Chapter One

Beyond Pluralism, Monism, Relativism, Realism etc.:

Reassessing Peter Winch

The Legend

Peter Winch's work has been hugely influential in the philosophy of the social sciences. But wait; is that actually true? Many sociologists and philosophers of the sciences at least know Winch's name. If they know more than that it will be his work in the philosophy of the social sciences (rather than in, say, ethics or the study of Simone Weil). Do they get Winch's ideas right? Or has his 'influence' mostly been the spawning of some 'followers' who he would largely repudiate and of many 'foes' who actually fail to engage with (and thus in a key sense fail to disagree with) what he meant? Has Winch unfortunately been 'influential' in the philosophy of the social sciences only in creating an argument between friends who are not his real friends and foes who misunderstand, rather than rebut, him?[1]

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1 The all-too-predictable irony of this if, as we shall suggest, the latter is so, this would in a sense be exactly what Winch's own thinking would predict: that there has been an insufficiently serious effort to understand Winch, among those who would wish to criticise him. That, if one wants to criticise, one has first to understand, and this first base is all-too-rarely attained. That, in order to have a shot at understanding the strange, one sometimes first has to put it at a *greater* remove from one, from the kind of thing one is used to thinking about a theory being (indeed, in this case (of Winch), as in that of the Azande: one has to be

For anyone who admires Peter Winch's work sufficiently to read it carefully, reviewing the secondary literature on him is a depressing experience. One not infrequently encounters bowdlerised versions and crude caricatures of what he thought[2] –and here we talk about many of his would-be friends... With his 'foes' the situation is far worse still. They attack with much zeal theses which Winch supposedly held. These 'foes' rail against Winch's philosophical or political (!) 'conservatism', or against his 'revisionism' concerning the practice of social science; one finds seemingly-endless criticisms of Winch for being too slavish a follower of Wittgenstein—

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prepared to consider the possibility that what one is trying to understand is not a theory at all. One has to be ready to open one's mind beyond scientism and beyond theoryism). In sum: the primitive misunderstandings of Winch that one generally encounters mirror closely the primitive misunderstandings of the Azande etc. that Winch sought explicitly to overcome!

2 We are thinking here, for instance, of certain moments in the work of B.D. Lerner and of Patrick Phillips. Lerner's (1995) paper, 'Winch and Instrumental Pluralism' purports to be a development of Winch's views in a desirable direction, toward an 'instrumental pluralist' rendition of cultures very different from ours; Phillips's reply, 'Winch's Pluralist Tree and the Roots of Relativism' (*PSS*, 27:1 (March 1997), 83-95) argues that Winch's views do not need developing in that direction, because they already *are* 'instrumentally pluralist'—but Phillips thinks this is not desirable, because it leads to 'relativism'. We argue below that with interpreters like these, who needs enemies... (But we thank them, for at least inspiring the title of this chapter…)

and sometimes also for having failed to follow Wittgenstein faithfully enough. Above all, there are endless and repetitive assaults on (or, among Winch's 'followers', sometimes endorsements of) Winch's alleged 'relativism'.

Winch died in 1997, and some reassessment of his work has been going on for the last decade. Colin Lyas's (1999) useful book, *Peter Winch,* was a welcome step forward, as was the fiftieth anniversary reissue of the second edition of *ISS*, with a helpful introduction by Rai Gaita. Our hope is that there will be a real and thorough rethinking over the coming years, and would like this book to be (part of) and to provoke this. Such an assessment needs more than a re-reading of *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy,* a work whose fiftieth anniversary is upon us as we write, in 2008. Here we undertake the following task(s):

(1) Illuminating Winch's (Wittgensteinian) conception of philosophy, which informs everything he wrote (this is the main burden of the current chapter);

(2) Rebutting central misunderstandings of Winch, particularly those which have emerged in recent years (we begin this task in the current chapter, and complete it in a couple of our subsequent chapters, those on idealism and on conservatism).

Before beginning these tasks, we outline now some key elements present in any genuine understanding of what remains Winch's central work in the philosophy of the social sciences. We try to generate a 'picture' of

Winch that, even if the reader is not entirely convinced, might at least work as a corrective to the 'received view' of Winch's philosophy, the ruling 'picture' of his thought.

What is Winch's 'Picture' of the Understanding of Human Action?

A word of warning: this question already risks presupposing much too much, as our scare-quoting hints. *Does* Winch have a picture of the understanding of human action? Or does he only guard against various natural/frequent misunderstandings that are produced by attempting general accounts of action? The social sciences are supposed to explain 'human action', give new understandings of 'human behaviour'. But *is there any such general task that really needs doing*?

We might note some occasions on which—and ways in which—an expression like "understanding other people" is used in everyday speech which is its home. This expression has a variety of specific uses, outside theoretical 'social science'. It might be used by someone in distress at their lack of social skills; "I have trouble understanding other people." Used in a positive sense, it would probably be heard as self-satisfied: "I know how to understand people. Let me tell you what makes people tick…". But social theorists apparently want to provide a foundation, or a general *method*, for understanding people (almost as if we were all about to start from scratch in

doing this and now, in year zero, require a general formula for understanding). In this, theorists don't just envisage surveying the myriad techniques all members of human societies have for finding each other comprehensible. They mean, instead, something like a *single* general, teachable method, one that can be mechanically applied and understanding automatically read off.

In everyday discourse, much more often than invoking any supposed need for or realisation of methods of general understanding, one speaks in more specific ways than those mentioned above: "I understand you perfectly", "I don't *understand* why my mother always does that", "D'you understand the game of Chess; can you teach me?". It would be best to give up the notion that there is an intelligible general thing, "*the* understanding of other people." If one is to talk of this at all, if one is to talk of enhancing our state of understanding of others, or indeed of ourselves, then we think that one must resist the temptation to think of 'understanding' as one kind of thing, and, consequently, to over-generalize, to unnecessarily 'theorise', to fantasise a 'method' ('social research method(s)', and a 'theory' of society) for achieving it.

Winch argues in his *ISS* that the social sciences are programmatic, that they have been designed with philosophical purposes latently or blatantly in mind. They have been designed, in various different ways, on the model(s) of

certain conceptions of natural science; or, even as they retreat from allegiance to 'science' the idea that they are *empirical* enterprises remains central to their identity. They ask, "How can we bring human life under the heading, under the concept, of 'science'", or, in post-scientific mode, "How will empirical—or theoretical—investigation transform our understanding of human life; how will it serve to disabuse us of certain prevalent illusions"? But, Winch asks: what are their—the social sciences'—problems, their puzzles? What problems do they actually have? Or, what problems do they 'investigate'? And what could possibly be the justification for the assumption that human life in general can be effectively and profitably brought under the scientific or of some other form of empirically generalised concept?

Most readers just do not take Winch's—full—title seriously enough. Just as Wittgenstein was a 'complete Bolshevik' in the philosophy of mathematics, so is Winch in the philosophy of the social sciences. People tend to read Winch and think that the issue now confronting them must be, "How, if at all, could we incorporate Winch into the way we now do social science?". But Winch's title is best unpacked as "On the Very Idea of 'Social Science,', on how philosophy can dissolve it, and on how philosophy can do this in part by taking back to itself what was stolen by 'social scientists'".[3] Winch is not trying to put 'social science' right, but to say that the *whole idea* is wrong-

3 Compare Louch's interesting writings on Winch and 'social science'.

headed. Hence, no "Here's how to do (and not to do) social science aright", nor, "here's a better method for social scientists." Winch is pressing questions on would-be social scientists as much as making proposals to them: "*What* are you trying to do? What genuine *empirical* problems are you trying to solve? Is there any clear idea of this? How does the idea that a 'social *science'* is needed get a hold in the first place?"

That this was the central nexus of Winch's concerns we think becomes much clearer in writings of his that followed the publication of *ISS* when he is writing for those readers who do not presuppose the aims and ambitions of social theory or the concept of philosophy-as-a-primarily-theoretical-discipline. (Thus we will spend a fair amount of time with those subsequent writings of his.)

Having raised a concern that any attempt to extract a methodology for social science, or a theory of it, will be alien to Winch, for argument's sake we take the risk of outlining a tentative answer to the question raised above, the question of what 'picture' of human action we may usefully—for purposes of at least displacing one's compulsive attachment to other, more culturally-dominant pictures—find in Winch, by drawing attention to two distinctions present in Wittgenstein's writings, and drawn upon by Winch in *ISS.*

(I) Between *understanding* and *explaining*.

Donald Davidson , in reply to the Routledge published series of "little red books" of philosophy, which included *ISS,* insisted[4] that giving reasons involves causal explanation. However, we, like Winch, deny that this need be so (*ISS* p.45). The assumption of much social science is that all explanations are causal, so that either (a) reason-giving explanations are not causal and therefore do not give explanations of human actions, and will not feature in social science (save as expressions of ideology) or (b) that reasons do explain, but they do so in a causal fashion.[5] Winch thinks that reasons do play a pervasive and important role(s) in our practices, some of which are of course 'explanatory', but to give a reason is <u>not</u> *ipso facto* to postulate a cause. Understanding human action in terms of its reasons is, for Winch, what—at its best—social study / human 'science' can do.

What is it to understand human action? Need it (normally) involve interpretation/explanation, or is this an overly intellectualised starting-point?

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4 It is interesting to note that Davidson's claim that reasons are causes is just affirmed, not argued for, in this founding article of his, and the wide acceptance this claim has since met perhaps suggests how strongly the wish to believe that actions need explaining—and that explaining means *causally* explaining—has a hold on contemporary culture.

5 Our questioning of this assumption will be tantamount to modern heresy to many. Our point is as follows: understanding X (where X is an act token) is facilitated by grasping a person's reasons for X-ing. One does not need to subsume X under a causal law, or see it as a manifestation of an underlying causal mechanism in order that it be understood.

Can it instead simply involve description[6] and taken-for-granted understanding(s), understandings-in-practice? Winch writes:

> Understanding is the goal of explanation and the end-product of successful explanation. But ... [u]nless there is a form of understanding that is not the result of explanation, no such thing as explanation would be possible. An explanation is called for only where there is, or is at least thought to be, a deficiency in understanding. But there has to be some standard against which such a deficiency is to be measured: and that standard can only be an understanding that we already have. Furthermore, the understanding we already have is expressed in the concepts which constitute that form of the subject matter we are concerned with. These concepts on the other hand also express certain aspects of the life characteristic of those who apply them. (Winch 1990, x)

These lines come from the (Preface to the) revised edition of *ISS*. Regrettably, few of Winch's latterday critics take full account of how different Winch's *ISS* looks when re-read in the light of the 'Preface' to the

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6 Cf. the instructive title of Nigel Pleasants's paper, 'Winch and Wittgenstein on Understanding Ourselves Critically: Descriptive, not Metaphysical'. Though we must dissent from some of Pleasants's criticisms of Winch in his *Wittgenstein and the Idea of a Critical Social Theory: A Critique of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar* (London: Routledge, 1999)—there, despite the homage to Winch in the title, Pleasants makes some of the moves we are critiquing in this essay: he treats Winch as a covert metaphysician—specifically a transcendentalist about rules—with definite assertions to make and theses and theories to convince us of. These reservations aside, Pleasants' book comprises a devastating critiques of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar.

second edition.[7] Several of the most frequent criticisms of the book are there either rebutted or conceded in a way which clarifies Winch's more mature understanding without involving fundamental revision. Why, then, has the preface to the second edition been largely ignored (by those writers to whom it has been available)? One of our subsidiary aims in the present work is to use as and where needs be an understanding of the totality of Winch's work on the philosophy of the social sciences, not just upon what he wrote on the subject up until the early 1960s.[8] Any reckoning with the point of view of

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7 Has Winch then substantively modified his 'views'? Has he actually abandoned his early 'bold' views? No; in some respects, he never held the 'bold' views attributed to him (e.g. like Kuhn, he was never in any useful sense of the word a 'relativist'); in other respects, his 'views' are just as 'bold' as they ever were. Only he has reformulated his expression of them to lessen (one hopes!) the chances of his being misinterpreted (As he puts it on page xi, 'I should now want to *express* myself differently...' (our italics)—most (though not all) of his concessions to his 'opponents' say only that he expressed himself badly before (though in philosophy, that is of importance)). Finally, as we endeavour to explain below, there is a key respect in which it is misleading even to describe him as having 'views' at all. *Qua* philosopher (or *qua* social student), he is we think often best described as having no views at all, as making no assertions, as not claiming anything whatsoever. (Whereas *qua* layperson, he has for instance the view that the poison oracle is not to be trusted, that it just isn't something by which he would want to conduct his life, etc. etc.)

8 As we quoted in our *Introduction* (above, fn 34), Winch writing of one of his critics, James Bohman, notes that while drawing approvingly on criticisms of some of his writing that followed *ISS*, Bohman does not himself go to those writings. The evidence strongly suggests

Winch on the philosophy of the social sciences must in particular go by way of the 1990 Preface, which in turn should be placed in the broader context of Winch's plainly-Wittgensteinian later *corpus* as a whole. *ISS* was not only a young man's book, and a polemical work, it was also a *short* one, unadvisedly taken to task for omissions, or for overly concise statements susceptible of misinterpretation. Winch's later comments, and his broader corpus, provide bulwarks against hasty (mis)interpretation.

What, then, are the implications of the passage quoted above for thinking about understanding human beings?

> [E]ven if it is legitimate to speak of one's understanding of a mode of social activity as consisting in a knowledge of regularities, the nature of this knowledge must be very different from the nature of knowledge of physical regularities... . If we are going to compare the social student to an engineer, we shall do better to compare him to an apprentice engineer... . His understanding of social phenomena is more like the engineer's understanding of his colleagues' activities than it is like the engineer's understanding of the mechanical systems which he studies... // I do not wish to maintain that we must stop at the unreflective kind of understanding of which I gave as an instance the engineer's understanding of the activities of his colleagues. But I do want to say that any more reflective understanding must necessarily presuppose, if it is to count as genuine understanding at all, the participant's unreflective understanding. And this in itself makes it misleading to compare it with the natural scientist's understanding of his scientific data (*ISS* 88-89).

