winch does this with the word 'reality'. General questions about the relationship between

language and reality overlook the fact that 'reality' belongs to the English language, not to philosophy. It has its own use in practical affairs. The case against Evans-Pritchard boils down to this, that he treats the expression 'reality' as though science (now used in a narrow sense referring to the natural sciences) had sole and proprietary possession of it when it has intelligible use in other contexts than scientific ones.

Winch's philosophy, like Wittgenstein's, is concerned with intelligibility or sense, rather than with questions of truth (since saying whether empirical assertions are true is the business of empirical inquiry and outside the remit of philosophy). 'Reality' has intelligible uses within law, religion, and history, as well as in philosophy, and these uses are not necessarily coordinate with one another.

Winch certainly regards the concept 'reality' as more than just-another-concept, but rather as one indispensable to any language and thereby to pretty much any practice.<sup>4</sup> One can imagine a language without the concept of 'television' but without that of 'reality'? As we will see he makes the same point about 'rationality'. Winch's treatment of the word 'reality' is not very far from J.L. Austin's treatment of it as a 'trouser word' (Austin, 1972 p. 70). Once upon a time, the one who 'wore the trousers' bossed the rest of the household. Comparably, it is the implicit or explicit contrast term with which the word 'real' is associated in use that 'wears the trousers' and thus bosses the meaning of 'real' in that context. The question 'Is that real?' requires some context for its intelligibility. 'Is that a real fiver?' has the contrast 'forgery' to hand, with associated ways of checking the validity of the note, whilst 'Is that a real leg?' contrasts with 'artificial' and its ways of finding an answer. The

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<sup>4</sup> It is a matter of registering the possibility of some sort of 'an external check' on assertions people make.

word ‘reality’ is ubiquitous across departments of social life but that does not signify a generality in the kind of contrast made across all occasions, only the multifariousness of the contrasts made on different occasion. There can be no general question ‘What is real?’ to be asked independently of some contrast-bearing context. Thus the word ‘reality’ is used both in science and religion, making contrasts in each case, but the lines it is used to draw are very different in science from those in religion.

Winch’s difference from most of his critics is surely due to the fact that he does not see science *as having any especially close relationship to philosophy*. As the contrast of empirical with conceptual inquiries should make plain, philosophy and science are in different and quite independent businesses. Philosophy can reflect upon language use in science (for purposes of disentangling philosophical confusions) as it can on language use in any area of life, but it does not need, for its purposes, to endorse or question the results of science. There is no necessary animosity toward science in this (though critics sometimes imagine that not only is there animosity, but that is intense), it is simply that there is no need to endorse or question the results of science for these purposes (not to mention that philosophers *qua* philosophers generally lack the competence to make informed decisions either way on individual findings in one or other of the natural sciences<sup>5</sup>). Winch’s critics often and unreflectively assume a close connection between philosophy and science; they are apt to see themselves speaking on behalf of, if not from within, a scientific point of view and to treat the demarcations marked in scientific discourse by ‘reality’ as especially

important, if not generally definitive.

Winch’s point requires no more than the observation that it is intelligible (to us as well as to the Azande) that the oracle makes a difference between people who are in reality bewitched and people who are not (though, since they suffered misfortune, it may have seemed that they were). The application of ‘reality’ is tied to very different procedures in oracular consultations and in scientific experiments, and Evans-Pritchard effectively underestimates the further differences that this makes, to the extent of coming into conflict with his own descriptive portrayal of the mechanics of magical practice. Evans-Pritchard’s own descriptions of witchcraft diagnoses show that the oracle’s deliverances are not treated as hypothetical predictions which are to be tested to see if they are fulfilled – they do not have a comparable place in the life of the Azande to that which hypotheses have in the lives of laboratory scientists. At the same time, Evans-Pritchard exaggerates the pre-eminence of scientific hypotheses in our own culture<sup>6</sup>. They do have a prominent place in our lives, but that does not preclude there being other aspects of our culture that are closer to the ways of the Azande than they are to the model of hypothesis-testing science. The way in which Christian prayers solicit God’s help, or the importance that people invest in tokens of their relationships to others (such as wedding rings) can remind us that we are not always so distant from magical practices as all that.

If Evans-Pritchard’s basic mistake is grounded in the {pseudo-}philosophical problem of the relationship between

<sup>5</sup> Winch’s own interventions in the ‘social sciences’ do not transgress this limit, since as far as he is concerned ‘social sciences’ often subsumes conceptual confusions at least as much as empirical difficulties.

<sup>6</sup> Not to mention neglecting the extent to which science resembles Evans-Pritchard’s picture of the belief structure of witchcraft, with innumerable scientific predictions being falsified and then ‘explained away’ in science’s own terms. I’m not saying this is a good analogy, since the point is to obviate this picture of how magic works.

language and reality, which leads him into unsuitable analogies between the two cultures when he attempts to understand the part magic plays in people's lives by matching it with something that plays a comparable part in ours. Recognition that practices that are much akin to magical ones come as naturally to some members of our culture as does dealing with witchcraft among the Azande eliminates the need for the kind of explanation Evans-Pritchard wants to give in terms of core and supporting beliefs. Clearer understanding of a practice can be enough, as it is in this case, to make it intelligible as to why they continue in it.

