Rules, Magic, and Instrumental Reason

A critical interpretation of Peter Winch's philosophy of the social sciences

Berel Dov Lerner

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Peter Winch was one of the most controversial philosophers of the twentieth century. The past few years have seen a renewal of interest in his deployment of the philosophy of Wittgenstein, and his influence has reached across the social sciences.

This book offers a systematic and critical discussion of Winch's writings on the philosophy of the social sciences. The author points to Winch's tendency to over-emphasize the importance of language and communicative action, and his insufficient attention to the role of practical, technological activities in human life and society.

The book includes detailed discussion of:

* Winch's analysis of the notion of a "rule";
* his arguments against explanatory social sciences;
* his treatment of "meaningful behavior"; and
* his discussion of African magic.

It also offers an appendix devoted to the controversy between the anthropologists Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere regarding Captain James Cook's Hawaiian adventures.

Essential reading for all those with an interest in the relationship between philosophy and the social sciences, this book will also be of great service to anthropologists, sociologists, and scholars of religion.

Berel Dov Lerner received his PhD in philosophy from Tel Aviv University and is currently a lecturer in the Western Galilee College. His work has appeared in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, *Religious Studies*, *Human Studies* and *Philosophical Investigations*. He recently contributed a chapter on African magic and religion to *Indigenous Religions: A Companion* (Continuum, 2000).

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lived without complaint amid a flood of books and papers for these past years.

This book is dedicated to my mother and father. By their example they set high standards; their support and encouragement have always been unconditional. *The glory of children are their parents.*

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* Chapter 10 borrows from my essay "Understanding a (secular) primitive society," *Religious Studies* 31 (1995): 303–9.
* Chapter 11 is largely a reworking of my essay "The materialist mentality revisited," which appeared in *Human Studies* 17 (1995): 449–59, reproduced with the kind permission of Kluwer Academic Publishers.

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Abbreviations

ISS: Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, second edition. London: Routledge, 1990.
MWMM: W.W. Sharrock and R.J. Anderson, "Magic witchcraft and the materialist mentality," *Human Studies* 8 (1985): 357–75.
SNORF: Social nature of rule following.
UPS: Peter Winch, "Understanding a primitive society," in his *Ethics and Action*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972, pp. 8–49.
Witchcraft: E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937.

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Introduction

Peter Winch's book *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* and essay "Understanding a primitive society" (hereafter, ISS and UPS, respectively) have had a profound impact on how philosophers and social scientists view the study of human behavior and society. Together they have generated a large body of criticism and discussion, which is only partially represented by the bibliography of the present work. A proper appreciation of Winch's historical role would require a wide-ranging survey of intellectual developments. Suffice it to say that ISS made an important contribution toward the development of anti-positivist and anti-naturalist trends in social science,[1] and UPS sparked a huge debate on the universality of reason.

This book is not primarily concerned with intellectual history; rather, it offers a reading and critical assessment of Winch's philosophy of the social sciences. In writing it, I had to decide on a number of questions of interpretative policy that deserve the consideration of anyone attempting to characterize Winch's ideas. These are, in particular: (1) what was Winch trying to achieve in his philosophical writings; (2) to what extent may Winch's philosophical corpus be read as a coherent whole; and (3) how should Winch's strong dependence on the ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein be taken into account? Not surprisingly, these questions are closely interrelated. On the one hand, Winch's understanding of the purpose of philosophy was greatly influenced by Wittgenstein. On the other hand, some scholars have claimed that Winch was guided by different philosophical ideals at different stages of his career.

The opening chapter of ISS explicitly describes philosophy as a discipline devoted to creating a body of theoretical knowledge (more on this in Chapter 1). Nonetheless, some scholars (e.g., Rupert Read, unpublished[2]) consider Winch to be an anti-theoretical thinker who adopted Wittgenstein's therapeutic goal of curing philosophical diseases and conceptual confusions through the perspicacious description of enlightening examples. Nigel Pleasants (2000b) characterizes much of ISS as "Kantian" while claiming that in UPS Winch began to take a more thoroughly Wittgensteinian tack. Earlier, A.A. Derksen (1978) distinguished

between the "logical position" of ISS and the "empirical position" of UPS. D.Z. Phillips (2000) claims that Winch substantially revised his view of rule-governed action (a central topic of ISS) *circa* 1976, and in 1990 Winch himself criticized parts of ISS in his introduction to its second edition.

The general policy of this book will be to treat UPS, as well as Winch's latter writings, as expansions on ISS rather than as constituting a radical break from it. Winch's own comments in UPS certainly support this view. There is also an important historical argument for concentrating on ISS and UPS. After all, Winch made his most influential contributions to the philosophy of social science in these works, both inspiring and infuriating other thinkers. Given the opportunity to rewrite ISS, Winch declined, citing his change of philosophical interests (ISS: ix). ISS and UPS remain the central programmatic works in which Winch most thoroughly lays out his vision of the nature of the social sciences. Appropriately, they constitute the core of my exposition. Since Winch continued to use rather abstract and reified concepts (such as an idealized notion of "grammar") in his later writings, I shall feel free to read him as possessing a theoretical orientation rather than being engaged in a purely descriptive philosophy. As for Winch's self-critical preface to the second edition of ISS, his comments may be placed under three headings: some are so obscure and qualified that it is difficult to take account of them; others are so radical that room can hardly be made for them in the framework of ISS; while the third corrects errors of emphasis and exposition. I largely disregard the first, make note of the second, and try to work the third into my description of Winch's position.

Although a number of scholars (e.g., Bloor 1983) have questioned the validity of Winch's interpretation of Wittgenstein, I shall say very little about this issue. An evaluation of Winch's exegesis would presuppose my own certainty regarding the message of Wittgenstein's writings. Wittgenstein's "canon" is a chaotic morass of personal notebooks, manuscripts sometimes more and sometimes less prepared for publication, scraps of paper, and various types of students' lecture notes. Furthermore, if Wittgenstein intended his later philosophical writings to serve therapeutic aims, their proper interpretation will reflect the particular conceptual disease with which each particular reader is afflicted. Not surprisingly, exceedingly intelligent and well-informed expositors disagree on many key points of its interpretation. I have no intention of entering these battles. However, since Winch's allegiance to Wittgenstein is unwavering, I do reserve the right to cite Wittgensteinian texts occasionally to fill out lacunae in Winch's own writings.[3]

A quick overview of the book should help readers to follow its argument. The first five chapters deal with fundamental issues for the philosophy of the social sciences discussed by Winch in his celebrated book *The Idea of a Social Science*. Chapter 1 discusses Peter Winch's

vision of philosophy and its connection to the social sciences. Already at this early juncture, two potential weaknesses in Winch's doctrine come to light: his exclusive preoccupation with discursive thought; and his contemplative (rather than policy-oriented) notion of social science. Chapter 2 begins with a review of Winch's version of Ludwig Wittgenstein's analysis of rule following. After defining what Winch sees as the main characteristics of rule-following behavior, I continue with an examination of Winch's claim that the establishment and observance of rules can occur only within a social framework. According to Winch (following Wittgenstein), an individual can be said to follow rules only if there exists the possibility of other people catching their mistakes. This leads to his adoption of what I call two theses of the social nature of rule following: (1) Any rule that may govern the activities of any person X must be, in principle, learnable (or discoverable) by any other person Y; and (2) A person X will, in principle, not be able to develop the ability to follow rules without the benefit of interaction with other people. Furthermore, a particular rule will rarely be followed outside the context of a larger system of rules, or what Winch calls a "mode of social life." I show how Winch's ideas regarding rules lead him to declare the interpretative and epistemological autonomy of social "modes" or practices, i.e. that the meaning of an action and its rationality may only be determined by criteria native to the mode of social life to which the action itself belongs. The remainder of the chapter considers to what extent Winch may allow for criticism of social practices.