The closing two sentences are crucial for our purposes. Winch is

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that Bohman does not even read Winch's writing beyond the 1958 publication of *ISS.*

reminding us that, so long as one is not blinded by philosophical preconceptions (of, say, 'Relativist'—*or* Scientific 'Rationalist'—hues), social actors can gradually be understood in their actions, without imposition or irony. Furthermore, insofar as there is or might be any project of *understanding* human being(s), that is going to have to proceed by cases—considering mindful human beings in action, engaged in specific human practices—and courts failure if it doesn't begin by engaging with the 'order' inherent in / reconstructed by those practices. Here Winch writes almost as if he had read Harold Garfinkel, and (of course) interpreted him (as the 'Manchester school' of ethnomethodology do) after Wittgenstein.

We tentatively suggest that that liberation from the endlessly frustrated conviction that a 'human science' is forthcoming will begin (and, in a sense, end) by assembling a careful and un-imperialistic / un-impositional description of, roughly speaking, the self-understandings-in-action of the person or people in question.[9] I.e. Simply of ordinary people, ourselves and others. They are not baffled or confused all the time, many of their practical projects satisfy them as successful, they are evidently not (by and large)

9 As is made clear below, stressing how people understand themselves *in action* is not equatable with substantive social theorizing, e.g. of the kind favoured by Charles Taylor or the Symbolic Interactionists. Winch's 'picture' isn't intellectualistic or rationalistic: for detail, consult Winch's tellingly-titled paper, *'Im Anfang war die Tat'*, in his (1987) *Trying to Make Sense*, and page 170f. of Lyas (1999).

enigmas to themselves, endlessly puzzled by what goes on in their cultural environs. Whatever else one might have in mind to do as a 'social scientist' one needs to ensure that one *understands* those one proposes to 'theorise' *first*, for unless one understands what their activities are *for them* one cannot even begin to address their lives, and potentially recharacterise or criticise. A first thing to remember is that in many cases *we* the social scientists are *them,* the supposedly naïve dwellers in the society, that our 'research' doings draw heavily upon. It needs to be borne in mind that discussion of Winch on 'understanding' has been heavily weighted, and thereby distorted, by the focus on 'Understanding a primitive society' and therefore upon a case – oracular magic – that can be puzzling and calls for some kind of explanation. (That was *why* Winch chose the case as one to examine—*because* of its being unusual, genuinely and persistently puzzling! It gets his intent horribly wrong, to turn it into a paradigm case of ordinary social understanding, as if every time we get to understand someone we have to put together an Evans-Pritchard-plus-Winch type of enterprise!)

But (A) the fact that sociologists are characteristically studying people with whom they share many understandings-in-practice does not obviate the problems of misrepresentation and imposition since those understandings in and of practice are commonly subjugated to the impulse to theorise and the demands of preconceived methodologies. The problem, in many areas of

sociology, is not that of finding a better method or theory for understanding of co-members'[10] practices but of clearing the theoretical and methodological detritus out of the way, allowing a more lucid appreciation of what, in one way or another, one *already* understands. And (B) even though sociologists are engaged with those in the same society, this of course does not eliminate all problems of understanding, only the idea that there is *a single, unified* problem, which is that of the professional researcher understanding the naïve natives of the same society. There *are* problems of understanding, but they are not problems between a (sort of) scientist and a scientifically lay person, but of the sort that arise amongst members of the society themselves, where different kinds of people and different ways of doing things themselves present assorted problems of intelligibility. The kinds of problems that arise, very roughly, between people who have a disagreement about something…

In those cases where we are dealing with people—whether from an 'alien' culture or from 'our own'—whose activities really puzzle us, *one* (and only one) useful way of doing this is to compare them with *whatever* actually helps us understand them. We don't impose a standard on them from our own practices, but we look for comparisons which will help to see them right. Such comparisons need of course to be apt—and may need to be surprising /

10 "Co-members"–Those who inhabit society along with us, who are members of the community/communities that we are.

unsettling to us.[11] Thus, Winch suggests, the advantages of comparing what the Azande do with their poison-oracles to what Christians do with prayer—provided that one hasn't already got a wrong-headed idea of what Christians are doing when they pray (e.g. praying to God is not like calling a taxi, God is not required to give us what we ask for so whether prayers come true is not a test of predictive capacity but is, or ought to be, instructive for us). We can also sometimes profitably compare and contrast their attitudes to their practices and 'contradictions' within those practices to those of our own philosophers and mathematicians.[12] Or we can look at our own 'superstitious'

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11 Saying this does not force us back into a Realist/Literalist account of description and understanding, both because the weaknesses of any comparison are at least as important as its strengths (see below), and because a comparison's 'aptness' may be quite uncashable in any 'correspondence' terms. For full argument as to why, on the latter point, see Read's writing on schizophrenia and Faulkner in *The Literary Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 2004) or in his (2007a).

12 H.O. Mounce (1973) goes into detail on this comparison in his mostly illuminating paper, 'Understanding a primitive society', *Philosophy* 48 (1973), pp.347-362. Mounce rightly insists that it is not enough for Winch to say, 'The Azande's practices are not profitably compared with our science'; he needs to look at the similarities (for example, there does appear to be a predictive element in Zande practice, as in science) as well as the differences. What Mounce is doing is taking seriously Winch's remarks, and endeavouring to learn from them in a way more nuanced than Winch himself. Thus Mounce is largely exempt from our criticism of most readers of Winch in this chapter. For, like Pleasants (1999), he doesn't misunderstand the character of what Winch is doing, but makes only an internal critique of certain points

attitude toward certain pieces of metal and pieces of paper (i.e. money).[13] Or we can compare and contrast the Zande 'witches' with 'witches' as those are known to us from our own society and history—Winch stresses that this comparison is particularly fraught, and it may be unwise to translate the Zande words as 'witch', for a quite different case to our own. …In sum, we can cast some positive light on others if we open-mindedly look for ways of repairing breaches in *our* understanding; and, more important still, when we look at the 'game' or 'games' which they play, we can and must note carefully what's *wrong* with various appealing analogies we might want to make to help 'interpret' them, and thus we can see—or learn to see—how to avoid misunderstanding them.

Apart from the 'problem' of understanding another society or practice, it is Winch's remarks on rule-following that have been most seriously challenged. These remarks, however, will themselves be misunderstood unless it is recognised that they fit the general pattern outlined and, rather than recommending 'rule-following' as the model social science explanation,

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within it.

13 This is Pleasants's approach in his *(op. cit.);* and his work, like for instance some of Chomsky's on linguistic propaganda, can be usefully seen as exemplifying not social or critical *theory,* but critical *description*—the describing of society with a view to bringing out ways in which it needs to change.

Winch's direction is quite contrary to the idea that rule-following is a candidate form of theoretical explanation for people's conduct, one that sociologists could be urged to adopt. Winch's point is that rule-following 'explanations' are already in place and in operation, for they are, *inter alia,* the kinds of explanations that, as ordinary persons, we give to one another. Sociologists need no urging to adopt 'rule-following' understanding for they are up to their necks in understanding what they themselves and others do as rule-following both in their personal lives and as sociologists, though in the latter case largely on an extra-mural basis without regard for their official theories.

To reiterate, the first thing one needs to think about in developing a 'social study/studies' are some genuine problems, instances of things that we do not understand ('alien' practices are the main/typical examples[14]). But, most of social life is not a problem for anyone, which is why (a) sociologists have to try to create problems by proposing strange ways in which we might view familiar things so that, then, we will see that we (allegedly) do not understand them: e.g. if we look at what we do from the vantage point of history-as-a-whole or the standpoint of the totality or through the lenses of Marxism, functionalism, structuralism, post-structuralism etc.; or if we

14 Things that are before our eyes so much—are such second-nature to us—that we cannot even see them are another such class, that we will discuss from time to time, and that are central to enthnomethodology and 'Conversation Analysis'.

actively forget what we socially-know, and pretend that we are looking at ourselves or at some of our institutions as if we were looking at a strange tribe (think e.g. of some of Goffmann, or of Latour and Woolgar); and (b) the notion of 'understanding' is typically totally wedded to the idea of having a theory, and it is enough to point out that we—ordinary folk—do not have a theory of something (or, worse, have a wrong theory, a mere ideology), and therefore cannot be said to understand it, and therefore need the sociologist to explain it to us… Sociologists just don't have genuine empirical problems—in the way that Keynes at least had the occurrence of the business cycle to explain [15]—of the sort that would motivate a genuinely explanatory venture on their part. Their 'problems' are mostly artefacts of the prior possession of their theories (or as much 'sociological' research is, are addressed to administrative, quasi-administrative or frankly political problems—is there an 'underclass', what stops people rising up in revolt, etc.). Their theories do not originate as genuine responses to things that puzzle us. In fact, we are inclined to hold that sociology is overwhelmingly driven by a preoccupation with the form of explanation, not with giving any actual explanations.

This is arguably what the vast majority of 'human science' *is:* simply misbegotten epistemology and metaphysics.[16] Winch's main role is *not* a

15 Compare also Read (2007a).

16 Some of the small minority is genuinely empirical and or fully political 'policy studies'. A full exposition of this point would be the topic of a further chapter, one we do not include

here. In brief: Some of social science is harmless quasi-bureaucratic local 'policy studies'-type work. E.g. What proportion of the population have home access to inside toilets? Such factual enquiries, important in some administrative and political contexts, are like another portion of 'social science' which is similarly 'local': enquiries into social *history*. Both such enquiries, let it be noted, run serious risks of being methodologically unsophisticated in ways which can turn out to be problematic. But these risks are almost insignificant compared to the far more intense risks that arise when it comes to 'the big questions' of social science, the questions which set the social sciences apart from or 'above' 'mere' history or 'mere' policy studies, questions such as 'What is the structure of Modern society?', or 'Does 'society' really exist?', or 'Who *really* holds power?', 'How obedient are human beings?', even 'What is human nature?'. These questions are—where they are not just matters of common sense—philosophical questions, at best, Winch suggests. Social theorists want to choose how to live, and to understand what it makes sense to say ... in short, to do philosophy (including here ethics and political philosophy), *by other means*—but the means are singularly ill-chosen, and while the conceptual confusion that results from them perhaps 'makes us think we have the means of solving the problems which trouble us...', whereas, in fact '...problem and method pass one another by.' (*PI* part II section xiv, page 233). For Wittgenstein, to quote this key passage once again, "The confusion and barrenness of [e.g.] psychology is not to be explained by calling it a 'young science'; its state is not comparable with that of physics, for instance, in its beginnings." The dreadful mistake of the programmatic approach to the foundations of human science is to suppose—to hope—otherwise. All that is properly left to 'human science'—to social study—is, for Winch, specific questions arising in specific circumstances concerning the understanding of things that we find hard to understand, concerning coming to terms with persons who we don't naturally 'get'. This non-systematic endeavour is best pursued with a sound philosophical sensibility, an open mind.

methodologist's, one who enables one to understand better what 'the methodology of social study' is and must be; his treatment of 'social science' is reflective and clarificatory, an attempt to locate some of the roots of confusion in such plain, non technical expressions as 'understand', 'explain', 'rule', 'reason', 'cause', 'rational'. He insists especially that any instance of genuinely explanatory social study must be premised upon the existence of a puzzle (since there can only be explanation where this is misunderstanding or puzzlement), something where there is a deficit in our understanding or which tends to confuse us or others. Where there is manifestly room for explanatory questions, there is no reason to assume that the kind of explanation required *must* be the sort that involves some professionally developed general theory. Winch does not rule out all possibility of theory playing a role; rather, he puts the onus on would-be theorists to establish where 'derived from a theory' is the appropriate species of explanation in relation to the issues to be understood.

(II) Between *acting-on-a-rule* [17] and *interpreting a rule*.

17 For detail, see Read & Guetti (1996). D.Z. Phillips's (2000) paper, "Beyond Rules", partially defends and elaborates Winch, and points in the same pro- and post-Winchian direction. For papers which explicate Wittgenstein on rule-following with which we are in agreement and which we recommend to our readers, see Warren Goldfarb (1985) "Kripke on Wittgenstein on Rules" and John McDowell's (1998a) pair of papers "Non-Cognitivsm and Rule-

This is the *key* distinction made in section 201 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*: "[T]here is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call "obeying the rule" and "going against it" in actual cases." When one acts on a rule, one normally does no interpreting. One grasps the rule.[18]

Thinking about (II) naturally connects with thinking about (I), above, in the following way: If one is interested in accurately *describing* human behaviour for the purpose of *reporting* it—a large part of which, though by no means all is action-according-to-a-rule—then one will need, much as Wittgenstein says, to 'grasp' the rule actually being followed by the person(s) one is describing, and will manifest that grasp in (for example) how one goes on to see the rule being applied in new examples of that person's action(s) which one encounters. One will want to avoid *interpreting* the rule being followed in such action *if* that can be avoided, on pain of otherwise risking missing just exactly what rule truly was being followed—acted upon, acted 'from'—in any given instance. One will want rather just to look, and see it. And then probably to describe it. Indeed, this, we contend, is what ethnomethodologists—and, in general, good ethnographers—typically do.

Following"(198-218) and "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule" (221-262).

18 See, again, John McDowell's paper "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule" (*op. cit.*) which is most informative on this point. See also Hutchinson (2008) *Shame and Philosophy* on world-taking (chapters 3 and 4).

Some of their work is an 'existence proof' of the possibility of sometimes doing what Wittgenstein invites us to do: roughly, simply looking and seeing, rather than always thinking (in the sense of intellectualising or theorising).

This move contravenes the 'conventional (philosophical) wisdom'—common, albeit under different guises, to philosophers as otherwise divergent as Nietzsche, Gadamer, Habermas and Donald Davidson, and just as common among a very wide spectrum of contemporary human and 'cognitive' scientists—*the dogma that it cannot be meaningful to speak of a description of some human behaviour that is not already an interpretation of that behaviour*. Gadamer, for example, for all his many philosophical virtues, continually risks over-intellectualizing ordinary human action by means of investing it all within an *interpretive* horizon; whilst Davidson assimilates 'understanding' of language to 'radical' interpretation, which is in turn unfortunately not clearly distinguished from explanation. Such an approach is overly—narrowly—scientific and risks mechanising human being.

The 'non-interpretivism', the grasping, which by contrast we are recommending here is not Positivistic, for it does not imagine description as an isolated and purely object-oriented / fact-gathering phenomenon. Rather, after Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin, and Harold Garfinkel—and, of course, after Winch—it allows indeed that there is what we call description[19] (which is not

19 And, of course, understanding.

best assimilated to interpretation), and that it is important, but does not imagine that it prescinds from one's grasp, as a participant in a practice, of that practice as a lived activity. (One can see here already what we will gradually focus in on below: that in the philosophy of the social sciences, one is (or ought to be) always in the business of looking for judicious, perspicuous, modes of presentation: for 'reminders', for truisms. One is looking not for discoveries, but simply for ways of making perspicuous presentations of the terrain of what it makes sense for us to say.)