As this way of reading 'Understanding a primitive society' makes plain, its main force is at least as much against Evans-Pritchard's treatment of 'us' as it is of 'them', just as the second half of the paper, which centres on criticism of MacIntyre's presuppositions about our standards of rationality confirms.

Wittgenstein's methodology of showing that ordinary language expressions which are the focus of philosophical puzzlement have just as humble a civilian use as 'lamp' or 'door' does not lead Winch to think of our concepts of 'reality' and 'rationality' as being just-another-concept concepts. Whilst one can find languages without the concept of lamp or door, it isn't plausible to Winch that one would find one without either of these concepts. Nevertheless much the same treatment can be given to 'rationality' as was given to 'reality' above, i.e. recognising that 'rationality' has a life outside scientific contexts. Its use is dependent on contexts of application – it may be used in religious contexts just as readily as within scientific ones (though it mustn't be thought necessarily to have the same content from one religion to another).

This is not leading up to the conclusion that I disavowed on Winch's behalf earlier in the discussion, namely that there each

culture has its own independent and distinctive rationality. Winch is not arguing that there is such a disparity between Azande culture and our own that the rationality of theirs cannot be recognised in terms of ours. On the contrary, Winch's opposition is to what he sees as MacIntyre's exaggeration of the contrast between our rationality and theirs.

Most simply, it just is not as though 'our' concept of rationality demands that we find 'their' practices irrational (No more, then, is it necessary to condemn 'our' concept of rationality as subject to ethnocentric blindness to other cultures). To Winch, the version of 'our culture' which serves as the platform for MacIntyre's (1962, 1970) arguments is one which makes our use of 'rationality' more rigidly bounded and well defined than it is. 'Our' notion of rationality is not to be applied in mechanical fashion, as though they could be applied across the board, quite independently of the cases they are being applied to, those criteria are not even necessarily all that determinate. It is as if one can tell on sight whether any activity is rational or not, without need to pay much or careful attention to the case. Winch holds that 'our' criteria do not embody an advance assessment of every possible case. New cases can present problems for the application of 'our' criteria, and the decision as to how to rate the cases may itself call for rational reflection, offering the opportunity for the extension of those standards to unfamiliar, even unprecedented kinds of cases, understanding of *both* the standards and the cases being changed through thoughtful consideration:

possibilities which are perhaps suggested and limited by what we have hitherto so accepted [as rational], but not uniquely determined thereby. (Winch, 1964, p. 318)

Furthermore,

these possibilities are limited by certain

formal requirements centring round the demand for consistency. But these formal requirements tell us nothing about what in particular is to *count* as consistency, just as the rules of the formal calculus limit, but do not themselves determine, what are to be the proper values of p, q, etc. (ibid, emphasis in original)

Steven Lukes (2000), one of the longest-standing critics of Winch and what he sees as related positions, was relieved to find, after reading through the fierce debate between Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere over events resulting in the death of Captain Cook at the hands of Hawaiians.

I was on the right track. For nothing said by Sahlins shows the Hawaiians to have been bereft of the power to think logically and draw inferences and of the ability to recognize material objects and human persons, even including Captain Cook, for what they were. (Lukes, 2000, p. 17)

Lukes relief reflects the fact he, like others, is apt to view the idea of different rationalities as implying that others might be incapable of ‘logical thought’ where that involves drawing inferences, recognising inconsistencies and so forth, but that is not, as the quotations shows, an idea that comes from Winch<sup>7</sup>. ‘The formal

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<sup>7</sup> Winch does discuss the fact that Azande do not acknowledge a contradiction that Evans-Pritchard thinks is to be found in their thought, but this could as well be understood in relation to Wittgenstein’s theme that in their practical lives, people are not ‘superstitious’ about contradiction in the way that he accuses formal logicians as being, and practical folk may not have any practical need to do anything about the contradiction. If one thinks of a Marxist-style account of capitalism as featuring internal contradictions, say, as a sound account, or of Seymour Lipset’s *First New Nation* with its thesis that the history of American society has been shaped by its commitment to the contradictory objectives of equality and achievement as a successful description, then it would seem that neither do contradictions matter all that much to ‘us’. Winch’s discussion is about the fact that the Azande do not draw certain conclusions resulting in a contradiction, with no suggesting that they are

limits centring around the demand for consistency’ are a minimal requirement unavoidably set by the requirements of our own concept of rationality – if there were not some consistency then why speak of different *rationalities* at all?

However, and in line with remarks in *The Idea of a Social Science* about the dependence of relations of logic on the relations of people, the point is that recognising such formal analogies between our practices and theirs says

nothing about what in particular constitutes rational behaviour in that society; that would require more particular knowledge about the norms they appeal to in living their lives. (ibid, p. 318)

Our determination of whether there is a contradiction in another culture depends upon our developing an understanding of that culture. We have to determine whether something which, on superficial acquaintance with their practices, looks like a contradiction will continue to look like one as we become more familiar with the ways of that practice and, as Winch adds, the contexts in which its rules apply, as well as the part that they play in the lives of those involved with them.