Chapter 3 opens with Winch's attempt to appropriate Max Weber's claim that sociology should concern itself with "meaningful behavior" to his own philosophy of social science. I attempt to clarify what Winch is claiming by limiting the purview of the social sciences to the study of meaningful behavior: exactly what he means by the expression "meaningful behavior" and how meaningful behavior is linked to rule-following behavior. Finally, I consider whether rule following is as all-pervasive as Winch would have us think and whether rules must be shared between people in order for coordinated social action to take place.

Chapter 4 brings us to Winch's position on perhaps the most central question in the philosophy of the social sciences: should the social sciences emulate the natural sciences in their search for causal explanation of phenomena, or should they seek to interpret the meanings that uniquely inform human behavior? After presenting a general overview of the issues involved, I describe and criticize Winch's case for an exclusively interpretative social science. Winch rejects causal explanations of meaningful behavior because (1) to say that someone follows a rule implies that they are free to break the rule, and (2) the application of a rule to a novel situation is fundamentally indeterminate. I criticize Winch (and Norman Malcolm) for not appreciating that a naturalistic inquiry into the human cognitive capacities that underlie rule following could serve as the subject of an explanatory science of uniquely human behavior. Furthermore, I point out

that the application of a rule to substantially unfamiliar circumstances is precisely the situation in which "meaningless" causal factors are most likely to determine human behavior. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Winch's attitude toward ubiquitous elements of human behavior that might support the formulation of universal laws in the human sciences.

Chapter 5 expands on some arguments mentioned earlier to explain and criticize Winch's views on the role of technical language in the social sciences. In as much as technical social-scientific terms express ideas that are unfamiliar to many of the people studied by social scientists, there is reason to believe that Winch would reject the use of such concepts. Although he offers examples of apparently acceptable technical terms, they do not, on closer inspection, really serve his philosophical purposes. I suggest that the field of linguistics offers better examples of the kind of technical vocabulary that would be acceptable to Winch.

Chapter 6 attempts to reformulate Winch's philosophy in terms of a principle of interpretative charity and formulates my version of Winchian charity (largely inspired by David K. Henderson).

Winch presents the most sustained application of his ideas to the interpretation of actual social phenomena in his celebrated essay "Understanding a primitive society." Since UPS deals with Sir E.E. Evans-Pritchard's ethnographic classic *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, I devote Chapter 7 to a description of Evans-Pritchard's book and Winch's criticisms of it. Winch is troubled by Evans-Pritchard's characterization of Zande mystical beliefs as objectively false and of their magic as ineffective. According to Winch, these judgments are based on the application of epistemic criteria associated with modern Western science to completely unrelated cultural practices. The autonomy of cultural practices requires that the truth of witchcraft beliefs and the effectiveness of magic may only be determined in terms of the native criteria of Zande culture.

Chapter 8 relates Winch's views on magic and religion. Since he is sure that magic and religion both fail miserably as instrumental practices, interpretative charity requires that he not think of them as being geared toward the procurement of practical goods and advantages. Instead, he regards magic and religion as media for the *expression of attitudes* towards life and its exigencies.

Chapter 9 introduces the twin notions of instrumental monism and instrumental pluralism. Winch's rejection of the instrumental interpretation of magic is based on the assumption of instrumental monism, i.e. the assumption that everyone shares our (Western, scientific, and anti-magical) criteria of instrumental rationality. By entertaining the validity of instrumental pluralism (the notion that various societies and practices can involve significantly different criteria of instrumental rationality), we allow for the possibility that magic may fulfill its practitioners' criteria of instrumental rationality, thus bringing the instrumentalist interpretation of magic in line with the requirements of interpretative charity. Although it

may be argued that the pragmatic necessities of human existence force all cultures to share a common criterion of instrumental rationality, anthropological evidence suggests that mere survival can be achieved by societies informed by widely varying standards of instrumental rationality. Furthermore, different instrumental practices in the same society may assume different criteria of instrumental rationality. Thus a society may practice an apparently rational agriculture alongside what we would call an irrational system of instrumental magic. Unfortunately, the role of instrumental monism in Winch's analysis of magic has been obscured by the recurrent ambiguities of his seemingly pluralist rhetoric.

Since Winch's interpretation of Zande magic explicitly contradicts the self-description offered by the practitioners of magic (who claim to perform magic in order to enjoy its practical results), it requires especially strong grounding in the ethnographic record. Chapter 10 demonstrates that Winch's interpretation of magic fails to account for much of the data of the ethnographic record. I suggest that Winch's thinking may have been distorted by what Mary Douglas has called the "myth of primitive piety," i.e. the assumption that all traditional cultures are informed by a deep spiritual sensibility. Since the Azande culture almost completely lacks any of the practices usually associated with the expression of religious feelings, Winch feels obliged to interpret their magical practices as outlets for such sentiments.

Chapter 11 examines the attempts made by a team of Winch's supporters, W.W. Sharrock and R.J. Anderson, to explain the epistemological basis of Winch's interpretation of magic. They suggest that Winch's superior interpretation of magic results from his highly developed spiritual sensibility and from the application of certain principles (not quite the one I suggest) of interpretative charity. I counter that among the parties to this academic debate, only Evans-Pritchard, who actually lived with the Azande, could have developed the kind of sensibility that Sharrock and Anderson attribute to Winch. Furthermore, in as much as they view this sensibility as promoting powers of discrimination between better and worse cultural practices, it clashes with their demand for interpretative charity.

Chapter 12 brings the notions of instrumental pluralism and monism to bear on Winch's analysis of rule following and meaningful behavior. I suggest that Winch's instrumental monism bespeaks the assumption that natural environmental conditions and universal human needs dictate a single practicable set of criteria of instrumental rationality. These natural limitations might be thought of as replacing society as the teacher of instrumental rules. Thus, Winch must avoid discussion of instrumental behavior in order to protect his doctrine of the social nature of rule following. In broader terms, Winch's doctrine may be said to favor the definition of humans as language users over its traditional rival, humans as tool users. Since speech is first and foremost a medium of communication

between people, it is easier to demonstrate the social nature of language than to demonstrate the social nature of tool use. In contrast to Winch's own instrumental monism, instrumental pluralism, while admitting that natural constraints make an important contribution to the formation of instrumental practices, allows for a range of different viable criteria of instrumental rationality. This range leaves society a role in the formation of the criteria to be used by its members, making instrumental practices less threatening to Winch's particular *idea of a social science*.