None of this implies that there is only ever one 'true description' available of any given piece of (e.g.) rule-following—there can be several or even indefinitely many true descriptions of same; what this means is only that an action is such under a description, following G.E.M. Anscombe (2000 [1957]). But it does preserve a role for the notion of descriptions which are not *ipso facto* interpretations. For example, as one sits at one's desk and writes, or reads, the description of one of the objects in front of one on the desk as 'a glass' is not an interpretation. And the description of the activity we are currently engaged in as 'writing' is not an interpretation either. These are ways in which we *take* what is before us on the desk to be such and *take* what we are doing to just be such-and-such, respectively. We simply *take* there to be a glass in seeing the glass, we do not interpret what is before us as a glass—other possibilities of what 'the glass' might be said to be do not arise

only to be eliminated in favour of the best interpretation, 'a glass'; they do not arise at all. The insistence that all perception is interpretation is an example of the craving for explanation, where explanation involves comprehensively general propositions, and where, therefore, something which is an *occasional* feature of our activities—there are times when we need to interpret—is converted into a general/universal characteristic. The important point is, one might say, procedural as opposed to ontological.[20] For, if we call all apprehendings of our world interpretations then we lose clarity regarding the way in which we meet our world. We over-generalise; we give into the scientistic craving; we fail to see and to teach *differences*.

One way such a lack of clarity can lead to obscurantism is that clearly illustrated by J.L. Austin's (1962) pig example in *Sense and Sensibilia,* which we invoked in our *Introduction* (above) and we draw upon again here. Austin, in response to sense data theorists, wants to make perspicuous a distinction: that between having evidence for something (evidence of greater or lesser weight for a pig being in the vicinity) and apprehending something (taking something to be, *seeing it: there being a pig before us*). Evidence is only relevant when our apprehending of the 'thing' is in question—sight of the pig is not—

20 In that it is not a claim grounded on a commitment as to what is taking place (or not taking place) in the brain. It is merely a claim designed to make our relationship to our world, to phenomena, perspicuous. It is a 'grammatical' claim regarding the 'grammar'—meaning—of 'to interpret' and/or 'to see'.

further—evidence of its presence. What *we* are doing then is no more (and no less) than offering a reminder to our readers that ordinarily they distinguish between interpreting that *x* and apprehending—or taking there to be—*x*.

If one not only avoids explaining but (more important) avoids interpreting, then *one avoids a hermeneutic.* One sees no need to add *anything* to people's practices as they understand them (both explicitly—if interpretation is actually called for, for example, and—the usual case—'implicitly', in practice).[21] One hopes to capture the terms of the rules which they are following—always bearing in mind that this, too, is no single affair, that there are all sorts of rules, and all sorts of problems in acting according to those rules, as well as to being able to tell that someone is so doing.

The objection, frequently made against Winch over the years, runs roughly thus: 'Why so much talk about *rules*? Surely it is absurd to think of

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21 This need not be politically conservative, as explicated in subsequent chapters. To anticipate: To describe is not yet to evaluate; to get what people are doing is not yet to criticise. Evaluation and criticism comes later—but sometimes it will surely come! And generally, and crucially, such criticism will take the form roughly of indicating to the people one has described how they themselves should be able to come to understand what they are doing as problematic: the self-understanding of people can be extended / changed / improved, by means of bringing descriptions that they themselves can be brought to accept back to haunt them. …But all of this is a more complicated affair—more of a fraught, human undertaking – than the elitist dictations-to the lay-people that are the subject-matter of conventional, crude 'social science'.

human behaviour as literally rule-governed—surely that removes its spontaneity, and over-intellectualises it, at one and the same time! That's got to be un-Wittgensteinian—Wittgenstein didn't believe that human beings are profitably-described as rule-following animals—*and* in any case it's wrong-headed. Winch errs, on this view, in centring his philosophical picture on rules. We would do better to focus, not on rules, but on norms, or on practices.'

An initial response would be this: *Insofar* as Winch speaks of "rule-governedness", then this is best heard, to avoid putting Winch in the undesirable position of mimicking the social theorizing that he (rightly) critiques in others, as a picture that Winch himself employs, for the purpose of re-reorienting his readers to their subject matter: the study (*where* such is called for) of society. Our worry here is that the objection assumes that Winch's conception of philosophy is substantive and theoretical; in particular, that Winch is an advocate of a particular implicit (rule-centred) 'social theory', where 'rule-following' will be called upon to meet the requirements that any other purported social theory is expected to meet. Rule-following does not ask for exemption from those requirements; rather it tries to show that they are inappropriate. Whereas we should want to claim that Winch is successfully read as having *no* social theory, *no* substantive philosophical anthropology. Even to speak of Winch having a 'picture' of human action, as

we did earlier is, as suggested there, to court misunderstanding. Such a picture, we are now suggesting, will only be necessary, helpful and relevant if it is designed to prevent one from making *particular* kinds of mistakes, falling into the habit of generating *particular* kinds of misunderstanding. It will not be Winch's place rather to give us a picture which aims to reflect the 'general metaphysical truth' as to the nature of persons.

Winch is not asserting, "Rule-following is the essence of human nature or human action." Of course, as Winch concedes in the *preface* to the second edition of *ISS*, his imperfect mode of expression at times in that book led to that interpretation of his words. But in acknowledging this he is at one and the same time clarifying that this is *not* what he was *advocating*. Winch's remarks on rule-following form no part of any theory of human nature. Winch is not a social theorist and the talk of rule-following is best-heard as an analogy.[22] Alternatively, we might say learning about other people is to some extent *like* learning the rules of a game. (Rules are an *object of comparison* that Winch is suggesting for us; that is their central role in his text.) In important respects, Winch brings in rules to point out that in many areas of activity the notion of doing things 'correctly' and 'making mistakes' are involved, and this could not be so if those activities were to be causally explained (though

22 Likewise, his talk of 'conversation'; see *ISS* pp xvii-xviii, and below. (For Winch's last words on the potentially misleading nature of focussing on rules, see *ISS* p xiii)

Winch does overgeneralise a little in making the notion of rule and mistake interwoven, since the notion of rule is, in other contexts, internally related to 'violation', and in yet others to 'validity').

Games come in many varieties, and thus how we understand the nature of rules should be equally varied. Some games have strict rules to the extent that failure to act in accordance with those rules is a failure to simply play the game: Chess, for example. Some games have rules which we operate within, but which don't so much dictate our movements as invoke limits to the sort of movements it is legitimate to make in pursuit of the goals of the game (if there are any): Association football, or boxing, for example. Some games are more like a dance, more free-form, if you like; the goal (should it make sense to talk of such games as having goals) of the game being merely pleasure (or a tolerable way to pass a few hours, maybe) for the participants. Here the rules are dynamic and are not so much followed as made up as the game is played: 'catch', for example.[23] The claim that Winch *seems* to make, that "meaningful action is rule-governed action", is (rather) part of the 'elucidation' he is engaged in, emphasising that there are often—not always—standards that determine what constitutes an activity of that kind, whether the activity has been performed correctly and so on. Over-archingly, for the

23 For an informative discussion, see again D.Z. Phillips "Beyond Rules". See also *PI* sections 83 and 66.

purposes of de-mythologizing (i.e. de-scientising) sociology—this is an 'elucidation' that Winch famously engages in on pp.42-3 of *ISS*. The point of this elucidation is again to point one away from the idea that one is working through these issues in order to decide what is the best way to start building a social science, whether one should opt e.g. for a rule-following model rather than a causal one. Winch's is very importantly an attempt to place a limit on the idea that all explanation is causal in nature (see Alasdair MacIntyre's (1962) "A Mistake about Causality" as another very telling attempt to achieve the same effect). The truism that many actions are actions-according-to-a-rule, and the 'grammatical' point that explanation by rule is not of the same form as causal explanation, establishes that not all explanation is causal.

Thus, the 'argument' for rule-following emphasises that one is engaged in *reflection* on the practices that are found amongst the ways of people living their lives (including ourselves in the/our social studies) and that establishing, applying and appealing to rules is a commonplace amongst these.

So, once one is clear on all this, it becomes clear that to formulate a social theory based on norms or practices rather than rules would be a step *backwards*, not a step forwards: the point about any of these terms, for 'we Winchians', is precisely NOT to fall back into formulating a social theory around them or on the basis of them! To try to improve/repair/perfect one's

social theory or social metaphysics is a profitless and counterproductive exercise, taking one deeper into this disease of the intellect. Notions such as 'rule', 'norm' and 'practice' are first and foremost part and parcel of our social life already; and what Winch is urging upon one is to return to the understanding of social life that one always already has, *before* the inclination to 'social science' gets in the way. Foregrounding 'rules' is a way of becoming clear about what one has grasped already in its fundaments, just by virtue of being a competent social actor. Insofar as it starts to look like more than that, it is becoming problem, and not solution.

Winch's Critics: The Case of Theodor Schatzki

Let us review Winch on rules by means of dealing with the objections Theodor Schatzki makes to Winch on behalf of what he, Schatzki, takes to be a properly 'Wittgensteinian' point of view. We choose Schaztki because he is no fool… Schatzki is not a *crude* misinterpreter of Winch; if he misinterprets, it is at least worth paying serious attention to where and why he does so, though he is in quite direct conflict with Winch in that he thinks that Wittgenstein's philosophy can be put to something like sociological theory-developing purposes.

Schatzki refers extensively to *Wittgenstein* in an effort to support his case, but, in a pattern with which we are all-too-familiar, fails to cite more

than a minimum of *Winch's* words to support his case. Schatzki argues as follows: "In Winch's account, understanding a practice requires a grasp of the usually nonexplicit rules governing it... . In Winch's view...understanding a given surface phenomena *(sic.)* (a practice) requires a grasp of something below the surface which governs it (non-explicit rules)" (Schatzki 1991, p324).[24]

The metaphor of surface and depth here is liable to mislead. As there is no direct quotation from Winch at this point in Schatzki's paper, it is hard to know precisely from where he gets it; but it could not possibly be Winch's account.[25] For the 'account' of which Schatzki writes is exactly the kind of picture that we find in (say) Chomsky, and that any Wittgensteinian who takes seriously that "nothing is hidden" must resist.

It is worth quoting extensively from Winch, to see what he actually says, at the point in his monograph to which Schatzki refers:

> 'In the course of his investigation the scientist applies and develops the concepts germane to his particular field of study. This application and modification are 'influenced'

24 Again, Schatzki is a useful commentator to focus on here partly *because* of his undoubted Wittgensteinian leanings. If even he gets Winch wrong, things are in a bad way–as we fear they are.

25 We suspect it stems from Schatzki having a standard social science conception of a rule as a kind of theoretical mechanism, rather than looking to see what count as rules in Winch's own text: how are the rules of counting in sequence not explicit – counting in this sequence just *is* the rule.

both by the phenomena to which they are applied and also by the fellow-workers in participation with whom they are applied. But the two kinds of 'influence' are different. Whereas it is on the basis of his observation of the phenomena...that he develops his concepts as he does, he is able to do this only in virtue of his participation in an established form of activity with his fellow-scientists. When I speak of 'participation' here I do not necessarily imply any direct communication between fellow-participants. What is important is that they are all taking part in the same general kind of activity, which they have learned in similar ways; that they are, therefore, capable of communicating with each other about what they are doing; that what any one of them is doing is in principle intelligible to the others...

[I]f the position of the sociological investigator (in a broad sense) can be regarded as comparable, in its main logical outlines, with that of the natural scientist, the following must be the case. The concepts and criteria according to which the sociologist judges that, in two situations, the same thing has happened, or the same action performed, must be understood in relation to the rules governing sociological investigation. But here we run against a difficulty; for whereas in the case of the natural scientist we have to deal with only one set of rules, namely those governing the scientist's investigation itself, here what the sociologist is studying, as well as his study of it, is a human activity and is therefore carried on according to rules. And it is these rules, rather than those which govern the sociologist's investigation, which specify what is to count as 'doing the same kind of thing' in relation to that kind of activity.' (*ISS*, pp.85-87)

Winch is here attempting to teach us differences.[26] He is, we would

26 Michael Nedo, of the Cambridge Wittgenstein Archive, tells us that Wittgenstein had originally thought of using as a motto [for *PI*] a quotation from Shakespeare's *King Lear*: 'I'll teach you differences'.' The precise way in which Winch saw the differences in this case is well-explicated on page 61 of Lyas (1999): '[A]n explanation in the natural sciences does not remind us of something. ... We are not reminded about sub-atomic particles: we find things

suggest, onto the thought, much exploited by ethnomethodologists, that what 'social scientists' typically present to us as 'data' are already pre-digested; that the true data of social study ought to be, and in fact must be, typically what is observably present and observably underway in interactions between persons.[27] He is not using the notion of 'rules' in any doctrinaire fashion, for

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out about them.' Whereas, strange as it might sound, a large part of the activity of sociologists consists simply in reminding us—unfortunately, often *in very misleading* (e.g. reductionistic, impoverished, or highly-abstract) *terms*—of things about ourselves and others which we were not ignorant of to begin with.

27 For detail, see e.g. Mike Lynch's work. Lynch, unlike some influenced by certain strands in Garfinkel and especially by the later Harvey Sacks, avoids falling into a quasi-scientific rendition of ethnomethodology as the *general uncovering* of the 'hidden truth' of (the constitution of) social order, and sticks to an appropriately Winchian rendition of the (piecemeal) tasks of philosophically-sensitive social study. As Lynch (2000) argues in his paper ''Against Reflexivity'', to speak and work as the best ethnomethodologists do, in a manner attempting to escape as much as possible from abstraction (e.g. terms like 'observable', 'reflexive', 'indexical') in favour of the concretion of actual social settings, is far less liable to be misleading than are the alternative modes of writing more commonly found in the social sciences, which even imagine that they are following Wittgenstein when they speak for instance of a 'double hermeneutic' as characteristic of social behaviour and (especially) of social science. As we emphasize more or less throughout this chapter, the use of the word 'interpretation' is often much more perilous and misleading than has generally been realized—and this we think is why Winch uses it far less frequently than do those (e.g. Geertz, and 'interpretivists' in the *'Verstehen'* tradition) to whom he is often assimilated.

the 'rules' he does mention can readily be pointed to, such as those which call for a change of regime after an election, which regulate the consultation of the poison oracle, which require the washing of hands prior to a religious ceremonial (and those that instruct a washing of hands for reasons of hygiene.) There are even rules about how UK postage stamps should be positioned on the envelope with respect to the orientation of the monarch's head.