MacIntyre is thus accused of treating the determination of comparative rationality as a matter of applying our standard of rationality as the measure of the rationality of their behaviour without thought for what their own standards of rationality might be. Hilary Putnam reputedly responded to the charge that he was only using one’s own criteria of rationality, ‘Who else’s should I use?’ Winch likewise emphasises our unavoidable dependence on our own criteria of rationality in framing our understanding of others, but does not think that this must result in the overriding of any one else’s independent standard. This

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incapable of making inferences or recognising contradictions.

unavoidable dependence gives MacIntyre the 'optical illusion' that all that is involved in appraising their rationality is one set of standards, which are both 'ours' and also 'the' standards. Hence in examining behaviour, he poses the question: how does that behaviour square up to these - our - standards? MacIntyre therefore neglects what is for Winch the indispensable *first* task, which is to establish what their standards of rationality are (standards in terms of which their behaviour is intelligible to them). Understanding their standards of rationality is nothing different from or additional to learning to understand their practices, but recognition that their standards of rationality are involved can correct the 'optical illusion'. It is not necessarily beyond our powers to use our standards of rationality to identify and understand those of the others in a way which does not obliterate or trivialise these differences, for the very reason given above, that standards of rationality are open, and that their application to new cases involves decisions. The choices available to us are not the ones that the philosophy of social science has rather tended to suppose must force itself on us, that we must *either* find that the others are rational because they have just the same rationality as us *or* that they cannot be called rational in our terms because they have a completely different and entirely different rationality. First of all, Winch's argument is wholly against the thought that questions of comparative rationality are to be decided (even though he knows that his own form of philosophy is one of *apriori* i.e. conceptual inquiry) through taking a general stand on the - shall I call it? - conceptual closure of different cultures. The substantive emptiness of the 'formal' requirements for rationality ensure that this cannot be done, since their substantive realisation is only possible within the context of a culture., So it cannot be assumed that the shapes rationality takes there must be readily

recognisable, easily identifiable with, or even paralleling at all the shapes rationality takes amongst us. Perforce, grasping others' standards of rationality modifies our own:

we are not seeking a state in which things will appear to us just as they do to members of S [an alien culture], and perhaps such a state is unattainable anyway. But we *are* seeking a way of looking at things which go beyond our previous experience in that it has in some way taken account of and incorporated the other way that members of S have of looking at things. Seriously to study another way of life is necessarily to seek to extend our own - not simply to bring the other way within the already existing boundaries of our own, because the point about the latter in their present form, is that they *ex hypothesis* exclude that other (Winch, 1964, p. 318)

Comparative assessments then must crucially depend, on the one side, on careful determination of the features of the instant case and, on the other, choice of an appropriate comparator. None of this implies a general, and certainly not *apriori* doctrine about the comparative rationalities of diverse cultures, not least because the focus in the two main cases - Evans-Pritchard, MacIntyre - is on what Winch takes to be a peculiarity of our culture, namely, the prominent place that 'science' is given in it, and some problems which arise *among us* as a result of that. When these problems appear in the context of 'understanding another culture' one way to counter them is by paying close(r) attention to the ways of the other culture. If this is done, then it *may* be that unfamiliar ways will seem more intelligible/rational than they first appeared, but it does not follow that this *must* be so. For once Winch is in agreement with MacIntyre, the fact that a practice has rules does not establish that practice's rationality, for wider account may need to be taken of the place the practice has in people's lives in understanding the point of the practice:

For, as MacIntyre quite rightly says, to note that certain rules are followed is so far to say nothing about the *point* of the rules; it is not even to decide whether or not they have a point at all. (Winch, 1964, p. 318)

Just as it is not to be assumed in advance that any given practice must have a point, neither, presumably, is it for those who do not belong to a practice to dictate whether it does, for the question is about how those engaged in the practice relate to it. No more, then, can Winch be ruling out the possibility that people find those practices, in which they themselves are engaged, e pointless and alienating, even becoming critical of them, though he is often enough accused of conceiving people as intractably bound into the status quo. When James Kellenberger says

As anthropologists, or simply as scientifically-minded observers, we can ask: Is their belief in witches true? As Twentieth-century men, of course, we have good reason to think it false. (Kellenberger, 1972, p. 48)

he is misleadingly treating the question ‘Is their belief in witches true?’ as though it could be a live question for us, when that question is only the same as ‘are there any witches?’ One can see the way that asking ‘Is their belief in witches true?’ might make relativism seem a tempting option, especially in the light of Winch’s emphasis on the autonomy of their standards. Saying outright that their belief in witches is false could seem like the kind of epistemic imperialism that Winch has been warning against, so saying that ‘belief in witches is true *for them*’ might seem like a way out. Yet (a) appending “for them” only achieves redundancy, since in this context the ‘belief’ in ‘their belief in witches’ means ‘take as true’ and (b) avoids facing up to the fact that the question only means the same as ‘are there witches?’, and cannot effectively conceal the fact that this is not a question that we can *seriously* ask. I have emphasised Winch’s sentence about ‘beliefs we cannot possibly accept’ and

must do so again, for Azande belief in witches just is one of those. Winch’s own philosophical position *as such* does not entitle him to either endorsement or denial of the existence of witches, that is a substantive factual matter and outside philosophy’s remit, though it is just a fact about our (culturally conditioned) responses that we give no credence to witches. Winch’s exercise hardly incites us to reconsider our incapacity, being more concerned that our inability to accept their beliefs should neither distort our understanding of their concepts (which is a matter of the part they play in their lives), nor sustain related misconceptions about the part that science plays in ours.