   The appendix compares Winch's critique of Evans-Pritchard with the controversy between Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere regarding Captain Cook's adventures in Hawaii.

1 Social science and Winch's idea of philosophy

ISS opens with a bold declaration of intellectual strategy. Winch announces his intention to reform both our notion of philosophy and our notion of the social sciences. He rejects attempts to portray philosophy as a universal master science yet will not stand to see it demoted to the status of an "underlaborer" concerned merely with disposing of the conceptual refuse cluttering more respectable disciplines. Practitioners and philosophers of a naturalistic and positivistic bent want to draw the social sciences into the methodological compass of the natural sciences, but Winch hopes to claim the social sciences for philosophy. These first programmatic comments foretell difficulties that reappear in various aspects of Winch's philosophy.

Winch cites John Locke's "Epistle to the Reader," which prefaces his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* as the *locus classicus* of the "underlaborer" conception of philosophy:

> The commonwealth of learning is not at this time without master-builders, whose mighty designs, in advancing the sciences, will leave lasting monuments to the admiration of posterity: but everyone must not hope to be a Boylee or a Sydenham; and in an age that produces such masters as the great Huygenius and the incomparable Mr. Newton, with some others of that strain, it is ambition enough to be employed as an under-laborer in clearing the ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge.
>
> quoted in ISS: 3–4

According to the "underlaborer" view, there is no area of investigation peculiar to philosophy itself. Rather, philosophy's job is to eliminate the bothersome "linguistic confusions" (ISS: 5) that come up in the course of the genuine production of knowledge in the empirical disciplines. Although metaphysics and epistemology appear to constitute essentially philosophical areas of investigation, they are in fact either (1) fancy names for the philosophy of science and philosophy of psychology; (2) a "temporary phase" devoted to the improvement of the tools of linguistic hygiene, which is philosophy's true purpose; or (3) pointless intellectual parlor games.

Winch appreciates the importance of the "underlaborer" view of philosophy as an antidote to the notion of philosopher as "master scientist". The "master scientist" view, most notoriously exemplified by Hegel's (1970) preposterous *Philosophy of Nature*, would presume to put *a priori* speculations regarding natural phenomena on the same epistemological footing as the hard-won results of empirical scientific research. However, while Winch denies philosophy the right to forward opinions regarding the details of empirical reality, he positively claims that "the philosopher is concerned with the nature of reality as such and in general" (ISS: 8). The study of "reality as such" does not refer to some grand unified theory of nature but rather to how humans relate to reality, or, more specifically, the conceptual basis of this relation. Winch wants philosophy to tell us how human beings go about making sense of the reality in which they live, how their reality is made intelligible. While philosophy cannot tell us anything about any particular phenomenon that occurs in such a reality, it does have much to say about the general conditions that must apply in order for that reality to remain humanly accessible. In the case of empirical reality as studied by the natural sciences, philosophy cannot "legislate against a breakdown in the regular order of nature" (ISS: 17). However, it "must legislate *a priori* against [the very possibility of] *describing* [my emphasis] such a situation" in terms of the usual notions of empirical reality such as stable objects and their properties. One might say that while philosophy cannot guarantee that a particular relation to reality will have any application, it can tell us something about the general nature of reality when and if it is successfully made intelligible in a particular way.

It is at this point that the importance of language for Winch's philosophy first becomes evident. On the one hand, Winch seeks to avoid the "underlaborer's" blunder of reducing philosophy to a mere custodian of linguistic hygiene. On the other hand, language and speech are, respectively, the paradigmatically human institution and human activity that offer Winch models for understanding all aspects of social life. Winch achieves this elevation of language by practicing a *de facto* identification of thought with speech. Thus far he has explained how philosophy may be viewed as the study of the intelligibility of reality. Next he explains that "To ask whether reality is intelligible is to ask about the relation between thought and reality." But "in considering the nature of thought one is led also to consider the nature of language" (ISS: 11). Soon we learn that language is not merely one factor in human thought, but rather our entire grasp of reality is constituted in terms of the discursive concepts available to us:

> In discussing language philosophically we are in fact discussing *what counts as belonging to the world* [emphasis in original]. Our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality is given for us in the language that we use. The concepts we have settle for us the form of the experience we have of the world.

ISS: 15

At the end of the day, a discussion of the ways in which human beings relate to reality largely boils down to an analysis of the "grammar" of the language they use to describe reality. No wonder that Roy Bhaskar (1979: 181) refers to Winch's philosophy as a "linguistically transposed transcendental idealism." ISS presents a brand of Kantianism that limits itself to the consideration of discursive "categories" without recognizing the need, for instance, for a "transcendental aesthetic" to deal with the visual aspects of human experience. On a rare occasion when Winch does take notice of the role of non-discursive elements in human life, he offers a quick excuse: "In order to remove complications about the function of mental images in such situations I will suppose that I express my thought explicitly in words" (ISS: 25). What at times appears to be a pragmatic and tactical concern with language is in fact a preoccupation that shapes and distorts Winch's entire philosophical enterprise. One need not be a cognitive scientist to appreciate the role of non-linguistic representation for human thought. Anyone who has tried to produce a prose translation of the information contained in a simple road map or flowchart will be well aware of language's limitations. By over-emphasizing the role of language, Winch does not merely leave non-discursive thought out of his description of our relation to reality. He also makes clear his advocacy of a particular and very ancient notion of the essence of humanity, i.e. humans as speaking animals. Unfortunately, he leaves no room for a more recent yet quite important counter-tradition, which defines human beings as *tool-making* animals. Winch's lack of interest in practical, *instrumental activities* will be touched upon several times in later chapters.

Where does this leave Winch's philosophical project? The traditional philosophical sub-disciplines of epistemology and metaphysics have been transformed into a study of how we construct intelligible reality, especially in terms of the language we use to describe it. However, it would be a mistake to assume that intelligibility and reality are unambiguous concepts that are always applied in the same way:

> The scientist, for instance, tries to make the world more intelligible; but so do the historian, the religious prophet and the artist; so does the philosopher. And although we may describe the activities of all these kinds of thinker in terms of the concepts of understanding and intelligibility, it is clear that in very many important ways, the objectives of each of them differ from the objectives of any of the others.
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> ISS: 19

Appropriately, the philosophy of science will study the ways in which scientists try to make sense of the world, while the philosophy of religion explores the way in which the religiously faithful seek a very different understanding of reality. While Winch is careful to warn us not to expect the views of reality associated with different human activities to "add up

to one grand theory of reality" (ISS: 19), he does not abandon hope of the possibility of a general epistemological study of intelligibility *per se*. Such an epistemology will not be able to distill a single universal set of criteria of intelligibility from the manifold activities of humankind, but it should be able "to describe the conditions which must be satisfied if there are to *be* [emphasis in original] any criteria of understanding at all" (ISS: 21).