Put another way: the word 'rule' is not a theoretical term, it is a perfectly ordinary English word, and Winch uses it as such: there are innumerable activities—such as the spelling of words in English which are obeyed many times on every line of this book—that are extensively or in some aspects rule governed. To state this is not to offer any theory of writing or of English spelling; it is merely to describe, state a truism about, writing. It would be a deep mistake to treat such an observation as providing a basis for

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Winch generally avoids the intellectualism which 'interpretivists' typically fall into. Crucially, he agrees with Wittgenstein that what matters is *both* to understand humans as engaged in ordered practices *etc. and* to understand that stressing the deed, not the word or the thought, is usually least liable to mislead philosophically. We act, we obey rules blindly, and 'as a matter of course'—see pp 30-31 of *ISS*. (Our own brief diagnosis of the persistence of the intellectual temptation to intellectualism among intellectuals is... perhaps so obvious after the use of the word-root 'intellect' three times in one sentence that we won't bother giving it here.)

a general account of action, especially as an interpretation of someone who does not believe that such an account is needed! Winch's invocation of rules does not require him to push through the idea that action is rule-following—action = rule-following—into a general truth, but only to point out that, given that rule-following and causal explanations *are* different kinds of explanations, the patent presence of innumerable rules in social life simply *blocks* the ambition to erect a general, causal theory. Schatzki is quite right insofar as what he is doing is suggesting that any 'individualist' or (more generally) theoreticist attempt to render rules as a foundation for the explanation of human behaviour—as for example in Chomskian linguistics, and in much of Cognitive Science—is bound to fail. But this point is not appropriately directed against Winch.

Schatzki's other main argument against Winch opens as follows: "Winch begins from the assumption that each society has its own concept of (or rules for) the intelligibility of human proceedings." (318) Schatzki's mistake here is again to interpret a propadeutic strategy as though it were a general theory—it is plain that there are differences amongst human practices in standards of intelligibility, differences to be found both within a society and across them, the truth of which mundane observation blocks the idea that there are universal standards of intelligibility worth speaking of or that there

is a universal method for understanding all practices. However, it is unwise to translate this into grossly generalised claims such as that 'each society has its own concept of….' when Winch's effort is directed against the *whole idea* that we need to engage in some comprehensively systematic comparison of societies' respective concepts of intelligibility.

Winch's concern is with sensitivity to particulars, involving restricted, detailed and careful comparison of instances of conceptual variation, all of which will be lost in gross, sweeping, indiscriminate generalities of Schatzki's kind. Winch doesn't argue that 'we' (the English) have one concept of intelligibility and the Azande another completely different one, as though 'ours' is a scientific mode and 'theirs' their oracular system. He surely proposes, instead, that scientific concepts are not general standards of intelligibility even in our own society, and as a result are an irrelevant comparison to 'their' oracular practices. The oracular practices are different from, but not entirely unlike, some religious practices in our society, and the former can be made more intelligible to us by noting that they are akin to practices current amongst us. One doesn't even have to be religious to grasp the cogency of Winch's linking of oracular consultation to prayer (in certain respects). Schatzki's is also a bad translation of Winch in that it suggests that Winch can accept only *difference* – each society has 'its own' concept of intelligibility which is different from every other's. Nothing of this dogmatic

sort is involved in Winch, for there are surely both differences and similarities between—even within—practices, let alone societies, in criteria of intelligibility, and the point is to warn against obliterating important differences—Winch's is, in other words, an attempt to point out the vaunting / o'er-vaulting ambition often attached to the idea of giving sweepingly synoptic summations of diverse and internally varied practices in face of the multiplicity of similarities and differences involved. To the question: does a society have 'its own' concepts of intelligibility, the best *a priori* answer is—they do and they don't … Which means *in practice* that the question, if it is to be asked at all, needs to be raised in respect of particular cases, and points of comparison… but Schatzki thinks Wittgenstein can be converted into input for sociological theory.

So, *contra* Schatzki, Winch only claims that it will be useful when presented with a rendition of a 'primitive' society as essentially having the same concept of intelligibility as ours (as for example Frazer seems to think: he appears to think, as Wittgnstein says, that those he is studying are essentially English parsons, only stupid ones[28]) to consider alternative ways of putting things. *Provided we don't think we are stating a metaphysical thesis when we do so,* there will then be no harm in saying, e.g., "The Azande have a

28 Whereas Wittgenstein is struck by the profound sensibility of many of the people(s) portrayed in *The Golden Bough*—while he suspects that many English parsons lack such a (religious) sensibility!

somewhat different concept of [say] 'prediction' (or 'contradiction') than we do (but not, apparently, of 'empirical cause'.)"[29] Alternatively, one might fruitfully cast it as a negative point: we shouldn't presume that other people, especially ones whose ways differ from ours, must have, or really need, the same concepts as ours. It is not an *a priori* matter to specify which concepts any specified collection of people must have, and since Winch was concerned with *a priori* matters any attempt to make substantive claims about the extent of uniformity or variety across cultures and practices other than those he / one had looked at would be a wholly invalid generalisation of his argument.

The underlying problem then is an intellectualist tradition thinking of understanding as the product of a universal method. Such a tradition is frustrated by Winch and Wittgenstein's emphasis on understanding as a highly personalised matter, conditional upon, e.g., one's efforts and one's sensibilities and associated reactions and willingness to rethink—one isn't willing to acquire a vocational commitment to being a monk, to put the time, effort, sacrifice in or one simply *can't* respond in this way to (say) the Bible in the way that devout Christians do, etc. . There is no theoretical shortcut here, but practitioners in the 'social sciences' want to be assured that there is such a

29 See page 101 of Goldstein (1999) for a useful rendition of Wittgenstein's thinking on the family-resemblance-ness of 'contradiction'.

shortcut; that they can impartially, impersonally and with only the effort of learning a method and applying it to the phenomena, understand anyone, and therefore *everyone*.

Winch's important (1992) paper, 'Persuasion', seemingly unread by the vast majority of his critics, draws extensively upon Wittgenstein's writings,[30] to argue that one must both realize the radical nature of Wittgenstein's efforts to get one to question pictures that hold one captive, and simultaneously acknowledge that there is no such thing as finding a place outside all pictures from which to assess them apodictically.[31] Nigel Pleasants puts the moral of Winch's discussions of anthropology *etc.* strikingly-similarly:

> The central message of Winch...—which has often been overlooked, or ignored—is the suggestion that in studying a so-called 'primitive society' we might, if we engage in the task sensitively and imaginatively, learn something important about our own taken-for-granted form of life. I…seek to follow Winch's advice that the very point of trying to learn about some

30 See *PI* p 227; and *Culture and Value* (ed. von Wright, transl. Winch; Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p.87: 'God may say to me: 'I am judging you out of your own mouth. You have shuddered with disgust at your own actions, when you have seen others do them.''

31 See Winch (1992) pp 129-130. (Again, this may sound like trying to have it both ways. We can hear the Analytic critics now: 'But you're not *saying* anything! Your Winch is not giving us any hard philosophical assertions to get our teeth into!' The critics are right. Only they fail to understand that this is inevitable, and exactly what the philosopher *should* be doing. Enabling us to see our language *etc.* aright—not giving us 'tinpot' theories and theses to knock down and put up again, endlessly.)

> apparently incoherent way of life is just as much to do with striving for an enhanced conception of one's own social conditions of existence, as it is with understanding that other way of life." (Pleasants 1999, 2)

And surely this is right for those who are struggling to understand 'spiritual' matters, though it would not apply (at least, not in anything like the same way) to someone trying to get up to speed in mathematical physics.[32] Those who have thought deeply about these matters—for example, Martin Buber and the traditions he has influenced and which have tried to work these matters out practically (e.g. Gestalt Therapy, with its concept of 'contact')—have held that truly to *meet* someone—to *acknowledge* them as they are themselves—is part of what must be involved in understanding them, and that this must involve a readiness to open oneself

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32 And this is what Wittgenstein was about in "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*" when he pointed to things we do (e.g. kissing photos of loved ones) which somewhat resemble things 'primitive peoples' do. The point is not, as Schatzki would have it (and as Lerner thinks Winch himself thinks—see p.183f. of his *(op.cit.)*), that we can understand them because they are really just like us; the point is that thinking about them enables us to notice things about us *which we forget, and whose nature is unclear to us.* Wittgenstein intends his point about our activity (in the photo-kissing) to surprise us—rather than having us absorb seamlessly a supposed item of knowledge about others; namely, that they are just like ourselves. It is thinking exactly *that* that Wittgenstein accuses Frazer of! (Thus, in the cause of our understanding others while remaining ourselves, Schatzki turns Wittgenstein into Frazer! What we *should* be doing by contrast is what Winch does: noting how openness to understanding others requires readiness to rework one's self-understanding.)

up. To open oneself up to the other, part of what it is to *engage* with another person, is to have at least a *readiness* to change in response to them, and to the encounter. To understand another, to treat another as a 'thou', is not to treat them as an isolated ego which one is inspecting and 'interpreting'—*contra* Davidson and Cognitive Science, alike.[33] As any but the most scientistically deluded psychotherapists and travellers (e.g. field anthropologists) have long been aware, one cannot just study other people, if one would understand them. One must be ready to learn from them; to learn from them about them—and also about oneself, and about 'ourselves'; to learn 'the rules' (both in a loose sense and in a tighter sense in specific instances) according to which they 'work', and order their lives. If we treat them as people at all, we use the unacknowledged resource of most sociology *etc.*—that is, our easy grasp of

33 Are we lapsing here back into metaphysical humanism in a way which undercuts our argument and our reading of Winch? No, for two reasons: first, this is very much a supplementary point, which our main argument could easily stand without, for those readers who are uncomfortable with talking about therapy, *meeting* people, and so on; and second, this point is, we would maintain, still a genuinely Winchian/Wittgensteinian one (and though we cannot justify the claim here, a tremendous extant justification is to be found in Stanley Cavell's (1976) "Knowing and Acknowledging" in his *Must we Mean What We Say?*, which in brilliant detail makes the tie between knowing the other ('epistomology') and actually acknowledging their reality as a person). We think that a substantial part of what Buber *et al* do is *remind* us of features of our form of life—specifically, of the grammar of 'meet', 'understand', *etc.*—which we frequently forget in philosophy or 'cognitive' or 'social' science.

most of what most fellow humans do. Then our ability where necessary to focus on making sense of those elements of their lives which are mysterious to us can come into play–in a decidedly supplementary fashion.

So, to take a diagnostic step back for a moment: there appears to be an interesting fantasy at work somewhere deep in Schatzki's version of Wittgenstein, a fantasy which we suspect is widely shared among Anglo-American philosophers: a fantasy that one can learn all about the world and about other people without oneself changing, without changing oneself. Compare Schatzki's words: "To state Wittgenstein's views[34] baldly: there is either sufficient commonality and hence understanding or insufficient commonality and, as a result, no understanding." (p.319) There is no place here for response to the other, for change. And yet Wittgenstein thought that the growth of one's own understanding, and the overcoming of one's 'ignorance' of one's own language *etc.,* in part through one's grasp of the other, was of central importance. Thus witness his famous remark to his student Norman Malcolm:

> ...what is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, *etc.,* and if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life, if it does not make you more conscientious than any ... journalist in the use of DANGEROUS phrases [Malcolm had used

34 See our discussion of Winch's or Wittgenstein's having views in philosophy at all, above: Winch is (on our reading) a serious Wittgensteinian, in aiming *not to have* philosophical views.

> the expression, 'the British 'national character''] such people use for their own ends. // You see, I know that it's difficult to think well about 'certainty', 'probability', 'perception', *etc.* . But it is, if possible, still more difficult to think...really honestly about your life and other people's lives (cited in Monk 1990 474-475). [35]

Or consider Wittgenstein's thought, used as an epigraph by Winch for his late paper "Persuasion", that "I ought to be no more than a mirror, in which my reader can see his own thinking with all its deformities so that, helped in this way, he can put it right." Winch, seemingly unlike Schatzki, and certainly unlike some of his other critics, such as Keita and Patrick Phillips, preserves and expands upon this role for "putting one's thinking right". Philosophy may be 'uncommitted enquiry'—but it is not without normative consequences.

Now, there's a danger that we might here be here taken still to be writing as if 'understanding' was a philosophical problem, not a personal one, and we are, here, talking about certain sorts of 'understanding' where prejudice toward others may intervene: to reiterate, philosophy—or social scientific method—does not provide us with means of achieving understanding. Philosophy sure is uncommitted inquiry in that we are not committed–in our reflections–to the greater desirability of any one set of concepts we reflect on, but real problems of understanding arise in our lives

35 Cf. also Wittgenstein's preference for *change in the way people lived* over *explicit adoption of his philosophy*.

and have to be addressed through our personal efforts. Studying 'other cultures' is not a philosophical job, for that (the latter) is rather the clearing up of confused ideas like 'it is impossible to understand other cultures' or 'human thought processes are everywhere the same' etc. . 'Understanding other cultures' in the relevant sense is something that sociologists adventitiously get involved in because their work brings them in contact with unfamiliar groups, ways of life, and practices, but 'understanding' these new contacts is not something that confronts sociologists distinctively. Rather, it is just the same order of problem—a practical one—that affects anyone who finds themselves in a new setting (e.g. an atheist amongst the religious, etc).

Schatzki seems deeply attached to the idea of understanding as something that is done at a distance and can be considered in formulaic terms—as if there are specifiable conditions for understanding. His construal sounds rather like Chomsky or Fodor: you can't really learn anything, you can only really understand what you are already capable of understanding—there is no room for expanding your capabilities of understanding, of moving onto things that you really couldn't understand before and now you find you can. To reiterate our point: there is no formula for understanding, there are multiple ways of trying to understand, and one can make repeated and various efforts to understand something, and fail, before finding that one can succeed / has succeeded. Sometimes one small thing can make all the

difference, sometimes one's understanding can change by degrees–light dawns slowly over the whole, as Wittgenstein (quoting Göethe) wrote—or one can experience a conversion, suddenly, abruptly a complete switch. Imagination can be involved and changes of aspect can play an important role too; furthermore, this is not to be thought of as a solo effort, for other people can help you understand, try to persuade you, teach you, put you through various experiences/practices etc. *So*, how much and what kind of effort one puts in, what sorts of imaginative exercises are employed, what kind of connection can be made between where you are and where you might want to be are all central to Wittgenstein's remarks on understanding but absent from, and thus unavailable to, Schatzki's version.