Winch’s arguments are addressed to social scientists, but they do not speak to problems which belong distinctively to social science, nor does he prescribe methods for them. Given his Wittgensteinian views, it is not possible for Winch to legislate a correct method of understanding when the nature of the approach is descriptive (or, as Winch terms it, ‘reflective’). Thus, Winch is not laying out any proprietary criteria for what ‘understanding’ must be, but is himself applying those that he finds in use within the society, to determine whether, *by those standards*, this or that would count as understanding or misunderstanding. In his last word on the subject, Winch makes explicit just what I argue was always manifest in his early writings, namely that understanding ‘another culture’ does not proceed on the basis of an unproblematic grasp of the ‘home’ case. He again affirms the possibility of limits to understanding, but not ones which can be drawn in any general way because ‘the line between what is and what is not “alien” is quite indeterminate’ (p. 202). Such limits may persist even though one understands very well the mechanics of some practice; this may be ‘curable in particular cases, and in others it may not’ (p.204). This indeterminacy can result from the

variability of human reaction, and arises between participants in different practices in the same culture as much as between those from different cultures, as when he writes

I see no reason why a contemporary historical scholar might not feel himself more at home in the world of medieval alchemy than in that of twentieth century football. (Winch, 1964, p. 198),

This kind of alienation can, for any given individual, be quite far reaching. Nor should we think that the comment 'I cannot understand how you could ...' needn't signify disappointment and a wish for a better understanding but, as David Cockburn reminds, may express full-on refusal and condemnation. The forms these disparities in understanding may take are heterogeneous and multifarious and are, for Winch (at least in part) produced by variability in responses, the ways in which individuals react to their exposure to parts of the surrounding culture<sup>8</sup>. Resultant gulfs in understanding are not, then, the result of using a wrong method nor susceptible to 'correction' through use of the right one. These considerations were much in mind with my earlier example of businessmen and bureaucrats being at least, if not more, remote from contemporary sociologists than any Pacific islander could be, as also in my comment on the social science reception of Winch as a choice example of his theme. The limitations to understanding Winch has in mind are prevailingly personal ones, those that individuals may nor may not find insuperable, and which are no less connected with the use of the concept of 'understanding' than are those cases in which persistent allegations are made against both Wittgenstein and Winch for arguments which preclude all possibility of

criticism. I probably should insert 'rational' before criticism. The basic logic of the charge may be plain enough; the supposed 'closure' of cultures against one another does not only bound intelligibility, but circumscribes an epistemic limit because the culture defines what 'knowledge' and 'truth' are, and any fully encultured individual will by definition be bound into faithful adherence to those definitions. Not because of any individual naïveté but simply because all thought is straight jacketed in these culturally given assumptions which define what can conceivably count as 'real' (thus precluding all possibility of counter-evidence). Disregarding the multitude of misconceptions involved in such misguided extrapolations, a response in accord with the 'descriptive not legislative' slogan can be a brief one: the task is not to determine (as if for the first time, therefore legislatively) the correct answer to 'Is (rational) criticism possible?' but to ask 'Is there criticism? What kinds of criticism are there, and what kind are criticisms such as these (e.g. of religion by atheists)? Where is this or that kind of criticism intelligible, and where not?' (all these questions inviting descriptive answer). This can be thought of as a third reprise of the fundamental point: since key words enmeshed in philosophical confusions belong to the language, which includes 'criticism', then, like 'reality' and 'rationality', criticism too can be understood to be ubiquitous, multifarious and contextually dependent. It is an elementary fact that there is plenty of disparity, if not outright conflict, between cultures, and abundant criticism of one culture from within another. So there can too be disparity and criticism within a single culture. This is just the sort of uncontroversial fact discussed at the outset, and it can only be utterly absurd to construe Wittgenstein and Winch as being in blatant denial about this.

Recognising that this line of interpretation

<sup>8</sup> There isn't room further to discuss the importance for Winch of the place of the first place and the personal in all these matters (cf. Winch, 1989, pp. 14-17)

is absurd will not, however, ease the problems of the acceptability of their arguments amongst some social scientists. Here the real trouble is not that the arguments rule out all possibility of criticism *per se* but that they cast doubt on the preferred position, which is that one kind of criticism be considered pre-eminent: it rests on objective criteria (such as those provided by science's methods or results, or comes with a successful philosophical theory) that can serve as a transcendental and neutral standard against which the credibility or rationality of any culture can be compared. Another twist of the curlicue would be to say that resistance to the idea of such an impartial standard *is* relativism, for it denies all possibility of culture-free and impartial assessment of people's naive understandings of their situation, even their plight. Such a twist produces only another lap of a circular argument where such objections again beg the question about the importance of context of use. It is not that ideas of 'impartiality', 'neutrality' and 'culture freedom' are denied intelligible application but (following arguments comparable to those about 'reality' and 'rationality') what could count as instances of these is contextually determined. It is the 'rationalist' idea that 'dependence on cultural context' equates with 'culture bound' and its derogatory sense, leading to the false supposition that Winch's assertion of the unavoidable ubiquity of such dependence must effectively also be affirming that we are universally culture bound. It is then doubly ironic that Winch's objection to the rationalist strains in Evans-Pritchard and MacIntyre is that their proclamations of an objective standpoint show that they themselves are culture bound. There is no suggestion that if this is their position, however, it is one which reflects an essential human plight to which we must all resign ourselves (for it is a fault Evans-Pritchard and MacIntyre manifest only at a few – albeit crucial – moments in their

thought, not some thoroughgoing affliction).