Now Winch is set to explain the connection of philosophy, and particularly epistemology, to the social sciences. In order to understand why people behave as they do, it is crucial that we understand their grasp of reality. As we have just learned, the study of how people make sense of reality is properly a philosophical task. This study will naturally include the role that understanding plays in various human activities and, more generally, the nature of human societies. Furthermore, claims Winch, interpersonal relations are themselves so thoroughly "permeated with ... ideas of reality" that he professes the dark equation "social relations are expressions of ideas about reality" (ISS: 23). Every aspect of our behavior and social life is revealed to be firmly grounded in our notions of intelligibility. Since the study of intelligibility is a philosophical activity, the social sciences may be conceived of as being essentially philosophical disciplines.

It would be unfair and unwise to begin an in-depth critique of Winch's philosophy of the social sciences based on a consideration of his opening remarks in ISS. However, it should be mentioned that those remarks point toward difficulties that are characteristic of his philosophy of the social sciences as a whole. I have already brought up Winch's preoccupation with language. Now I would like to touch upon his preoccupation with contemplative understanding.

One might borrow Habermas's (1971) term of art to ask which "knowledge-interest" Winch thinks the social sciences are pursuing. We have seen that Winch wants to understand how people relate to reality, and he enlists the social sciences in this philosophical endeavor. The typical goal of a Winchian social-scientific project will be to understand the conceptual basis of some group's relation to reality, especially as it is expressed in their language, and to clarify the importance of these concepts for the lives of the people involved. In the context of ISS, it may appear that such knowledge is to be pursued for its own sake, but it immediately becomes apparent in Winch's subsequent writings that such knowledge is to be regarded first and foremost as an object of moral contemplation. He writes:

> What we learn by studying other cultures are not merely possibilities of different ways of doing things, other techniques. More importantly we may learn different possibilities of making sense of human life, different ideas about the possible importance that the carrying out of certain activities may take on for a man, trying to contemplate the sense of his life as a whole.
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> UPS: 41

My aim is not to engage in moralizing, but to suggest that the concept of learning from which is involved in the study of other cultures is closely linked with the concept of wisdom. We are confronted not just with different techniques, but with new possibilities of good and evil, in relation to which men may come to terms with life. An investigation into this dimension of a society may indeed require a quite detailed inquiry into alternative techniques (e.g. of production), but an inquiry conducted for the light it throws on those possibilities of good and evil.

UPS: 42

To put things bluntly, the results of social research play the same role in Winch's philosophy as do exemplary texts drawn from great works of fiction. Characters from Tolstoy and Melville, as well as the Azande of Evans-Pritchard's ethnographical works, all offer Winch interesting specimens of human possibilities. But we expect much more from the social sciences. While Winch's contemplative study of society is an undoubtedly noble pursuit, it simply does not fulfill the most pragmatically important role of the social sciences. It is not enough for the social sciences to enrich us with a deeper appreciation of how various people make sense of their lives. We cannot afford the luxury of pure contemplation. Modern societies look to the social sciences for informed guidance in the formulation of public policy. We do not seek to understand other societies merely in order to appreciate the sheer diversity of moral experience but also, and more importantly, in order to avoid conflict and reciprocal harm and to improve the chances of cooperation. It is not enough to gain moral wisdom from our studies of other cultures; we must also strive to gain accurate, practical information.[1]

As will be discussed in later chapters, Winch takes pains to demonstrate the *a priori* impossibility of a causally predictive social science. Such skeptical impossibility proofs are not really very helpful. Policy decisions simply *must* presuppose that we are capable of knowing something about the likely outcomes of our choices. The alternative is blind irrationality. Winch does admit that we are sometimes capable of predicting human behavior, but he does not feel obliged to say anything further about the nature, limitations, and justification of such forecasts beyond simply noting that "their relation to the evidence on which they are based is unlike that characteristic of scientific predictions" (ISS: 93). Satisfied with pointing out some problems of positivism, he simply sees no need to discuss the practical and political implications of his particular idea of a social science.[2]

A useful contrast may be drawn between Winch's disinterest in these issues and Karl Popper's views on the practical value of the social sciences. Like Winch, Popper (1957) has serious philosophical reservations regarding the predictive power of the social sciences. Nonetheless, Popper recognizes

the need for a policy-oriented study of society and is concerned to delimit the bounds of its usefulness and reliability. He advises that we pursue a guarded and gradual policy toward the development and employment of applied social science, which he calls "piecemeal engineering":

> The piecemeal engineer knows, like Socrates, how little he knows. He knows that we can learn only from our mistakes. Accordingly, he will make his way, step by step, carefully comparing the results expected with the results achieved, and always on the look-out for the unavoidable unwanted consequences of any reform; and he will avoid undertaking reforms of a complexity and scope which make it impossible for him to disentangle causes and effects, and to know what he is really doing.
>
> Popper 1957: 67

As someone involved in philosophy, I can certainly empathize with Winch's position. Some years ago, a computer scientist friend told me about a program he had written that handled much of the paperwork associated with a children's summer camp that he had volunteered to manage. He quickly noticed my lack of interest and rightly chided me: "Oh no, I forgot you're a philosopher! No conceptual breakthrough? If a computer program doesn't pass Turing's test it's just a waste of time?" How fortunate that his work was not informed by my idea of a computer science!

2 Winch on rule following

Wittgenstein's notion of following a rule[1] constitutes the bedrock of Winch's philosophy.[2] For Winch, to say that someone is following a particular rule toward some particular end is to describe that person's behavior in the most primitive and fundamental terms possible. It is from the analysis of the concept of following a rule and his identification of rule following as the hallmark of specifically human behavior that Winch derives the central lessons of his philosophy, i.e. the social nature of human action, the inappropriateness of causal explanations for the human sciences, and the epistemological and hermeneutic autonomy of social practices. Winch's analysis of rule-following behavior also underlies his difficulty in dealing with instrumental action (that is, action performed in order to secure some practical, often material, benefit), a theme important for the present book. In the following sections, I shall explain Winch's views on rule following and discuss their ramifications for his general philosophical project.

What qualifies as rule-following behavior?

Three essential characteristics of rule-following behavior may be distilled from the pages of ISS:

1   *Fallibility*[3], i.e. that for any situation in which a rule is applied, it is possible to imagine how the rule could have been (counter-factually) misapplied to the situation.
2   That the individual rule follower must *understand*[4] what they are doing in applying the rule.
3   That they may *reflect*[5] on their own applications of the rule in order apply it to novel circumstances.

Winch tries to defend his theory of rule following by showing his readers that fallibility, understanding, and reflectiveness are conceptually tied to the very notion of following a rule. I will now explicate what is involved in each of these essential characteristics.