Perhaps the above will be seen as a little unfair to Schatzki. Perhaps he would accept that one can and sometimes does learn from others and transform oneself, in the encounter with other cultures, if one lets it be a genuine encounter, rather than being like the encounter of a biologist with a laboratory specimen. We contend nevertheless that Schatzki is thinking of the problem, with 'social science' ambitions and standards in place, wondering how Winch bears upon that problematic; but Winch is not concerned with that problematic because it is only a problematic if one ignores what Winch is saying about the nature of social studies. In the

remarks from Schatzki that we have quoted, one can see that he makes it sound as if Wittgenstein thinks that it makes sense quite literally to assess—to quantify—the degree of commonality which human beings have with one another.[36] To repeat, here is his summation of Wittgenstein's supposed 'position':

> To state Wittgenstein's views baldly: there is either sufficient commonality and hence understanding or insufficient commonality and, as a result, no understanding." (p.319)[37]

But we shall go on to show more fully both that it is already usually a misunderstanding to speak of 'understanding' as if it were a positive state to be achieved—and that it is already a misunderstanding to speak of Wittgenstein as having philosophical views at all.[38]

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36 Keita's (1997) position (in his 'Winch and Instrumental Pluralism: A reply to B.D.Lerner') is similar, only more scientistic. Keita thinks that 'the structure of the human brain is such that seemingly incompatible intercultural systems of ratiocination should really be understood within the context of how humans actually think' (p.80). Wow, a philosopher who can apparently read off from observable (??) brain structure 'how humans actually think'!...

37 We find the way 'understanding' is treated as a yes/no matter pretty astonishing—as if there aren't inordinately many forms and degrees of understanding: for example, do you understand French? A few words, enough to read with, I can carry on a simple conversation. Who understands French the best? The French Grammarian, Rimbaud, a native Parisian? What is it to not understand French? To know no French words, to not be able to participate in a conversation in French, to not recognise French as French when it is being spoken?

38 See Wittgenstein's pointed insistence, in his debates on the philosophy of maths with

Schatzki immediately goes on from the remark just quoted to say something which indicates that he appears to think that Wittgenstein's 'views' are truth-evaluable, and he values them as true: "Wittgenstein's claim about insufficient commonality is obvious." We shall shortly query this notion, both exegetically and (more important) philosophically. Let us do so somewhat indirectly, by focussing first on a closely-related aspect of Schatzki's argument, as it affects Winch.

Schatzki's assumption that Winch thinks that different human communities may as a matter of substantive fact have very few commonalities to them is quite unwarranted. Let us ask the following:

How could we determine whether as a matter of fact two human communities have 'many' or 'few' commonalities?

As soon as one asks the question, one realizes that it is, as things stand, a somewhat ill-formed question. There is no such thing as a substantive fact

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Turing (see Monk (1990) pp 419-420; though Monk himself misses the 'metaphilosophical' point here), that he, Wittgenstein, must not have any views or opinions. Otherwise, he would be (A) hostage to mathematical fortune, and (B) betraying his philosophical mission, as expressed e.g. in *PI* sections 108-134. It is also pertinent to note that when Schatzki talks of stating Wittgenstein's views "baldly", he means to state Wittgenstein's views in a way quite other than that in which Wittgenstein carefully chose to state 'them'—and other than Wittgenstein's text licenses 'them' to be taken. In this regard, see Hutchinson (2007) and Baker (2004) ch. 11 and his (2002).

of the matter about whether two communities are deeply different from one another, independently of some specific standard of comparison. Whether something is 'deeply different' is a matter of nuance, and of context. One needs to understand in order to then make the claim as to commonality and difference. Schatzki puts the cart before the horse as it were in claiming that communities are deeply different to one another. Someone can at one time find a strange novel practice of a faraway tribe very reasonable or understandable; and at another one can be quite bemused by what one oneself did five seconds ago.

All we can do here (and all we need to do here) is assemble reminders. We can stop ourselves being confused. For example, as already mentioned (and this is discussed more fully below), sometimes it is useful to be reminded that what counts as a contradiction can be very different in different places in different times. This is part of what Wittgenstein meant when he famously remarked that philosophy leaves everything as it is (This remark is cited approvingly by Winch on p 103 of *ISS*. And we give it some discussion in chapter 4, below). It is also part of what he means in a remark that is at the very heart of his so-called 'metaphilosophical' discussions in *PI*, but a remark almost universally ignored: "The civil status of a contradiction, or its status in civil life: there is the philosophical problem."[39] And it is

39 *PI* section 125. This sentence is succeeded by the following famous passage: 'Philosophy

precisely this that Winch brings out with his discussion of the 'contradictions' which Western observers find in Azande practice, where the issue is precisely Wittgenstein's point, that it is philosophers' *attitude* to contradiction that is the problem—their (formal logic-inspired) supposition that the presence of a contradiction must bring a practice to a halt. You have to look at the practice in context, says Winch, to see whether it is a good idea to say, "They have a different concept of 'contradiction' from us", or "What looked like contradictions turn out on closer acquaintance not to be so", or what-have-you. (Some such statements will be, at a given point in a particular 'conversation', much less liable to mislead than others.) If there is a contradiction in oracular magic, it surely does not bring the practice to a halt. And then that point has to be taken on board henceforth.

And there is not even, of course, a substantive fact of the matter about how to individuate communities in the first place—hence notice Winch's emphasis on the cultural independence of the Azande tradition from Western Christianity. Winch believes that 'social sciences' are somewhat (though only somewhat) less misleadingly described as social studies (This description must not of course be allowed to lead one to think that Winch is an armchair sociologist, competing with sociology on its own turf. For this is a point *about*

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simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.--Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us.'

social science/studies, not a point *in* them. (We discuss this further below)). Winch believes that, unless one is clear that a 'social science' is at best not just a science which happens to have as its subject-matter human society, but that the word 'social' decisively alters the character of the investigation in the study (studies) in question, one is likely to become philosophically confused. Of course, there is no substantive fact of the matter about *these* things either! Winch is *not* saying, "It's a scientific fact that you cut up the universe wrong if you classify (e.g.) sociology as a science." It doesn't even matter if the various social studies are grouped together under the heading of 'social science'—so long as one keeps a clear view of what is thus named, and what its character is. But that is almost impossible to do, even in the best of circumstances. Furthermore, Winch believes, with the ethnomethodologists and with Wittgenstein, that 'sociology' as a lay activity is ubiquitous, but, *for that very reason,* as a professional activity is only infrequently necessary.

Perhaps Schatzki himself, speaking in his own voice, would in the end not disagree with what we have said above. But he *follows* the standard reading of Winch, in accusing the latter of having the idea that communities are cleanly separable entities. This idea was suggested by some of Winch's incautious formulations in the first edition of *ISS*. He very clearly distances himself from this interpretation of his work, in the 1990 Preface to the second

edition. Let us explain this point further:

Winch does not think that any 'social scientist' or 'social theorist'—still less himself—is in a position even to claim or argue that it is a matter of hard fact that the Azande is one community and ours is a totally separate one.[40] It's rather that it will sometimes be ethnographically (or indeed philosophically) helpful to distinguish between communities of people which are of course to some significant extent self-identifying. That's the important criterion, if a criterion we need: whatever one says about the social world must be responsible to social actors, in a manner having no parallel in the physical sciences. However, as just hinted, all this may have been somewhat obscured in Winch's original presentation of *'The Idea of a Social Science'*, by his sometimes appearing to grant the notion that we can definitively identify communities, and indeed that they are definitively separate and homogenous. But (a) there is nowhere in—his follow-up paper—"Understanding a Primitive Society" where Winch makes any similarly potentially-misleading remarks, nor in the various other papers in which Winch subsequently to *ISS* spoke of sociology, anthropology etc.; and (b)

40 And see again *ISS* (2nd edition) pp xiv-xvi. (Winch points out the importance of the lack of a shared religious tradition between us and the Azande, in making it important to get the degree of cultural distance between us and them sufficiently *wide*, before attempting to understand. But this distance is not quantifiable, and total philosophical confusion is close at hand, if it is claimed to be 'total'. (*Contra* Relativist interpretations of Winch))

those who criticise Winch for having left the door open for 'relativism' in *ISS* have failed to appreciate his clarificatory remarks in the new 'Preface' to '*The Idea of a Social Science*'. Here (especially on p xiii), Winch specifically remarked that he had sometimes expressed himself in a manner that might mislead in the first edition of *ISS* on crucial issues connected with that nature of rules, and thus unnecessarily exposed himself to the kind of misunderstanding we see in (for instance) Schatzki. Indeed, in the Preface to the 2nd ed., Winch goes on immediately to say that, if he had paid closer attention to passages such as sections 81-82 (on rules) in *Philosophical Investigations*, then he

> ...might have avoided the impression sometimes given in this book of social practices, traditions, institutions etc. as more or less self-contained and each going its own, fairly autonomous way. ... Again, and connectedly, the suggestion that modes of social life are autonomous with respect to each other was insufficiently counteracted by [the] qualifying remark...about "the overlapping character of different modes of social life." Different modes of social life do not merely 'overlap'; they are frequently internally related in such a way that one cannot even be intelligibly conceived as existing in isolation from others" (*ISS*, xiv-xv).

Winch here evidently regrets some of his phrasings and possibly some more substantial aspects of his project in the first edition of *ISS*, and this is what he sought to redress in his 1990 preface. When read in light of that preface, Winch can be seen as interested above all in what it makes sense to say.[41] But of course, self-evidently, things are always said by people, in

41 See the discussion later of Winch's account of the importance but oft-misunderstood nature of the role of language in a sound conception of philosophy. (In a longer presentation,

contexts. Philosophers tend to ignore this simple 'fact', fail to remind themselves of it, at their philosophic peril. So: what one says in one conversation, speaking as a philosopher with colleagues, may be very different from what one says in another conversation, speaking say with a foreigner from an extremely different background, or with an opinion pollster, or with a popularising scientist. To one, one might say that the Azande are very different from us; to another, that they are much the same; to a third, that they practice a peculiar and unattractive form of magic; to a fourth, that they have a way of life whose categories are hard to mesh in any successful way with our own. There would be no contradiction in one's saying all of these, and more, at different times and places, to different people. Winch is looking for ways of rendering helpfully the concept of 'society', and is reaching for formulations which will be least likely to confuse and most likely to productively assist his audience; he is not stating or trying to state once and for all The Truth about social life, for the 'substantive truths' found in his writings are, as they must be in any properly Wittgensteinian exercise, banalities.

To further support our thought about the non-assertoric, non-constative nature of Winch's thought hereabouts, note the use of the notion of

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we should of course reckon with the increasing influence of Rhees on Winch's mature thought, (and others such R.F. Holland and Raimond Gaita). But this would certainly require an entire paper to itself, to discuss adequately.)

'internal relation' in the above quote. This term is explicated in the *Tractatus,* and, in the relatively rare contexts of use it has in Wittgenstein's later work,[42] it has much the same sense as it did there (Winch emphasizes the continuities in Wittgenstein's philosophy far more than is usually appreciated—for some detail, see below). The term 'internal relation' cannot be used faithfully to Wittgenstein in a way which provides a general account of 'metaphysical glue' between rule and application: indeed, that idea does deserve the kind of criticism which Schatzki (inappropriately) levels against *Winch* on rules.

So, what sense *does* 'internal relation' have in Wittgenstein's work? Well, crucial to it, as Winch was extremely well aware, is that internal relations cannot, strictly speaking, be spoken of at all. 'They' are not genuinely relations. (Thus there is of course an air of paradox to our discussion too. Talk of internal relations is thoroughgoingly *transitional*.[43]) Only 'external' relations are actually relations, between separate things. And

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42 See Read (1997), where he points out that Wittgenstein only rarely speaks of 'internal relations' after *c.*1939. (It is also to be noted that Winch came to think that speaking of social relations as internal relations may foster the unwarranted impression that social relations are always 'cosy', whereas Winch remarks on p xviii of *ISS,* once again pre-empting his 1990s critics, that one needs to take account of 'what role in [a conversational interchange] is played by strategies of deceit, blackmail..., punches on the nose, etc.'.

43 For explication, see Cora Diamond's work on the *Tractatus*, most of it collected in her (1992) *The Realistic Spirit*. Also see the discussion of 'internal relations' in Denis McManus (2007) *The Enchantment of Words.*

there have to be separate things, if there are to be relations (between things). To say that there holds an internal relation between 'things' is to say that on inspection one might well find that what one was taking to be things related are not discrete items at all; that so much as one can talk of two—internally related—things one is talking of 'one' carrying with it the other: such as to grasp the concept of 'fire' is to have grasped the concept of 'to burn'; or, one might simply emphasise, more humdrumly, that they utterly and obviously 'go together' as the notion of 'fire' and 'burning' do.[44]

It follows that when Winch speaks above of different 'parts' of social life as 'internally related',[45] or similarly of humans as 'internally related' to each other, and of social relations as *being* 'internal relations', what he is really saying is usefully put as follows: that they are not causal, or external, relations at all. The notion of 'internal relations' as Winch employs it is a wholistic notion that can be understood in contrast with the 'external'

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44 In this regard see *PI* section 474. One also should hold in mind the thought that internal relations are not invoked in the sense in which they were by the British idealists. They are themselves radically contextual. Whether one concept is internally related to another—whether grasping one entails the grasping of the other—is itself very likely a contextual matter. Here again one should look and see. In *TL-P* Wittgenstein illustrates the notion of internal relations by referring to a story by the Brothers Grimm, "The Golden Kids".

45 Giving the lie to the common Norman Malcolm's 'autonomous communities' interpretation of Winch's thinking discussed earlier.

relations of causal connections. In the causal case, two things that can be identified independently of each other and one can be the cause of the other—it is an empirical question whether one thing is the cause or effect of the other. With respect to something like a rule, though, the rule and the action which follows the rule cannot be identified independently of each other, since the rule is a rule prescribing the action and the action is properly identified as an action according to the rule—it is not an *empirical* question as to which kind of action follows from obedience to a rule since the identity of the action type is given in the sense of the rule. I.e. understanding a rule is in many cases knowing what to do—'driving on the left' is the action that corresponds to the rule 'drive on the left'. It may be an empirical question as to whether one can find an instance of someone obeying that rule and performing the action, but the connection between the rule and the action comes from *understanding the rule* not relating empirical occurrences. Therefore, characterizing them as relations can, riskily, lead to society being thought of in nonsensical atomistic ways. For example, when we pick up the notion of 'internal relation' for a while we see that, though it cannot be ultimately satisfactory, and though it can risk leading us to say things which sound awfully like (nonsensical) metaphysical 'theses' about the social world, it at least usefully closes down the unprofitable avenue of thinking of different practices as being (metaphysically) hermetically sealed off from one another, and furthermore

intimates instead an alternative picture which may help to point up the *absurdity* (not falsity) of the atomism and ontological individualism which so often turn up in social theory.