I've been trying to present a Winch without doctrines, intent on showing that his arguments can be understood as free of the metaphysical and epistemological attachments that are frequently assigned to them<sup>9</sup>. The tendency of commentators to attribute both, most often for purposes of facilitating rebuttal, only shows that Winch's commentators remain firmly rooted in the kinds of doctrinal philosophy that Winch would turn away from, consequently confirming his thought that social scientists are often thoroughly enmeshed with conceptual problems, though under the impression that factual matters are at stake. Reading Winch doctrinally can create and maintain the illusion that Winch aims to *prescribe* theory and methodology on the basis of controversial theses about the extent of human rationality, and the general form in which people's behaviour is to be explained (namely, as rule-following). Understood, instead, as descriptive, it becomes clear that he is not aiming to lay

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<sup>9</sup> Not to mention the kind of lunatic implications that are ludicrously attributed e.g. 'Should actors agree that they are wealthy, happy, beautiful etc. then they will be all of these things' (Kemp, 2003, 72). Such absurdities result from disregarding the difference between agreement in responses (*not* opinions) underpinning the constancy which justifies talk of 'a rule' to begin with, and the role of the rule as standard according to which e.g. assessments of facts can be made. As standards, they give criteria for e.g. what counts as 'wealth' or 'beauty' but the fact people agree – if they do!!! – on what the criteria for 'poverty' or 'ugliness' are does not mean that expressions such as 'Y is poor, but X is not' and 'A is beautiful but B is ugly' somehow disappear from the language. Whether Y is poor or B is ugly is decided against agreed standards, but it is the extent of Y's resources and the character of B's looks which determine whether, they are ugly or not. It is decided by the agreement between the standard and the (relevant) facts, not by agreement (in opinion) amongst individuals. Recognising these differences ought to be an elementary requirement to an understanding of Wittgenstein and/or Winch.

down new procedures for social science, but attempting to draw attention to the ways in which people already – and otherwise unremarkably – behave; it is a matter of presenting what Wittgenstein would call ‘reminders’ of what is already done within and across assorted practices (including the unreflective conduct of social scientists themselves). Winch does no more than point to the presence of the concepts of ‘reality’ and ‘rationality’ in disparate areas of social life and sketches some of the ways they figure there. This is no first step toward developing any proprietary account of the nature of ‘reality itself’ which would almost inevitably assume idealist proportions, to the effect that ‘reality depends on our concepts’ (though it is only with a very considerable stretch that this could be regarded as a paraphrase of ‘the notion of “reality”’; it only has any sense in some application’, and even then it would still risk being dangerously misleading). The whole point of Wittgenstein’s therapeutic method is to abjure that next step, recognising that surveying (some of) the diversity of applications is itself the point of termination, no preliminary to, but a very deliberate abstaining from, *either* invidious identification of philosophy with any one of those contexts of application *or* collectively (relativistically) endorsing all of them.

The sketch of Peter Winch drawn here shows him only a very distant relative (if connected at all) to the one in this picture:

Along with numerous other interpreters/appropriators of Wittgenstein’s thinking, Winch looked to it to critique positivist programs [sic] but at the same time to supplant them with a theory that shared the optimistic assessment of many positivists concerning the possibility of a philosophically, a rationally, warranted understanding of the main features and tendencies of human affairs. He advanced the claim that human actions, practices and activities are rule-governed, purposefully

reflective and hence mutually meaningful as true, but it is clear that it was important to him that this be the case, that he had a deep normative investment in his view that any very generalized scepticism concerning or pessimism about the prospect of mutual understanding is unwarranted. (Flathman, 2000, p. 11).

These comments are made with respect to *The Idea of a Social Science* but even there Winch references the limit that comes with variation in individual capacities for response by pointing to the indispensability of mathematical, musical and aesthetic sensibilities for the understanding of maths, music and painting<sup>10</sup>. In ‘Can we understand

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<sup>10</sup> It is true that Winch also remarks about birth, sex and death as what Winch called ‘limiting notions’, but this is not very far from Wittgenstein’s remark on the role of the ‘common behaviour of mankind’ as the frame of reference we use to understand an unfamiliar language:

‘The common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language’ (Wittgenstein, 1953, § 206)

In any case, there is no dogmatic prescription of what limits follow from them:

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 (Winch, 1964, 322)

Could this be same Winch?