What is the significance of the *fallibility* of rule-following behavior? A rule determines that a particular kind of behavior is correct or incorrect *in particular circumstances*. If, in some circumstances, nothing a person P could possibly do could be called a mistake (e.g., if P were in a coma), Winch would say that P's actions are simply not susceptible to being judged as correct or incorrect. Both comatose P and a monk who had taken a vow of silence could be described as "not making a sound." However, if they both emitted identical sounds, only the monk could be said to have made a mistake regarding the rule of silence. Since determining correctness and incorrectness is what rules are all about, there is no sense in claiming that comatose P had followed a rule.

Another aspect of fallibility touches upon the content of the rules. Actions may be classified as having been performed in accordance with some particular rule or in violation of the rule. If a purported rule always finds *anything* P does to be correct (e.g., the rule "P should either kiss on a first date or not kiss on a first date"), the rule has lost all classificatory value and is not in fact a rule at all. Perhaps such purported rules can be best understood as rhetorical ploys meant to say something about when rules should *not* be applied (e.g., "do not judge the appropriateness of a kiss on a first date in terms of some rule").

Of course, it is possible to describe behavior as correct or incorrect even when no rule is being followed. This is where the issue of *understanding* comes in. For instance, a clock may be said to keep time correctly or incorrectly. Such judgments can be made regarding the clock's behavior, but never by the clock itself. Since the clock does not understand what it is doing, it is not itself really following a rule. Rather, human beings apply rules in order to evaluate the clock's performance. At best, we might say (somewhat metaphorically) that the clock was "following" the laws of physics. However, when described in this way, if the clock were to operate in a manner inconsistent with what was predicted by science we would not say that it misapplies the laws of nature; rather, we would say that the clock's behavior challenges the predictive value of our current version of those laws.

Understanding a rule includes the ability to think about what it would take not to follow the rule. Winch insists that this potential for negating the rule in thought implies the ability to carry out such thoughts. In other words, in as much as P is following a rule, there is always a possibility, in principle, that P may decide to break it.

Finally, when encountering radically new circumstances, P will stand back and consider the rule according to which he wishes to act in order to devise a novel application. Such *reflectiveness* in rule following may be seen as an extension of understanding. While *understanding* requires that P be potentially aware of the content of the rule being followed, reflectiveness allows P a role in determining the nature of the rule itself.

The social nature of rule following

As Winch describes it, rule-following behavior seems to be thoroughly grounded in the thought processes of the individual rule follower.[6] "Reflectiveness" and "understanding" are usually thought of as going on "inside the head" of a particular person. On a somewhat different note, Winch also describes the learning of a rule as being similar to the acquisition of a skill. He explains that we do not learn to apply a rule by learning a further rule governing the application of the former. Such a procedure would result in an infinite regression of rules about how to apply rules about how to apply rules. Instead, learning to apply rules (for instance, rules of logical inference) involves "learning *to do* something" (ISS: 57). Although it may be difficult to square the ideational aspect of rules *qua* objects of intellectual reflection with their more practical aspect *qua* skills, the latter is also naturally associated with the individual human being. It comes, then, as something of a surprise that the first major doctrine that Winch tries to derive from his characterization of rule-following behavior is what I call the "social nature of rule following (SNORF). SNORF is not a simple idea. At least three distinguishable theses may be teased out of Winch's discussion:[7]

1   Any rule that may govern the activities of any person X must, in principle, be learnable (or discoverable) by any other person Y.
2   A person X may be said to follow a rule only if it is in fact known to other people. Furthermore, it must be possible for these other people to check the correctness of X's application of the rule.
3   A person X will, in principle, not be able to develop the ability to follow rules without the benefit of interaction with other people.

It is not always clear which of the three theses Winch is arguing for. A delineation of the implications of each of the three should help to resolve such ambiguities. For this purpose, I shall introduce a popular thought-experimental subject named Robinson Crusoe (Ayer 1966, a.k.a. "Romulus" in McGinn 1984). Crusoe is shipwrecked and alone on a desert island. Is he able to follow a rule?

According to thesis 1, even if Crusoe were to be shipwrecked as a newborn baby and have absolutely no experience of human companionship, he would still be able to follow a rule. Crusoe's isolation is a mere contingency. There is nothing about his situation that makes it impossible in principle for someone else to learn his rule. Perhaps we could do this by observing Crusoe's behavior via a spy satellite. Thesis 1 only disallows rule following that is *necessarily* private. Rules regarding the recognition of internal sensations might be thought to be private in this way. For instance, I am the sole arbiter of whether I am in pain. This may tempt me to conclude that I follow a rule for recognizing my own pain that no one

else is capable of learning (the privacy of sensation is an important topic for Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1968)). Such allegedly necessary privacy has nothing to do with the contingent privacy of a desert island. I remain the final arbiter of whether or not I feel pain even as I recuperate in a crowded hospital ward. However, thesis 1 does not bar me from claiming to apply a rule that, for instance, *happens* to be known only to me when selecting which socks to wear each morning.

Thesis 2 makes stronger claims for SNORF. It is not enough that others may be able, in principle, to learn the rule I follow; they must actually be acquainted with it. If Crusoe's isolation does in fact keep others from knowing about the rules he invents, then he is incapable of inventing rules. Thesis 2 also prohibits my claim to follow a personal rule of conduct for choosing socks unless other people are in on my secret. I may only claim to follow such a rule if I am prepared to risk the chance that, say, my wife or children will catch me dressing and admonish me for having done so incorrectly.

Thesis 3 has nothing to say about particular individual rules. It does not even exclude the possibility of necessarily private rules. What it does require is that it would never occur to someone to order their behavior in terms of rules unless they had, at some time, lived in a societal framework. Thus, if Crusoe had been shipwrecked as a newborn baby and had absolutely no experience of human companionship, he would not be capable of rule-following behavior. However, if (as in Defoe's novel) Crusoe had been socialized prior to his isolation, he would be perfectly free both to continue following the rules he had learned in the past and to invent new rules at his pleasure.

Having described three of its versions, I shall now consider Winch's efforts to demonstrate SNORF. It shall also become clear precisely to which set of theses he is ultimately committed. Winch tries to prove SNORF from the fallibility of rule following. The fallibility of rule following requires that in any situation in which a rule is applied, it is possible for the rule to be misapplied. In other words, when it is impossible to imagine P's making a mistake in regard to some rule, it is also impossible to deem P's action correct in regard to that rule. If Winch can show that *mistakes* in rule following may only be made against the background of some societal context, he will have also demonstrated that correct rule following requires that same societal background. Here is the crucial paragraph in which he tries to do just that:[8]

> A mistake is a contravention of what is *established* as correct; as such, it must be *recognisable* as such a contravention. That is, if I make a mistake in, say, my use of a word, other people must be able to point it out to me. If this is not so, I can do what I like and there is no external check on what I do; that is, nothing is established. Establishing a standard is not an activity which it makes sense to ascribe to any individual in complete isolation from other individuals.