Having got somewhat clearer on Winch's observations on the concept of 'society' and 'social relations', we are finally in a position to turn directly to the following question:

Is There a Genuine Question Concerning How Strong the Commonalities Between Persons Must be in Order For Them to be Mutually Comprehensible?

Our remarks about the absurdity of thinking that philosophers (or 'social scientists') are in a position proprietarily to individuate communities and pronounce upon their openness and closedness to one another lead naturally into a thought of even more importance for comprehending what Winch, after Wittgenstein, is up to in his philosophy of social science. We are thinking of the allegations of 'relativism' and 'incommensurabilism' made against Winch (We will examine the related allegation of 'idealism' explicitly in the next chapter). Sometimes these are prosecuted by self-proclaimed rationalists (e.g. Martin Hollis) who think Winch is defeasible on quasi-empirical grounds—we need, Hollis, argued, a 'bridgehead' of shared beliefs in order to comprehend people from other cultures, and that bridgehead is to be found in our shared human rationality. Sometimes, this idea becomes

more explicitly quasi-Kantian in nature, as in Davidson, who at points suggests that his ultimate grounds for his notions of 'charity' and 'humanity' are 'transcendental'. *Such* an idea can seem related to Wittgenstein's thoughts about 'form of life', especially to the famous passage in *PI* on 'agreement', sections 240-2.[46]

But these remarks of Wittgenstein's are not quasi-empirical, nor even about transcendental conditions of possibility. They are grammatical 'reminders', pointers away from certain specific philosophical confusions in which it is extremely easy to find oneself embroiled; confusions even of 'the grammatical' with 'the empirical', for example. Thoughts such as "We must presuppose massive agreement in order for there to be able to be disagreement at all" are not therefore truth-evaluable, are not quasi-empirical claims nor even transcendental truths. Just as it is absurd to imagine that philosophers or their kin can individuate communities by means of determining the facts of the matter as to what communities there really (irrespective of how people take themselves to be 'communed') are, so it is

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46 On which, see Read and Guetti (2007 [1999]) "Meaningful Consequences", reprinted in Read (2007), a paper which sets out concretely how 'form of life' is … not something stateable. To avoid particularly crude relativistic misreading of Wittgenstein here, it is crucial to bear in mind that the agreement in question is of course 'agreement' *not in opinions but in form of life.* (Agreement as Davidson and Hollis have it, by contrast, seems to be pretty much agreement in opinions.)

absurd to imagine that philosophers can enunciate true statements, 'assertions', 'theses', which (would) settle the debate of 'rationalism against relativism', or decide whether claims of incommensurability are true or not. It is *absurd*, as we suggested above in discussing Schatzki, to suppose that there is a substantive philosophical or anthropological *fact of the matter* about whether the Azande are 'really very different' from us or not. Or even about whether they are incomprehensible in 'our categories' or not. The would-be point is deflated by the recognition that questions like this can only be asked in the environment—context—of some standard which gives 'in what respect' we and they are to be compared. Otherwise, the answer will always be: they are and they aren't.

One clear and helpful way of putting this point is perhaps as follows: 'incommensurability' is itself *not measurable.* One can't measure 'loads of agreement', 'very different', 'necessarily partial understanding', and so on. For it raises the obvious question as to, do they agree with us: about what exactly? Thus if one stands by or contradicts the *thesis* of incommensurability one sounds as if one is ruling something in and something else out; but when the 'thesis' is unpacked there are no clear determinations of what is being ruled in or excluded. The only theses there can actually *be* are sheer banalities and tautologies, such as perhaps: "When two scientific disciplinary matrices seem very different to one another, *beware* of conflating them and assuming

that one can be actually expressed in terms of the other." This Kuhn-inspired propadeutical remark is pretty much tautologous. It is helpfully phrased explicitly as a warning rather than as an assertion. It should *not* be seen as a substantive doctrine.

The whole debate of "rationality *vs.* relativism", the whole debate of those who imagine themselves to be arguing for or against Kuhn and/or Winch, fails to gain purchase, simply fails to get off the ground. There is nothing to be said on the 'question' supposedly at issue, the question in Kuhn's case of whether as a matter of fact (say) pre-Einstienian physics is incommensurable with post-Einsteinian physics. Kuhn's deep message is not "The truth is that there have been scientific revolutions which render scientists unable to understand each other, and us unable to understand old science/scientists". His message is not well-put as the truth of a pluralised Kantianism, as Hoyningen-Huene (1993) has claimed it is, nor really as any kind of relativism. His message, rather, is something like, "If you're really interested in the nature of the sciences, if you want (as any serious student of science should) to understand what the sciences are and how they work, then try looking at science differently from how Whig historians of science and formalistic philosophers of science have taught you to. Try taking seriously the differences between old and new science (rather than seeing the old through the lens of the new). Use my 'new concepts', such as 'revolution' and

'paradigm', if they help you (*Sometimes* I, Kuhn, find them helpful, but I wrote a whole book on the transition to quantum physics without using the *words* that I initially used to pick out those concepts). But, be ready to abandon them instantly if they stand in the way of a sound grasp of the actual concretion of scientific practice in its historicity and in its contexts. "His message is philosophical, in an important sense;[47] but we think it is not helpfully-described as epistemological or metaphysical. Those words carry much too much baggage. (If we re-read Winch's *ISS* in light of his later thought, we think that we can see that Winch himself would have been less likely to have employed those words, in his own voice—though they were not even then intended to be understood in the more usual ways they are used in philosophy.)

Likewise, there is simply nothing finally definitive or fact-like to be said about whether Azande thought is incommensurable with ours. Winch's deepest message is something like, "If you're really interested in the nature of lay and professional social inquiry, then try looking at culture(s) differently from how scientistic 'social scientists' and rationalistic philosophers have encouraged you to. Try taking seriously the differences between us and them (rather than using the readiest-to-hand aspect of our own culture as a lens through which to view them). Use Wittgenstein's terms to do so, *if* those help

47 For detail on all this, see Sharrock and Read (2002).

free up your mental cramps."

Winch was (and became increasingly) well-aware of the risk that he would be *read* as saying something more substantive and theoretical than this, as was Wittgenstein. But he *had* no theory of how society is, of how humans are, nor even of how sociologists ought to conduct themselves.[48] He investigated the concept of 'society', the concept of 'social science', and the concept of 'philosophy', and found that certain oft-made methodological and philosophical 'mistakes' were less likely if one attended to the results of such investigations, which were, after all, intended to put us back in touch with things which in our everyday practice we all of us already understand perfectly well. *He had no theory.*

One way of seeing the logic of our argument is as follows: try taking seriously the idea that there is a debate, a debate heavily constrained by and even settle-able by the invocation of facts, a debate which philosophy can hope then to have settled and to pronounce assertorically and definitively upon, a debate concerning (say) how different the Zande are from us. If there is such a debate, then let us hear the 'evidence' from the sides to it. Well, for example, we have Davidson opposing 'conceptual scheme relativism', a 'relativism' often associated (largely wrongly, we are suggesting) with Winch

48 For support, see Sharrock and Anderson (1985) "Understanding Peter Winch".

and Kuhn. One of Davidson's key claims is that there must be massive agreement in order for there to be disagreement. That we must presuppose that anyone we are 'interpreting' shares a vast number of beliefs with us; otherwise, we cannot go so far as to treat them as a person or their language as a language.

But has it ever been explained what this presupposition—if heard as quasi-factual, rather than 'merely' as a situation-relative grammatical reminder—amounts to?

We can make perfectly good sense of the project of enumerating (say) the number of tigers still alive in the wild in India; or even of the project of enumerating the hairs on one's head; or even conceivably, given certain 'border' constraints, the number of grains of sand on a given beach.

Matters become rather less clear when it comes to enumerating the number of dialects spoken in a country. Criteria for individuation of dialects are rather less clear, more purpose-relative, exposed to philosophical debate, beset by the special features of any of the objects of the 'human sciences'. And this is not the same as holding that the criteria are difficult to agree upon, in a similar way in which the criteria for counting how many lakes there are in Finland are so difficult. In the case of Finnish lakes the problem is agreeing in advance what counts as where a lake ends: how narrow and how long the channel must be between it and the next lake for us to be able to say there are

two lakes linked by a channel, rather than saying there is one lake which narrows significantly in the middle. The point about dialects is not so much that we find it difficult to agree prior to counting but that what counts as a dialect is purpose-relative and dynamic. This has parallels with Wittgenstein's self-posed question in the early remarks on the 'builders', in *Philosophical Investigations.* Here Wittgenstein explores the question as to whether the primitive language-game of the 'builders' could be—might count for us as—the *whole* language of the two 'builders'. In some contexts the answer would be "No": The builders are merely employing words as signals, they are doing no more than "giving voice". In other contexts, for other purposes, we might be inclined to answer "Yes": the builders are clearly employing words (iterable signs, in Derrida's terminology) to communicate. They are manifesting the human "power of speech". The point of which Wittgenstein's imaginary scenario avails us, read-aright, is that what we count as a language is dependent upon the purpose of our counting. Similarly, enumerating the number of people one has truly loved is a project perhaps as intrinsically important as it is fuzzy and desperately difficult (and potentially life-changing), if taken seriously.

But when it comes to enumerating the number of beliefs one has, or the number of beliefs two people share, do we really have any idea how to *begin* the process? Is there really a 'process' here which we can begin at all? Can

Davidson's notion of 'massive agreement' be 'operationalised', *at all?*

More specifically:

How are we to count beliefs whose referents are identified differently by the believer than by ourselves?

How are we to count beliefs in the puzzle-cases of belief which philosophers are so fond of?

And, crucially, all the different forms/cases of belief investigated for example by Wittgensteinian *etc.* philosophers, by philosophers of religion, indeed by philosophers of anthropology (e.g. 'belief-that' *vs.* 'belief-in'; 'belief' as *trust*; belief-in-practice as discussed by Winch, Pleasants, *etc.*)?

What about meta-beliefs?

Concatenations of beliefs?

'Unconscious beliefs'?

What about degrees of belief, and gradations of belief, (e.g. 'I believe x with about 75 per cent probability')?

Do we only count propositional beliefs (as opposed to, say, my belief that my keys were in my pocket, that though I didn't manifestly hold the belief, my surprise at finding my keys not to be there on arriving at my office implies I was 'holding' such a belief)?

And so on—the list could easily be extended.[49]

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49 Compare here J.F.M. Hunter's (1973) work on belief as not a 'phenomenon'.

We suggest that one can have no clear—in the abstract—notion of what it is to enumerate one's beliefs, and that the idea of such, which appeared to be a way of introducing order to the interminable debates around relativism (and 'refuting' relativism), debates in which Winch and Kuhn supposedly figure on the side of the relativists, gains no purpose. One could of course invent some way of enumerating our beliefs—religious authorities have occasionally attempted to do so in restricted contexts for purposes of establishing whether one is a heretic or not—but how could something which one thus *invented* solve a philosophical problem?!

The only tenable thing to say is as follows. It may sometimes, for certain 'practical' philosophical purposes, be useful to say:

> i) 'We must share lots of things—e.g. beliefs—in common with others in order to be even treating them as human beings, as susceptible of understanding, at all.'

And it may sometimes be useful, for the same kind of purposes, but in *different* local circumstances, where the discourse in one's area has taken a *different* kind of illusionary turning, to say:

> ii) 'People can have different world-views/paradigms, which make them partially impenetrable to one another.[50] One has to be ready to

50 See p 199 of Winch 1997, "[T]here is *a kind of understanding* of [Zande] practice that we...do

see others as deeply different from oneself.'[51]

But neither 'saying' should be heard as an empirical assertion or anything like one.

Winch and Kuhn had cause to say the latter kind of thing ((ii)) more often than the former ((i)), *because they were largely combatting inherited traditions of 'Whiggism', 'rationalism', and 'Realism'.* They look to some as if they were 'relativists', because of their concern, owing to the cultural situation they were placed in—to the dominant cultural trends of their time and context (in later times, they would have been (and in fact were!) more concerned to combat 'postmodern' relativism)—, to combat certain particular kinds of confusions more than others. Their looking a bit like relativists is not a matter of their beliefs or 'doctrines'; it is a function of the *audience* that they were most concerned, therapeutically, to aid and exorcise. If they were truly irrationalists, they wouldn't have been bothered by helping out such an

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not have. I will try to express this by saying that we cannot imagine what it would be like for us to behave as the Azande do and make the kind of sense of what we were doing as the Azande, we assume, do make of what they do; or perhaps: we cannot imagine taking the consulation of the oracle *seriously,* as the Azande do." See, similarly, p 223 of *PI*; and p 32 of Lyas (1999).

51 Again, against the foolish claim that Winch thought of communities (nonsensically) as apodictically identifiable and hermetically-sealed one from another, we should note Winch's fascinating late discussion of difficulties which can arise (in) understanding members of our *own* culture. See again his (1997) "Can we Understand Ourselves".

audience. Indeed, if anything, the concern of Kuhn and Winch to combat excess tendencies toward 'Realism' or 'rationalism' *is a mark of the degree to which they were themselves temperamentally and intellectually close to just those traditions!* This is obvious to anyone who has cared to understand Kuhn, who himself cared intensely about science and its image and its difference from non-science disciplines, though not about astrology or post-modernism or 'dream catchers'. In Winch's case too, something similar is true, when one looks closely: Winch wanted academic inquiries to be respectable and sound, not pseudo-scientific; he was concerned that 'social science' was giving the seeking of knowledge a bad name, and wanted apposite social study to occur (and for proper recognition of where it already occurs), instead. He wanted philosophy and its analytical rigour to reign in its full domain. He wanted thinking people to take seriously the quest for (and presupposition of) Reality in which all of us in different ways are engaged. He had no desire to promote irrational ways of living or to give any harbour to such ways of thinking. On the contrary; Winch wanted to place us in a position where we can properly criticise social practices that we do not believe in, and was irked by intellectual doctrines that prevent this from actually being able to happen.