But that does *not* mean that one’s views are subject to the test of some ultimate criterion, the criterion of what does and what does not belong to human nature. It means only that new difficulties, and perhaps new ways of meeting the difficulties, are always lurking below the horizon, and that discussion continues. Sometimes, if one is lucky, the discussion clarifies or extends one’s conception of what is possible for human beings. But it is no use saying that this is contingent on what *is* or *is not* possible for human beings; for our only way of arriving at a view about that is by continuing to try to deal with the difficulties that arise in the course of discussion (Winch, 1972, p. 88).

ourselves?' a primordial connection between the supposed problem of other cultures and that of other minds is acknowledged, with, in both cases, the initial supposition being that the first-person case understanding is wholly unproblematic, whereas the third-person one is presumptively problematic. Winch is cautioning that a capacity for self-understanding is not to be taken-for-granted as the starting point for reflection. From the fact there is no *logical* prohibition on the possibility of knowing another person's thoughts or feelings it does not follow that a meeting of minds automatically take place between any two individuals, whether or not they are from the same culture or even joint participants in the same practice. The possibility that (some) individuals might prove unfathomable to others remains, as does the fact that, at the level of practices, advanced mathematics is impenetrable to most people.

In Flathman's reading of Winch (which is intended to be mainly sympathetic) it as though it is the philosopher's job to adjudicate whether understanding between individuals or groups of human beings is uniformly possible, for only if that were so would any wholesale optimism about 'the prospect of mutual understanding' even be meaningful. Winch's philosophy is not *apriori* in this way<sup>11</sup>, and offers no advance assurances as to whether there will be (reciprocal?) understanding in any actual case, nor even anticipates what criteria are in use to fix 'what counts as understanding' in any as yet unfamiliar practice. What could have been properly expressed as scepticism toward general questions about 'understanding' is wrongly portrayed as a general scepticism about the possibility of giving a negative answer to such questions. Toward the end of *The Idea of a Social Science* Winch recalls that

I noted in the first chapter how philosophy is concerned with elucidating and comparing the ways in which the world is made intelligible in different intellectual disciplines; and how this leads on to the elucidation and comparison of different forms of life. The lack of commitment of philosophy comes out here in the fact that it is equally concerned to elucidate its own account of things; the concern of philosophy with its own being is thus not an unhealthy Narcissistic aberration, but an essential part of what it is trying to do. In performing this task the philosopher will in particular be alert to deflate the pretensions of any form of enquiry to enshrine the essence of intelligibility as such, to possess the key to reality. For connected with the realization that intelligibility takes many and varied form is the realization that reality has no key. (Winch, 1958, p. 102).

## The possibility of Social Science

Much of the argument against Winch is less about the possibility of understanding *per se* but about the possibility of a special kind of understanding provided by Social Science and, especially, the continuing viability of the idea of a 'Critical Social Theory'. Winch is accused of holding that

the scientific study of social and political things is inadequate or impossible [because] action must necessarily be identified in the actor's concepts' which are 'logically incompatible with causal explanation' (1973, p. 254, quoted in Gunnell, 2007, p. 81)

But it is rather that 'social science' and 'social theory' are (largely) *misplaced efforts*<sup>12</sup>. Winch brings *The Idea of a*

<sup>12</sup> Rachel Cooper (2004) asks 'Can sociologists understand other forms of life?' My suggestion is that Winch's answer to this is: given that other people can do this, there seems to be no reason why sociologists shouldn't be able to do it either, (subject, of course, to the usual conditions of variability in individual capacities to come to get the hang of or come to grips with those 'forms of life's' forms of life and getting along with those who live them. Cooper's argument presupposes

<sup>11</sup> It is *apriori* in other ways

*Social Science* to a close by substituting the – then popular – analogy with social scientific theories and their data which fuelled ‘the idea of a social science’ by one involving ‘theories of logic’ and ‘arguments in particular languages’ to the effect that

‘The relation between sociological theories and historical narrative is less like the relation between scientific laws and the reports of experiments or observations than it is like that between theories of logic and arguments in a particular language. ... One does not have to know the [logical] theory in order to appreciate the connection between the steps of the argument; on the contrary, it is only in so far as one can already grasp logical connections between particular statements in particular languages that one is even in a position to understand what the logical theory is all about. Whereas in natural science it is your theoretical knowledge which enables you to explain occurrences which you have not previously met, a knowledge of logical theory on the other hand will not enable you to understand a piece of reasoning in an unknown language; you will have to learn that language and that

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just what Winch casts doubt on, that sociologists face a special problem, one which they must decide by principled debate amongst themselves where the criterion of success will be whether agreement is achieved on a correct method which counts as ‘yielding understanding of a culture’, rather than responding to the question: what counts as understanding in and amongst those cultures). There may be questions about how much and what sort of understanding is needed *for sociological purposes* but since these are neither well defined nor stable, these will perforce be meaningfully asked only on fairly specific situations. Cooper’s discussion focuses on ‘science studies’ for reasons that ought to be obvious. Paul O’Grady (2004) says that Winch, like D. Z. Phillips, engages in ‘denial of some external vantage point from which different views of the world can be judged’ and under the guise of ‘external’ slips in something close to the idea of a ‘transcendental’ or ‘objective’ viewpoint. What else is Winch’s argument with Evans-Pritchard and MacIntyre if not about the need to be careful in judging a culture from *an external* viewpoint? Not one that need be labelled transcendental or objective, but is just from another culture.