> For it is contact with other individuals which alone makes possible the external check on one's actions which is inseparable from an established standard.
>
> ISS: 32

It is not immediately clear what is meant by others' "ability" to point out my mistake. On the one hand, this may relate to the first thesis of the social nature of rule following. Other people must be able, in principle, to *learn* how to recognize my mistakes. This weak interpretation does not require that others actually ever learn my rule, or that they actually witness my behavior in order to point out my mistakes. On the other hand, Winch might be making the stronger claim that the ability of others to point out my mistakes entails their already knowing the rule involved (thesis 2). Finally, the strongest reading would have it that other people know the rule and actually stand guard to catch any mistakes I might make.[9]

Much of the paragraph I have quoted seems to support thesis 2. Winch's insistence that my rule following must be subject to "external check" by other people could hardly be satisfied by the mere logical possibility (thesis 1) that they *might* learn my rule. Furthermore, Winch's talk of "established standards" seems to imply that the creation of a rule involves a societal process of its establishment. Again, such a societal process must surely involve more than the mere logical possibility of the participation of more than one person. It therefore comes as something of a jolt to the reader when Winch explicitly denies the second thesis and embraces the conjunction of theses 1 and 3:

> It is, of course, possible, within a human society as we know it, with its established language and institutions, for an individual to adhere to a *private* rule of conduct. What Wittgenstein insists on, however, is, first, that it must be in principle possible for other people to grasp that rule and judge when it is being correctly followed; secondly, that it makes no sense to imagine anyone capable of establishing a purely personal standard of behavior if he had never had any experience of human society with its socially established rules.
>
> ISS: 32–3

If it is now clear that Winch rejects thesis 2, he owes us an explanation of his acceptance of thesis 1. Suppose that I have already been socialized to understand the notions of following a rule and making a mistake. If I can then go on to apply them to the creation of contingently private rules (e.g. for choosing socks), why can I not apply them to the creation of necessarily private rules (e.g., for the recognition of internal sensations)?

In order to explain this surprising turn of events, it will be useful to first consider how mistakes are identified in cases involving rules whose social

nature is not immediately controversial. Most importantly, we must address the question of *who* decides when a mistake has been made. Unfortunately, Winch does not offer much guidance at this critical juncture, and I must provide a rather speculative account of how Winch might answer these questions.

Who interprets the rules?

Obviously, anyone who would qualify to participate in the interpretation of a rule and the identification of mistakes in its application must have, at some time, learned the rule in question. But is everyone capable of learning any rule? Depending on how one interprets the "in principle" ability of anyone to learn any rule, Winch's first thesis on the social nature of rule following may be construed as either of quite limited anthropological significance or as implying far-reaching consequences for his view of humanity. As for the later possibility, Winch's first thesis might be seen as announcing the cognitive unity of mankind. Once again, we are faced with one of the most crucial passages in ISS: "Given a certain sort of training everybody does, as a matter of course, continue to use these words in the same way as would everybody else" (ISS: 31). These words seem to imply that the structure of rule following is built upon the bedrock of a common human capacity to learn.

The claim that *anyone* can learn to apply *any* rule seems, to say the least, to be controversial. I venture it is safe to assume that Winch would count such activities as solving problems in advanced number theory or making sense of Joyce's *Ulysses* as involving rule following. Can "everybody" learn to accomplish these tasks "given a certain sort of training?"

These problems suggest a much weaker interpretation of Winch's first thesis regarding the social nature of rule following. Consider the parallel thesis of "the social nature of eating." This new thesis declares that anything that is edible by X must be, in principle, edible by any person Y. Once we have recognized "the social nature of eating" we will be spared the conceptual confusions generated by the literal interpretation of expressions such as "I swallowed my pride" (could someone else swallow my pride?). However, the eating thesis does not offer much assistance to dietitians. The social nature of eating does not guarantee that any particular Y, who might be a compulsive vegetarian, wear false teeth, etc., will in fact be able to join X in a hearty meal of raw beef. Similarly, Winch's first thesis does not imply that anyone else will actually be intelligent enough to catch on to X's deviously complicated rule. Rather, it merely guarantees that the very idea of someone else learning the rule does not involve conceptual confusion.

What does the social basis for the interpretation of a rule look like so far? We might imagine a community of people, each of whom recognizes the others as having successfully grasped the rule in question. Their consensus would determine the correct application of the rule to novel cases.

However, the very notion of "grasping" or "learning" a rule involves a further, much deeper, problem. Winch tends to write as if knowing a rule were an all-or-nothing affair. After a period of training, the student finally "grasps" the rule in a single intellectual quantum leap. In fact, although it may be natural to say that "everybody" "use[s] these words in the same way as everyone else," some people do speak more grammatically than others, some people have a *better* grasp of the standard definition of "these words" than do others. Furthermore, it may not always be clear that one interpretation of a rule is superior or inferior to the next. The precise application of a rule, even in quite ordinary and typical circumstances, may remain indeterminate or controversial.

In order to make Winch's position realistic, we are forced to conclude that in the statement "given a certain sort of training everybody does, as a matter of course, continue to use these words in the same way as would everybody else," the terms "everybody" and "the same way" must not be understood rigidly. The constituency of the group of knowers of a certain rule and the range of acceptable applications of the rule develop together in a dynamic relationship. On the one hand, the range of correct application of the rule will reflect a more or less broad consensus of group members' responses to "a certain sort of training." On the other hand, people who never succeed in producing responses that are acceptable to other group members will simply be seen as not belonging to the group. For example, suppose that A was trying to teach B the rule for generating a certain series of numbers. If A's rule was that the nth member of the series had a value of $2n$, and B did not manage to catch on to this, we would question whether B should be consulted in matters of basic arithmetic. However, if A's rule was that the value of the nth member of the series equals the penultimate digit of the one million plus nth prime number, B's failure would not lead us to judge him mathematically incompetent in any usual sense of the expression. Another, "fuzzier," example: learning to identify "clean dishes." One person may tend to judge dishes as "clean" when they are immaculate. Another may not be troubled by a few water streaks. Both these persons' applications of the rule for identifying "clean dishes" may be regarded as acceptable by the group criterion, and each may even slightly change the consensus. People who insist on calling dishes that are caked with mud "clean" will eventually be dismissed as "hygienically challenged" (to coin a phrase). They will not be trusted to make judgments regarding such matters and thus will be excluded from the continuing process of establishing the rule's correct application.[10]

Now we may return to the issue of necessarily private rules. Suppose that I am busy describing the colors of flowers in a garden. I then incorrectly identify a certain rose as blue. My mistake is an *honest* one; I am absolutely sure that I have identified the color correctly. However, when enough other people tell me that I have erred, I finally concede to their opinion. In such circumstances, no matter how certain I am that I have followed the rule correctly,

I can still entertain the possibility that I am mistaken; it is not inconceivable that other people will reject my application of the rule.