Both thinkers, Kuhn and Winch, were, in this crucial regard, the truest of children of the Enlightenment.

So: we should not thus fall into the trap of thinking that Kuhn and

Winch *believed* (ii), and disbelieved (i), simply and assertorically, permanently. No; not at all. They did not wish to hold, to argue for, the theses often attributed to them by Davidsonians and others; they only wished to remind us all of how we might best avoid saying nonsensical things about the history of science, about the understanding of persons and cultures, *etc.* .

They had, they have, no views, they make no assertions. Winch is no more a pluralist (as Lerner wishes he was, and Patrick Phillips thinks he might actually be) than a monist (as Lerner thinks he is). He just isn't in that kind of game.

To be fair to Schatzki, his line of thought is subtler than that of (e.g.) Hollis, in that Schatzki not only emphasises that commonality is needed in beliefs, but also in emotions, needs, physical environment, primitive reactions, interests, and so on (See p.316 of his essay). There needs to be, says Schatzki, 'agreement' in much of the whole warp and weft of form of life (and compare *Investigations* section 206). And there is of course something right about this. But the same argument that we ran above could be applied to each of these in turn: there can be no such thing as quantifying the degree of commonality; there is no *fact* of the matter as to how much commonality is required; and the claims about the need for a 'shared form of life' do *not* in the end amount to assertions. They are not claims that could be contradicted, or theses that are controversial. They are—they can only be—efforts to return

us all to our actual life with language, no longer deluded by nonsenses that masquerade as science-like claims.

Why Then, Given the Above, are Kuhn and Winch so Misunderstood?

We have already indicated that the answer to this question is multiple. But it must be said that it is only certain incautious remarks that Kuhn made that gave his interpreters *any genuine* reason for foisting this issue onto him. Winch was if anything slightly *more* careful and circumspect than Kuhn, and certainly more cautiously faithful to Wittgenstein in his approach; but as mentioned above, certain incautious remarks in the first edition of *The Idea of a Social Science* did unfortunately offer hostages to fortune, but, even so, only if one considered those expressions in isolation and overlooked the places where Winch did distance himself from or offer a different understanding than those that his critics seized on—Winch, as we have remarked throughout, suffers from *partial* reading probably as much as anyone does. (We give a slightly fuller account toward the end of this chapter as to why Winch has been as badly misunderstood as he has.)

Against Interpretation

To recap: If we are to risk generalizing at all, we shall say that the production of descriptions or presentations of human action/behaviour which are not

interpretations, let alone explanations, is the only way to avoid grossly failing to 'capture' that behaviour, given that such rule-following *etc.* behaviour is utterly unlike what we call the 'behaviour' of inanimate objects, is active, deedlike—though, again, largely in a non-interpretative fashion. Most human behaviour does not involve interpretation, so its understanding *need* not normally be interpretive either. *Contra* the claims of Charles Taylor and other critics of Winch, even self-understanding or self-description need not be self-interpretation (or theory-laden, or necessarily draw upon tacit knowledge). It is an interpretivistic (or post-modernist) dogma, a piece of 'theoryism', to claim that linguistic articulation of wordless self-understandings is necessarily interpretive. (When we ask someone what they are doing, sometimes they simply tell us. Or: sometimes we can simply see, without needing to be told. That such seeing is defeasible does not force upon one the inference that it never happens; that something is *logically* open to being otherwise does not translate—social constructionists to the contrary—into 'therefore it might actually be otherwise'; i.e. being defeasible is a *logical* possibility, not a matter of being actually, in practice, open to refutation, let alone refuted!) "Self-understanding" *etc.* is, again, vital to understanding humans as human animals rather than as material objects or even as (the vast majority of non-human) animals—but it is not (necessarily) interpretation. One needs to think, not of someone viewing themselves from the standpoint

of another and speculating on why they themselves have done something (a very unusual case), but rather of someone having the capability to alter what they are doing in response to social circumstances, say in response to a failure to make themselves understood, or in response to a surprising change in the physical environment (usual cases).[52] *Then* perhaps one will have the chance to see clearly how human action is, and what "self-understanding" (when understood in a properly non-intellectualist sense) amounts to.

Of course, the *terms* used in all this are not *in themselves* crucial (i.e.: So long as one understands "explain" or "interpret" in a sound non-scientistic fashion, *etc.* then one can happily use terms like "explaining / interpreting human action"—as Winch on occasion does. And somewhat similarly: if the word "description" seems somewhat forced, as we are employing it, then we will happily shift to another word that seems to you more felicitous, such as perhaps "presentation" or a "seeing".). We are not word-fetishists or language-policemen.

But distinctions at least along the lines that we have made are we think usefully correlated with the words (describing, understanding, explaining; acting-on-a-rule, interpreting a rule) discussed in (I) and (II),

52 We need to think, that is, in the kind of ways suggested by Ethnomethodology, as explicated for instance by Mike Lynch (1993), pp.14-17. Lynch and Winch are much happier in this regard than (say) Taylor, Weber, or Jaspers.

towards the start of the chapter—in common and intuitively useful senses (uses) of those words. Thus we take it that it is useful to say that Winch (1970 [1962]) hopes in his paper, "Understanding a Primitive Society"—his critique of the great anthropologist, Evans-Pritchard—to be pointing the way toward a description or presentation of Azande practices which will not impose upon them.[53] And imposition will, he thinks, result from (and amount to) interpreting them or (worse) explaining them. Instead, Winch invites us to *look at* the language-game the Azande are actually playing: to see it, or grasp it:

> It might...appear as though we had clear grounds for speaking of the superior rationality of European over Zande thought, in so far as the latter involves a contradiction [over criteria for the attribution of 'witch-hood'] which it makes no attempt to remove and does not even recognize: one, however, which is recognizable as such in the context of European ways of thinking. But does Zande thought on this matter really involve a contradiction? It appears from Evans-Pritchard's account that the Azande do not press their ways of thinking about witches to a point at which they would be involved in contradictions. // Someone may now want to say that the irrationality of the Azande in relation to witchcraft shows itself in the fact that they do not press their thought about it 'to its logical conclusion'. To appraise this point we must consider whether the conclusion we are trying to force on them is indeed a logical one; or perhaps better, whether someone who does press this conclusion is being more rational than the Azande, who do not. Some light is thrown on this question by

53 Once more: one should take care not to suppose that Winch is trying to give us a superior piece of human scientific research as such—he is not setting himself up in competition with Evans-Pritchard & co., but is rather only saying what must be going on in any 'human science'.

> Wittgenstein's discussion of a game... (Winch 1970, 92)

Winch goes on to suggest that the Azande are 'playing a *different* game':

> It is noteworthy...that the Azande, when the possibility of this contradiction about the inheritance of witchcraft is pointed out to them, do *not* come to regard their old beliefs in witchcraft as obsolete. [According to Evans-Pritchard himself:]'They have no theoretical interest in the subject.' This suggests strongly that the context from which the suggestion about the contradiction is made, the context of our scientific culture, is not on the same level as the context in which the beliefs about witchcraft operate. **Zande notions of witchcraft do not constitute a theoretical system in terms of which Azande try to gain a quasi-scientific understanding of the world.** This in turn suggests that it is the European, obsessed with pressing Zande thought where it would not go -- to a contradiction -- who is guilty of misunderstanding, not the Zande. (Ibid 93)

Winch's primary concern is, then, to avoid *mis*understanding[54] a radically different society (or misunderstanding religion; or art; *etc.*). He is not asserting, "Here is the truth on what these 'aliens' are", nor "Here is how to enter into the positive 'empathic' state of understanding them"; and what he is asserting is merely (thinking back now to our much earlier discussion of

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54 Putting the emphasis on *'(not) misunderstanding'* rather than on any alleged quasi-Collingwoodian empathy or imagination, or on some quasi-anthropological methodology that Winch is taken to recommend under the heading of '*Understanding,'* could be couched in Austinian terms of shifting our view of which word around here is the 'trouser-word'. Perhaps more important is to note that this is one of the points where Winch is frequently misread; for example, by Schatzki, who suggests (on p 319 of his *op.cit.*) that Winch aims at a positive state of understanding, whereas for the most part all Winch aims at is the removal of mental cramps *etc.* which force us into ethnocentric *etc.* misunderstandings.

'understanding') that one doesn't misunderstand some people but, *in the ordinary sense of the word,* understands them. If one doesn't misunderstand them, one does—in this straightforward sense rather than in some fantasised theoreticist sense—understand them. (Understanding and not misunderstanding, once we have become clear that 'understanding' is not something special or mystical, are of course 'internally related'.)

So, to a reader who might ask, why can't Winch, and we, say: So Winch does understand the Azande better than Evans-Pritchard does; Why is a concern to get understanding right not as legitimate as avoiding misunderstanding; indeed how is it different? And we can now see that one can say these things, provided that one does so with care and subtlety… This is very important, and helps make perspicuous another aspect of Winch's practice signally neglected by most of his 'friends' and 'foes'. Winch, to say it again, is trying to put us in a better position to avoid setting up a spurious problem—that's all. A bit like with Kuhn's recasting of scientific progress in terms of progress only *away* from past insoluble puzzles ('anomalies'), there is no teleological vision in Winch; and he is not setting up a rival methodology to that employed by field anthropologists either, not least because his whole understanding of the Azande comes from Evans-Pritchard's own book—it is not Evans-Pritchard, the ethnographer, who is being challenged, but Evans-Pritchard the reflective interpreter, and he is being challenged on the grounds

that his interpretations don't fit with *his own* ethnographic report.

Here we arguably have an outline example of someone—Winch—being able quite successfully to "follow along with"—to make something of—an 'alien' discourse without *imposing* on it or *interpreting* it in terms other than its own. But, again, not through any theory, nor through a superior / rival piece of quasi-empirical sociology.

For, mostly Winch just accepts that Evans-Pritchard understood the Azande perfectly well as a result of living with them–it is to be remembered that Evans-Pritchard's account is rejected on only one point, albeit a key one, where he tries to say what their practice amounts to by comparison with ours. Winch's critics are as one in their failure to understand this aspect of Winch's disagreement with Evans-Pritchard. It certainly isn't an attempt to establish that there are inherent obstacles to understanding another society (this impression probably follows more from an over-reaction to the (very reasonable) strictures in *Idea of a Social Science* on being able to write a history of art without sensitivity to colour, shape etc and is illicitly projected onto "Understanding a Primitive Society"). Winch's whole discussion concedes that, to a large extent, Evans-Pritchard has succeeded in understanding the oracular practices, for Winch uses Evans-Pritchard's account of those practices against Evans-Pritchard. Again: The disagreement is really on one point, though it is a central and profound one, which is when Evans-Pritchard

comes to make a *synoptic* statement about how 'we' differ from 'them' (one which pertains to the point of their practices rather than to the specifics of them—which of our practices are they most like?). If you like, we could put it like this: Evans-Pritchard wants an overall evaluation—can a rational person believe these things? One can see plainly enough from Evans-Pritchard's very detailed story that they have the oracle, that they have such and such rattles, that such and such moves comprise curing rituals and all the rest—we can see, too, that all these are different from what we do. But the question that Evans-Pritchard is bothered by, inherited from the anthropological tradition, is: but do they think differently than we do? To which his answer is: in all their everyday affairs they are as practical and empirically minded as we are. But when it comes to their magical practices…It would be wise perhaps to recognise that the problem with the Azande isn't the possibility that their practices are possibly nonsensical in a Wittgensteinian sense i.e. examples of 'language on holiday', but that they are at risk of being *dismissed* in a parochial spirit as purveyors of nonsense, things that no self-respecting person could possibly believe. (Whereas the onus on the true Wittgensteinian is not to dismiss, not to police, but: to try to make sense. To practice therapy, from a stance of non-superiority.) The Wittgensteinian-type problem arises within Evans-Pritchard's own thought and his attachment to a metaphysical picture of the relationship between language and reality, which stands

between him and what he has already pretty much and pretty well understood, with the result that the apparent problem in understanding a primitive society is a pseudo-problem.

So, we contend that one of the attractions of the Azande case for Winch is that 'here is an excerpt from the social studies where there is a real problem of understanding'—the anthropological tradition is puzzled about what to say about alien magical practices; but then the question is: what kind of problem in understanding is it? The problem which perhaps puzzles 'us' more generally is: how can they believe that stuff? That is the question that Evans-Pritchard tries to answer: they, like us, are sensible at the level of practical empirical doings, so why don't they, like us, see that their way of doing things can't possibly work? Evans-Pritchard then tries to answer this question by arguments about the parts of their belief system that explain away the failures of their practice to deliver the goods and so on, and it is just here that Winch intervenes, to argue that the problem in understanding does not arise from the Azande's witchcraft being any less sensible than are their practical/empirical matters, or *prima facie* any less sensible or plausible than ours are—the obstacle is one that Evans-Pritchard puts in his own way, by making metaphysical assumptions about the relation between language and reality, and by giving science an ostensibly culturally-neutral role in adjudicating between them and us. Winch's response to this is to rearrange

some of the facts in Evans-Pritchard's own account, and to adopt more perspicuous standards of comparison with 'our' practices (Evans-Pritchard treats them as most like misfiring versions of our scientific practices; Winch says they are not much like these, but maybe more akin to some of our more 'ritualistic' practices, such as prayer), and, if we do that, then our problem, which is why they don't see through their practices, will go away, for it is no more one that needs asking than does: why don't we see through ours? The *obvious* implausibility of their ways are an artefact not of the obvious truth of our science but of the fact that its familiarity to us endows it with that obviousness (which *doesn't* obviate, of course, the difficulties that arise for those who are spiritually 'tone-deaf', so to speak).

None of what we say here entails, either, an incapacity to make judgements on other cultures. I.e. It doesn't require a "nice-bloke" supposition that everybody is basically a nice bloke like me—Winch is careful to position his own arguments on his evaluation that *Azande* culture is basically an affable one, so there is nothing really 'dark' about their witchcraft; but this is true (*if* it is true—animal-rights advocates might of course differ (pity the chickens); and compare here again Pleasants's intelligent *political* critique of Zande culture and witchcraft) of *Azande* culture, not of *all* 'alien' cultures. We are not bound to any moral relativism and can—and should—condemn another culture if it is 'dark', for it is perfectly

natural, perfectly human, for us to combat someone else's world view, to damn them as heretics, fools etc. … but we should be clear that when we do this, we are not doing so because we have rationally proven them to be mistaken in their ways or in their beliefs, but rather we have *rejected*—are viscerally opposed to—their way of doing things. Read this way, Winch remains close to Wittgenstein's remarks on the conflicts between religious believers, or between believers and non-believers—after all, having read and absorbed Winch we—the authors of this book—still can't possibly do what the Azande do,[55] their practice has no place in our lives (nor should we imagine their lives incomplete because there is no room for science in it). Perhaps we might state the point as: there are no guarantees in the business of understanding, and there are no guarantees that one can e.g. overcome one's repugnance toward or the fact that one is fundamentally out of tune with what others are doing.