in itself *may* suffice to enable you to grasp the connections between the various parts of arguments in that language’ (pp. 134-5, emphasis in original)

Even though these words were published over fifty years ago and the analogy with the natural sciences is now much more unpopular, i.e. sociological generalities are not normally thought of as ‘laws’, yet it does not follow that their point is outmoded. Though there is no room here to show contemporary application of the point, one can nevertheless say that the question which Winch poses still deserves to be asked much more widely and persistently: in sociology, does understanding of cases really follow from the generalities as it is portrayed doing, or is it, rather, that the generalities depends on prior possession of what Winch calls ‘an independent’ grasp of the situations making up those cases? There is, though, another question which is antecedent - how far are the questions to which sociological generalities are given in answer even genuine questions rather than expressions of confusion? And how far is that due – as Wittgenstein diagnosed – to two sources of philosophical muddle: a craving for generality, and its associated disdain for the particular case? Much the same things can be said about the concept of ‘explanation’ as were said about ‘reality’, ‘rationality’ and ‘understanding’<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Raatzsch (1993, 152) says ‘Sociology and philosophy do not merge, as [Roger] Trigg (and also Winch) think.’ This is more correct if one superficially surveys the range of research topics that sociologists address, but much less so if one assesses the major and persistent problems that occupy sociology and that are presupposed in its studies.

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## Discussion

### Question

So you are saying that the argument which claims a common universalist rationality to be the basis for understanding all people and cultures is much too intellectualist?

### Wes Sharrock

There is a point in Winch where he says he doesn't like the sociologist's standard concept of socialisation, for the simple reason that it overlooks the fact that people react to their culture in very different ways. People's responses to what they are offered are reactions, not rational assessment but reactions, and while I think that socialisation is not necessarily to be treated quite so glibly, in our book, we do say well, the thing about the Azande, or about religious people more generally. I can perfectly well talk like a religious person I can say all sorts of things that religious people say, I can even do, 'thee' and 'thou' type religious speaking and stuff, and it means absolutely nothing in my mouth. I can't say it with seriousness, I can't speak earnestly to somebody like that, who'll say "perhaps we'll see one another after death". I can imitate it with great intensity, look them in the eyes, "perhaps we'll meet again after death". But I'm just, going through the motions, I'm not engaged here. We use the analogy with the Azande we say well, "if we got a chicken, and some drugs and we went down the bottom of the garden, we'd feel like lunatics" [laughter] and of course these things can't be solved by any method, they can't be bridged by any method. You either do or you don't, so Winch sets that limit again, and I'm not

sure that was the wisest move to make, but he says well, to do a study of music you have to have an ear for the stuff, and to do a history of art or aesthetics, you have to have some sense of what a good painting is. The whole idea of the usual discussion of this stuff is to find the method, we need a method for understanding, and Winch is saying well these matters are not methodic at all.

### **Phil Hutchinson**

So to follow on from that. Where Collingwood's talking about (.....), we use an analogy similar to that in the book and we say the way much of social science progresses, is as if, when we find something puzzling, it's a bit like, when things are blurred because we've are short-sighted, and what we need is a methodology like we need a pair of spectacles to correct our eyesight, but that's not what's going on there, you can find something puzzling for different reasons and you just need to put more work into understanding the puzzlement. The mistake made is this idea that you need some artefact that will correct and allow us to understand.

### **Wes Sharrock**

So one of the points Mike made was of course that underlying this there's a deep scepticism about the motivation for the greater ambitions for 'social science' as a fundamental change – a radical step forward – in human understanding. What are the puzzles, the genuine puzzles that confront it, and of course, that was always the thing about philosophy and science, in science, puzzles get solved, in philosophy they don't

### **Question**

Isn't one big source of conflict between the idea that philosophy should tell us whether God exists, physics is (ultimately) right, utilitarianism is the (categorically) correct morality and many other substantive truths, and Wittgenstein's

doubt that there are philosophical questions as such?

### **Wes Sharrock**

Yeah, it's always important to emphasise that the aim is not to give evaluations of these practices, this one's right, this one's right, they're both right, one of them is right, one of them is wrong. It's to present them as best you can for what they are, and then to see if there's a puzzlement about it. And of course there's no suggestion that because this is a perfectly intelligible practice, the people that practise it are perfectly reasonable people, so much so that you should take it up, or approve it or endorse it. There are no implications of that kind, because of course these are matters for personal decision, they're not for some scientist or quasi-scientist to decide for people in general. They're for people to decide for themselves – whether God exists is a religious, not a philosophical or scientific question. And of course what's really being done by this is undermining the idea of any general problem of understanding by highlighting the diversity of these kinds of disagreements, and discontinuities there can be between people. As well as the continuities there can be diversities and disagreements which are not all of the same kind or order. And in any particular case they may present a quite different problem of intelligibility to other cases. And so the idea of a general solution, would need you to have the idea that there was a general problem.

### **Giuseppina D'Oro**

A clarification question. I got the impression that there are strong affinities between Winch's and Collingwood's anthropological work. What was Winch's position on the reasons/causes debate? Would Winch have endorsed the kind of thesis espoused by the likes of Dray and Melden according to which the explanation of action is rational/normative rather than causal/descriptive?