Now suppose that I am following a contingently private rule. As before, no matter how sure I might be that I have applied the rule correctly, I can still imagine circumstances in which it would be revealed that I am mistaken. After all, if other people had learned my rule and observed my behavior, they might claim that I am mistaken. Once again, my rule following fulfills thesis 1's requirements.

What if I am following a necessarily private rule? I am sure that I have made no error in its application. Since my rule is necessarily private, I cannot even imagine the possibility that other people could have learned it and gone on to claim I have erred. It is inconceivable that anyone else might possibly belong to the rule's reference group. However I choose to follow the rule will constitute the only possible consensus regarding its application! Since I, for my own part, am sure that I have applied the rule correctly, it is impossible that I have erred. Given Winch's claim that fallibility is a fundamental aspect of rule-following behavior, necessarily private (and thus *infallible*) rule following is not really rule following. As far as Winch is concerned, thesis 1 is vindicated.

Thesis 3 may be seen as following from elements in the argument for thesis 1. If Crusoe had grown up in complete seclusion from human company, he would never have been subject to the experience of having the correctness of his actions questioned by other people. According to Winch's analysis, this means that Crusoe would never have the opportunity to become acquainted with the situation of making a mistake. If Crusoe is never exposed to an instance of mistake making, he will never gain the empirical basis necessary for the development of the concept of "mistake." Someone who has no notion of making a mistake will not be aware of the possibility that they themselves may make a mistake. Since awareness of the possibility of making a mistake is fundamental to rule following, Crusoe will never be able to follow a rule. Thesis 3 is (as far as Winch might be concerned) vindicated: it would never occur to someone to order their behavior in terms of rules unless they had at some time lived in a societal framework.

A question quite naturally comes to mind. It is perfectly understandable how other people might point out my mistakes, but is this the only way I can experience error? When my efforts to secure some practical end meet with failure, can it not become clear to me that I have gone about things wrongly even if there is no one else around to point out my error? As we shall see, Winch claims that the lion's share of human activity is governed by rules. Confrontation with the possibility of non-human checks on errors in rule following will be unavoidable.

From rules to modes of social life: the autonomy of modes of social life

Although Winch devotes much of ISS to the analysis of rule following, individual rules offer only a quite primitive and elementary framework for the characterization of human behaviors. We must distinguish between "a general category of action – a mode of social life – and a particular sort of act falling within such a category" (ISS: 100). Broadly speaking, individual rules do not exist in a vacuum; rather, they constitute integral parts of a complete social practice. While it could be possible to teach someone to write the numeral "2" every time they saw the string of characters "1 + 1 = ", this is usually done in the larger context of teaching arithmetic.[11] Examples of such "modes of social life" cited by Winch include business and magic (ISS: 99), as well as science and religion (ISS: 100).

Like rules, "modes of social life" play a normative role. While rules determine the "correctness" of an action, modes lend an action its "intelligibility" or "logic" (ISS: 102). More specifically, Winch associates criteria of intelligibility, logic or rationality with each mode that are applicable to the actions that belong to the particular mode in question. Although this notion of criteria of intelligibility is quite central to Winch's doctrine, he never seriously attempts to spell out what a complete set of criteria for a particular mode of social life would look like. He does offer some hints:

> For instance, science is one such mode and religion is another; and each has criteria of intelligibility peculiar to itself ... in science, for example, it would be illogical to refuse to be bound by the results of a properly carried out experiment; in religion it would be illogical to suppose that one could pit one's own strength against God's.
>
> ISS: 100–1

The criteria of intelligibility of a mode are directly related to its "aims and nature" (ISS: 100), to its *point*. For instance, since one of the aims of science is (very roughly) to develop a description of the world that accounts for all available empirical data, it would be illogical within science to disregard valid experimental results. What is intelligible for one mode may be unintelligible for a different mode. For example, the point of comedy is to amuse. When I fail to see the humor of a comedy routine, it becomes unintelligible to me. Contrastingly, the point of judicial practice is to mete out justice and preserve civil society. I would not be bewildered to discover that humor was lacking in the prosecution of a murder trial. A Kafkaesque disregard by the judge for the rights of the accused, however, would make it difficult for me to formulate a coherent understanding of the trial's proceedings.

We are now confronted with an aspect of ISS about which Winch later expressed some reservations. A mode of life is constituted by a structured set of rules having some particular "point." Earlier, I explained how the criteria for the application of a rule and the determination of who knows the rule are decided by members of the rule's reference group. In as much as the constitutive rules of a mode of social life "go together," are learned and applied in an integrated fashion, there will be one reference group for all the rules involved, i.e. the participants in the mode of life themselves. Judgments regarding the meaning, intelligibility, and rationality of actions within a mode of life will be made in terms of its constitutive rules. In other words, determinations of the rationality and intelligibility of actions can be made only in terms of the criteria of rationality and intelligibility native to the mode of social life to which the action belongs. Furthermore, only the participants in a mode of life may determine the meaning and correctness of behavior occurring in the context of the mode of life in question. The idea that the participants in a mode of life are uniquely able to judge their own activities within the mode may be called the *autonomy of modes of social life*. This notion may be further divided into the twin principles of *interpretative autonomy* and *epistemological autonomy*. Interpretative autonomy grants to the participants in a mode of life the sole authority to determine the meaning of actions performed within the mode, while epistemological autonomy grants to the participants in a mode of life sole authority to determine the rationality of actions (including the truth of propositions expressed) within the context of the mode.

The upshot of all of this is that it becomes impossible to compare the relative rationality of different modes or practices. There is no room for talk of rationality *per se*, for some kind of universal standard by which we may judge and rank the degree of rationality of different modes. We can only speak of rationality as understood within the context of a particular mode. In perhaps the best-known passage of ISS, Winch writes:

> [Pareto] has not seen the point around which the main argument of this monograph revolves: that criteria of logic are not a direct gift of God, but arise out of, and are only intelligible in the context of, ways of living or modes of social life. It follows that one cannot apply criteria of logic to modes of social life as such ... We cannot sensibly say that either the practice of science itself or that of religion is either illogical or logical; both are non-logical.
>
> ISS: 100–1

Unfortunately, Winch does not take pains to explain exactly how broad or narrow a category of action may count as a "mode."[12] In one of his later essays, he implies that both Buddhism and Christianity belong to the more inclusive mode called "religion":

It is a noteworthy fact that, being able to make something of the distinction between a man who is a devout Christian and one who is not, I do not feel at a loss when I hear such a distinction drawn within the context of Buddhism, even though I have very little understanding of Buddhist doctrine ... The fact that, though ignorant of Buddhist doctrine, I can make some sense of the distinction between a devout and a non-devout Buddhist has a great deal to do with my recognition of Buddhism as a religion.