Paraphrasing a Wittgensteinian 'slogan', then, one might try simplifying our line here as follows: Don't look for the interpretation, look for an adequate description. A description that will not evince/evoke failures to meet those one is encountering *as they are.*

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55 Though we may, as discussed earlier, be changed by genuine open-hearted exposure to the 'alien': for instance, one may feel able to be more attuned to a sense of sacredness of the Earth. Though not, presumably, a sense of the sacredness of only very specific bits of the Earth, as is the case for a number of indigenous peoples' 'belief'-systems.

Again, we must stress that our remarks above too are 'grammatical reminders' (see *PI* section 127). They are not transcendental claims, nor gestures at ineffable truths, nor general contributions to a theory of society, nor any such. Winch, like Wittgenstein, gives us reminders, 'only'. He tries to judge the mythological errors we are likely to fall into, in part by looking at errors (e.g. Evans-Pritchard's, or similarly Frazer's, Pareto's, or Levy-Bruhl's) that actually have been influentially fallen into. (Take for instance the following disastrous confusion of perspectives within one sentence, to be found on p 43 of the abridged (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) edition of Evans-Pritchard's classic text; "We must remember that since witchcraft has no real existence a man does not know that he has bewitched another, even if he is aware that he bears him ill will".)

And it is perhaps important to reiterate that our reading of Winch resists assimilating his 'view' to that of most '*Verstehen*' theorists of the social sciences, and to Weber. Our view, based upon the letter of the kind of quotations from Winch given above, is that Winch's thought is falsified if one fails to recognize the difference he finds between descriptions on the one hand and interpretations / explanations on the other. Winch had a lot of time and sympathy for the Idealist tradition, for the work of Dilthey and Collingwood for example. He felt that they essentially grasped certain important philosophical points which eluded their Positivist foes, then and

now. Likewise, Winch can be drawn close at various points to certain schools of conventional sociology, such as the *Verstehenlich* moments in Weber, and some classical Social Interactionism. But we want to insist again that in the main Winch resolutely refused to take up any position whatsoever *within* social theory. He is not advocating any positive picture of the human being, or of (the) human society[56]—though he sometimes recommends certain pictures for certain prophylactic purposes. He is not, for example, asserting the truth of a picture of human beings as 'rule-following animals'—it is not Winch's 'finding', or even 'conclusion', that people (sometimes, often though not always) follow rules, and always (in an empty, non-factive sense) can be said to be within the realm of the normative—*it is a complete banality*. Winch rather follows Wittgenstein in pointing out how easy it is to be confused in attempting to understand other human beings who are perhaps strange to us if instead of taking account of their practices as already having/making an order, we rather interpret them merely 'positivistically', as merely acting in accord with rules; or if we fail to understand how different (say) their understanding of the effects of an alleged contradiction within their practices is to what we might have expected. Thus we think it unwise and unhelpful to try to read Winch as (say) a philosophical social interactionist, with a

56 He is not for example directly following Collingwood's over-intellectualist vision of human society and history—see his careful words on page 131 of *ISS* (and again at the close of the *Preface*).

particular theory of what human interaction is and of how important it is. If we are to associate Winch with any sociological 'school', it would have then to be, as already suggested, with the non-scientistic, Wittgenstein-influenced, resolutely local practices of 'ethnomethodology'. If Winch has an ally in sociology, it can we think only be Harold Garfinkel and his followers, who do not advocate a substantive theory of society. We might then think of ethnomethodological practice, in the work of Harold Garfinkel, Eric Livingston, Harvey Sacks, Jeff Coulter, Michael Lynch, Rod Watson and more besides, as being a fine-grained ethnographically-oriented non-fictional version of what Winch and Wittgenstein are up to with their examples, prophylactics and reminders.[57]

If Winch were aiming to describe a positive doctrine of understanding, then he would be an Idealist or a *Verstehen*-theorist. For all his affinities with these, he is neither. If it be responded, "Well then, if he is not aiming to describe a positive doctrine of understanding, then why is the crucial section of ISS entitled "Understanding Social Institutions", and why is his great essay entitled "Understanding a Primitive Society?", then, to reiterate and sum up our arguments above, the answer is threefold:

1) The "understanding" in Winch's titles is better heard as denoting

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[57] See, for instance, Sharrock and Watson (1988) "Autonomy Among Social Theories", which makes clear just how different the task of ethmethodology and, by—qualified, (see chapter

the ordinary *activities* of trying to understand and of understanding others, not as denoting a *state of understanding*. He is interested in reminding us of the ways in which we ordinarily come to understanding of others, interested, that is to say, in the '*grammar*' of understanding.

2) Furthermore, Winch is writing *about* this activity (he emphasises that his inquiries are reflective), and not, except in the most schematic and illustrative of ways, actually *undertaking* it. He isn't to more than a very limited degree engaging in the activity *himself*; he is not an anthropologist, or a practicising ethnographer (he adds nothing in the way of empirical information to Evans-Pritchard's study, nor could he possibly have done so, given his not having done any field-work, etc.). This should be obvious.

3) Finally, the activity he is talking about is one he is we think least likely to mislead, to encourage a wrong assimilation with philosophical approaches or with methodologies that were not his, if we put his endeavour in negative terms. He was chiefly concerned to prevent the creation of unnecessary misunderstandings, for the sake of better pursuit of the activity intimated in (1) and (2), above. …He wants those engaging in the

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3)—extension, Winch is from that of mainstream sociology or social theory.

> activity of would-be social science to appreciate better the extent to which their fieldwork needs to be informed by attention to our language, to meaning, rather than assuming the methods of the empirical natural sciences. This should be clear, in the case in which Winch goes into most detail: that of Evans-Pritchard. Winch offers tools for avoiding misunderstanding what Evans-Pritchard has actually given us, by way of an insight into the Azande; and these in turn yield conceptual tools which may be to other anthropologists' benefit. In short: while *ISS's* point could be signalled more clearly by shifting to a title such as 'The Very Idea of a Social Science', "Understanding a Primitive Society" could be perspicuously retitled as "Avoiding Misunderstandings of Primitive Societies", or, better still perhaps, "On Primitive Misunderstandings of 'Primitive' Societies".

And so now we are justified in venturing that a key 'mistake' which Schatzki makes—and Patrick Phillips and Lerner after him—is to treat Winch as a social theorist, who put us in the alleged position of possessing an understanding either of particular societies or of society in general. Thus Schatzki in fact covertly treats Wittgenstein as a social theorist too, though not

to the extent that someone like David Bloor attempts to do.[58] When we see clearly how the Winch/Wittgenstein approach eviscerates generalistic abstract questions such as for instance 'How great do the commonalities between persons need to be for understanding between them to be possible?' of content, we see, among other things, how futile the debates over Winch have tended to be.

To illustrate our meaning here, it is worth adding that salient and we think sensible support for distinguishing for prophylactic *etc.* purposes, as we have done above, after Winch, not just between description and explanation, but between description (and understanding) on the one hand and interpretation on the other, can be found in the Jeff Coulter's paper, "Is Contextualizing Necessarily Interpretive?":

> It is undoubtedly true that some readings of texts...are best construed as 'interpretive', as (involving) the making of 'interpretations', but this is not true for each and every facet of a reading of—or of reading-and-understanding—a text[for example] a psychiatric clinic record (1994, 692) [59]

And: if the reader continues to require further detail concerning how it

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58 The title of his (1983) book *Wittgenstein: A Social Theory of Knowledge* already says it all, really, in terms of making perspicuous the depth of Bloor's strong and wilful misreading of Wittgenstein.

59 See also p 442 of his (1996): "[One] ought to distinguish between 'reading' a text and 'having (or arriving at, *etc.*) a reading of a text', between ordinary cases of 'understanding' what a text says or what it means and cases in which 'interpreting' may be involved."

is that it is 'possible' for there to be plain (self- etc.) description (or 'presentation'), and how interpretation is not ubiquitous, then the place to go is to the ethnomethodologists' concept of the "accounting" and "accountability" of human practices/actions. Winch is much closer to ethnomethodology than to 'symbolic interactionism', 'Verstehen'-theory or philosophical Idealism, in this regard.

In sum, rather than as usual assimilating interpretation to the description side of Wittgenstein's famous opposition between description and [theoretical] explanation,[60] thus risking concealing the important disanalogies between description and interpretation, *we might usefully try out assimilating it rather to the explanation side instead, and notice the similarities there.* This is, we think, the main moral of thinking through oppositions (I) and (II), with which we began the chapter, above. (Again, the terms themselves are not vital—and all these concepts are of course 'family-resemblance concepts', there being for example many 'kinds' of description[61]—but the *points* we are trying to make here, both therapeutic and prophylactic, are we think sound.)

If this is right, then the best one can do, one might say, is present (rather, one might say, than *re*-present) the thought and language of an 'alien'.[62] But, if it 'hangs together', in the way Winch suggested Azande

60 See Wittgenstein's *PI* section.109, and section 654.

61 See for instance *PI* section 291; also *PI* section 24 and p 200.

62 Of course, in a trivial sense even this must be a recontextualisation—but the point is, it

thought in the final analysis does; if it can be made sense of without being imposed upon; if its character is such that one can come to describe it accurately, in important part through understanding it (at least initially) as they understand it: then one need not thereby falsify it—and then one really can present it. (And need not necessarily interpret it.) *And, in such cases, then this 'best' is quite clearly: wholly* good enough.

A Provisional Conclusion

To reiterate: like Winch, like any good Wittgensteinian (or indeed any good 'human scientist'), we do not confront the task of 'understanding other people' as any kind of general project, and find that any difficulties that we meet in our studies do not arise from the impossibility of transcending conceptual disjunctions but from the substantive nature of the situations, practices, cultures etc we are dealing with, as e.g. the difficulties of learning

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needn't be anything like a translation or an interpretation. 'Translation'—Quine's term; 'Interpretation'—Davidson's. Both risk leaving quite out of account the aspects of language, which James Guetti (1993) calls 'grammatical effects', which make all the difference between simply extracting one's own version of what someone is saying on the one hand, and doing what can justly be called 'understanding what they are saying' on the other (or at least understanding what one *can* of it and 'witnessing / letting be' the rest). Our point is that genuinely understanding even what one can of something strange, and letting its nuances and style and otherness be, is not well-subsumed under the heading even of 'interpretation' (let alone of 'translation').

enough mathematics to follow advanced mathematical work or of not letting one's religious indifference get in the way, or of overcoming one's lack of facility with other languages etc etc. Like Winch, and many others, we are convinced that it is often the case that insufficient effort is taken by philosophers and psychiatrists and historians of science (and so on) to understand the strange.[63]

As we pointed out above, Winch's arguments being reflectively *a priori* cannot dictate empirical facts and certainly cannot determine that, as a matter of fact, the activities of human being must be found to be—*must* be—coherent and intelligible: whether or not difficulties in understanding can be overcome is to be found out in the attempt, and the determination as to whether the difficulty lies with 'us' or with 'them' likewise to be made in the same way.

So, we have argued that Winch's philosophical suggestions, his hints

63 But sometimes, after much trying, one ends up judging that it's not possible to do that; in which case one ends up instead noting the patterns in a discourse but concluding that nevertheless there is an *irrevocable* incoherence in that discourse. (For such a case, see Read(2003)) We here presuppose a roughly Cavellian rather than Rortian reading of Wittgenstein. That is, a non-absolute distinction for certain 'practical' purposes between speaking 'inside' and 'outside' language-games. For detail, see the papers by Crary, Cavell, and Conant in Crary & Read (eds), *The New Wittgenstein (op.cit.);* and on the distinction's non-absoluteness, see Scheman's paper in Sluga & Stern (eds.) (1996).

and reminders, are extremely effective. We see no grounds whatsoever for thinking that Winch's commitments involve any relativism. No more, though, do they involve any of the other 'isms' that have been reactively bandied about by Winch's 'commentators'.

We have here sketched a reading of Peter Winch's mature philosophy of the social sciences, according to which Winch is perhaps-surprisingly congenial to Wittgenstein (on a resolutely therapeutic reading of the latter), and to much ethnomethodology (on a Wittgensteinian reading of the latter, following 'the Manchester school' of ethnomethodology, particularly).

Those who would read ethnomethodology as advancing lots of positive theses about society and about structure/action, as having for instance a particular, controversial stance on the spectrum laid out in the standard "structure vs. agency" debate, will likely be unsympathetic. As will those who would read the later Wittgenstein "irresolutely"[64]—as having substantial things to say about the form of (bits of) language, *etc.* . But any such readers need we think to reckon with the exegetical and 'substantive'

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64 The term is due to Warren Goldfarb, who takes the Diamond/Conant reading of Wittgenstein, with which Winch was thoroughly if guardedly impressed (see his 'Persuasion' *(op.cit.)* for detail) to involve in particular a 'resolute' understanding of the *Tractatus's* austere hard-line on the tendency toward nonsensicality of *all* philosophy. For discussion of irresolutism in readings of Wittgenstein's later work, see Hutchinson (2007) "What's the Point of Elucidation"?

argument that we have been making. An argument which attributes to Wittgenstein no theses or theories, and which suggests that followers of Wittgenstein such as Winch have been cruelly used by those who have taken them to have implicit social theories, philosophical anthropologies of the human, *etc.* . There is no substance to the 'idea' that human beings are all essentially the same; nor to the 'idea' that they are fundamentally different, 'community by community'. Winch would not suggest that communities are as a matter of fact 'cognitively closed' to one another, the frequent attribution of such a view to him therefore is somewhat disappointing. (Nor of course would Winch suggest that as a happy happenstance of metaphysical fact there is enough commonality between communities for communication to be possible, *etc.*). We turn in the next chapter to specific examination of what is probably the most widespread misunderstanding of all of Winch: the claim, already implicitly-undermined above, but seemingly almost endlessly-tempting to Winch's readers, that he was a 'linguistic idealist'.