**Wes Sharrock**

Well I think an important part of the answer would be that of course, one of the things that he points to is the fact that much of social life is organised on a rule-following basis, and I take it that the kind of understanding that we can have of the Azande or the Hawaiians has to do with the fact that what they do is rule-following. And we can understand the rules, we can learn the rules that govern their behaviour (from them). I'm not saying that. I think in *The Idea of a Social Science* he overstated rule-following, and risked severe misunderstanding, I'm not claiming that everything is rule following but it's very important to make the point that many connections in social life are not causal. They're rule-following connections. They're cultural connections. A lot of explanation of action doesn't have to do with the question 'what makes this person do that' in the way of causal compulsion. An awful lot has to do with the question, "what are they doing?" And "what's the point of what they're doing?" Sometimes of course a cause can be given for someone's doing, because of course there are cases where it's a perfectly good question 'what caused them to do that?' Well the answer isn't to be given in material properties of the occurrence of causal instigation, in many of those cases, it's in terms of the causal factor's place in a system of rules. Clearly it's not red light's wavelength that leads us to pull up at the traffic light, but the fact the light is being used to signal an imperative. So, there's all sorts of things to be explained, other than-

**Giuseppina D'Oro**

- an explanation which appeals to rules is normative, as rules are normative.

**Wes Sharrock**

Oh sure yes.

**Giuseppina D'Oro**

This suggests that Winch's views on anthropological explanation are not very different from Collingwood's conception of historical explanation.

**Phil Hutchinson**

Having read these quotes this morning I'm wondering whether Winch was well-versed with Collingwood? Some of this is so strikingly similar. Just to follow on the rules and causes, I mean, when you're talking about Melden - would Winch be like Melden?

**Giuseppina D'Oro**

In the sense that he's a non-causalist.

**Phil Hutchinson**

And I think, at the time when the first edition of ISS was penned, yes, certainly yes, you can put Winch alongside Collingwood and say he's an adherent of that philosophical position, when he comes to pen the preface of the second edition, he retreats from that position to the extent that he wants to clarify that he's not in the business of advancing philosophical theses about anything. The way I understand it is something like this, correct me if I'm wrong, he just thinks, we lose a huge part of our descriptive capacities, our explanatory capacities, if we don't differentiate between reasons and causes -

**Giuseppina D'Oro**

- And isn't that a philosophical thesis?

**Phil Hutchinson**

No, it's just a truism, that when we describe certain states of affairs, we describe them by appealing to reason.

**Giuseppina D'Oro**

Well I suspect that's the difference between Collingwood and Wittgenstein, I don't think that Collingwood would shy away from claiming that he's making philosophical claims.

**Phil Hutchinson**

No, that's what I thought this morning, looking at the quotes, Collingwood is happy to make those claims.

**Giuseppina D'Oro:** there's no (therapeutic) aspect there?

**Wes Sharrock**

Well there are so many things to talk about. One is, in an important sense Winch isn't making hypotheses, it isn't a theory that people's activities are infallible, it's one of the most commonplace observations that you could possibly make. It's not something that Winch knows as a philosopher, it's something that Winch knows from having been to school, gone to the cinema, driven a car. And understanding what rule-following is, just understanding what it is to stop for a traffic light, play chess and so forth. So all this is not philosophical knowledge, it's what *we* know and understand. So it isn't like a hypothesis that people follow rules, so is that part of a good theory (collection of hypotheses) for explaining people's behaviour? It's just an observation that lots of things people do is rule-following, and when rule-following is appealed to, in what circumstances does it give an explanation and what sort of an explanation does it give? And that's not a question to satisfy the demands of a philosophical theory it's to ask, what sorts of explanations do people accept? And so, yes, a reason and a cause are different in so far as if somebody asks for an explanation and you give them a reason it's different from giving a cause and will play a different role.. Although that's not to say that either causes and reasons have to be completely separated because of course,

some people can say "what caused you to stop the car?" you say "the traffic light"

**Dave Francis**

Yes, Winch does retreat from claims made in the first edition, when he comes to pen the preface to the second edition of ISS. He realises retrospectively that the trap that he fell into originally was the thought that reason and cause are fundamentally opposed concepts, and that the reason that's a trap is that that's a philosophical doctrine. What we now see in the second edition is that reason and cause are mundane concepts, which have been taken over by philosophy and turned into technical philosophical concepts such that they appear to be diametrically and logically opposed. And what he now says is hang on a minute, let's reconsider this, there are all sorts of ways that we use the concept of cause, which don't presuppose what philosophers have told us, the concept of cause necessarily and logically presupposes. So, but I think he gets that from Louch, because that is of course what he pointed out many, many years earlier, that, you know, it all goes back to David Hume. We don't have to go down that path.

**Giuseppina D'Oro**

Interestingly the reasons/causes distinction is not Collingwood's own terminology. He speaks of different senses of the term "cause" at work in different kinds of explanations/explanatory practices. He takes philosophy to be a very abstract form of conceptual analysis, a second-order activity, which uncovers the absolute presuppositions made by the practitioners of different sciences. But I don't think that leads him to endorse a therapeutic view of philosophy.