Winch 1987b:109–10

In ISS, Winch is concerned that we respect the reciprocal autonomy of Christian rites *vis-à-vis* those of pagan religions: "A Christian would strenuously deny that the baptismal rites of his faith were really the same in character as the acts of a pagan sprinkling lustral water or letting sacrificial blood" (ISS: 108). If each of these faiths is granted the status of an independent mode, then what sense is there in calling religion itself a mode? David Henderson (1987: 167) has written that this ambiguity creates "a very deep problem for Winch." Indeed, it is of little importance to any given question of social research whether or not two different practices belong to the same "mode of social life" unless we also know that the commonalities of the two practices that lead us to place them together in one mode are themselves relevant to the particular question being addressed. For instance, in the example cited above, Winch thinks that Christianity and Roman paganism are sufficiently similar for both to be classified as religions but that similarity has no bearing on the ritual function of water in the two faiths.

Critics (see Gellner 1970) have attacked Winch for overplaying the reciprocal autonomy of different modes and practices. Could it be that law and business, for instance, have *nothing* to say to each other? Are they without any interaction whatsoever? If different modes and practices are epistemically independent of each other, is there no possibility of mounting a criticism of one mode from the standpoint of another? ISS itself does make some effort to dispel this impression: we must "allow for the overlapping character of different modes of social life. Somebody might, for instance, have religious reasons for devoting his life to science" (ISS: 101). Later, in response to critics of UPS, Winch wrote:

I ought to emphasize that its argument is not, absurdly, that ways in which men live together can never be criticized, nor even that a way of living can never be characterized as in any sense "irrational"; still less do I argue in it that men who belong to one culture can "never understand" lives led in another culture. The argument is rather against certain kinds of account of the criticisms which are possible and of what is involved in such "cross-cultural" attempts at understanding.

Winch 1972: 7

By the time he wrote the preface to the second edition of ISS, Winch felt that he had to qualify the autonomy of modes of social life in even stronger terms:

> The suggestion that modes of social life are autonomous with respect to each other was insufficiently counteracted by my qualifying remark (on p. 101) about "the overlapping character of different modes of social life." Different aspects 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: xv–xvi

It is not terribly difficult to think of examples of such "internal relations" between modes of social life. Business, for instance, is largely concerned with the striking of deals and transferal of ownership. The legitimacy of such deals and transferals of ownership are adjudicated by the legal system. The "internal relation" of business to law validates both legal criticism of certain business practices and economics-based criticism of laws that strangle entrepreneurship.

The example of mounting a legal critique of a business practice does not go far enough to support Winch's claim that he does not rule out the possibility of legitimately labeling an entire "way of living" irrational. It is one thing for the law to prohibit certain methods of transferring and establishing ownership, and quite another for it to outlaw the transaction of business altogether. The radical slogan "property is theft" does not belong to the language of commercial law but rather calls for an end both to business and to the legal framework that legitimizes business transaction. Here I think we run up against genuine difficulties in Winch's thought. The discussion of *European* witchcraft and magic in UPS offers Winch's most explicit example of what might be called an irrational way of life:

> Concepts of witchcraft and magic in our culture, at least since the advent of Christianity, have been parasitic on, and a perversion of other orthodox concepts, both religious and, increasingly, scientific. To take an obvious example, you could not understand what was involved in conducting a Black Mass unless you were familiar with the concept of a proper Mass and, therefore, with the whole complex of religious ideas from which the Mass draws its sense. Neither would you understand the relation between these without taking account of the fact that the Black practices are rejected as *irrational* (in the sense proper to religion) in the system of beliefs on which these practices are thus parasitic. Perhaps a similar relation holds between the contemporary practice of astrology and astronomy and technology. It is impossible to keep a discussion of the rationality of Black Magic or of

astrology within the bounds of concepts peculiar to them; they have
an essential reference to something outside themselves.

UPS: 15

Here Winch is telling us that the "internal relation" that holds between
black magic and Christianity is such that it is legitimate for Christians to
criticize not only particular magical activities but also the entire practice of
black magic as a mode of social life. Since Williamson (1989a) has seri-
ously undermined the credibility of Winch's mobilization of "black magic"
as a historical example, I will suggest a less problematic illustration. The
explanatory discourse of some schools of contemporary alternative
medicine makes use of many concepts drawn from the natural sciences,
such as "energy," "electricity," "left/right brain," etc. While practitioners
of these techniques enjoy the prestige associated with the rhetoric and
terminology of the empirical sciences, they systematically turn their backs
on how these terms are used in scientific discourse (i.e., energy and elec-
trical charges are susceptible to quantified measurement; hemispheric
functional specialization of the brain is not absolute). They want their
techniques to be afforded the same respect as that accorded scientific
medicine while refusing to adopt the standards of experimental validation
and self-criticism that are necessary for the production of scientific knowl-
edge. The essential dependence of these forms of alternative medicine on
the practice of orthodox science leaves them open to valid scientific criti-
cism. In fact, one might say that Winch's critique of positivistic social
science (that it, ISS itself) takes exactly this form. If positivist social science
were a relatively autonomous intellectual project, it would be difficult for
Winch to reject it as a whole. However, positivistic social science is patho-
logically parasitic on the natural sciences. It tries to emulate the
methodologies and rhetoric of the natural sciences, while these remain
systematically inappropriate to its subject matter. It is precisely the
"internal relation" of the practice of positivist social science to the practice
of natural science that makes Winch's outright rejection of positivist social
science possible.

Since Winch seems to restrict the possibility of criticism between modes
or practices to modes or practices that are "internally related" or that
make "essential reference" to each other, he may be said to permit criti-
cism that is both *internal* and *partial*. The criticism remains internal
because "internally related" practices may simply be regarded as
comprising a single larger practice. I call such criticism partial because
when it appears that Winch is prepared to deem an entire mode of life irra-
tional, he is actually performing an internal critique against part of a
broader cultural category. For instance, the attack on European magic
takes place within a single culture that includes both normatively primary
elements (science and Christianity) and the pathologically parasitic

elements (black magic, European witchcraft) that are targets of legitimate censure. Clearly, Winch's doctrine will be hard-pressed to make room for the possibility of legitimate critique between cultures that developed in isolation from each other. Can we speak of one practice "essentially referring" to another of which its practitioners have no knowledge?[13]

3   Rules and meaningful behavior

Although Winch's discussion of rule following is of intrinsic philosophical interest, it was meant to support a particular view of the social or human sciences. Winch connects rule following with the social sciences by identifying it with meaningful behavior, which he holds to be their appropriate subject matter. It is of the greatest concern for Winch that we identify the subject of investigation of the social sciences correctly. Without this, it would be impossible to develop appropriate social-scientific methods. We would also remain ignorant of what sort of knowledge we should expect the social sciences to produce. Piggush (1974: iv) goes so far as to state that this demarcative work constitutes the core of Winch's intellectual contribution:

> The strength of Winch's theory lies in its revival of the ancient view, ignored or opposed in modern times by rationalists and positivists alike, to the effect that the character of its subject matter determines the type of knowledge it makes sense for a discipline to pursue.

In the following pages, I shall clarify Winch's doctrine of meaningful action by offering a close reading of the appropriate sections of ISS. As in the case of rule following, it will become clear in my final chapter that the category of instrumental action poses special difficulties for Winch's doctrine of meaningfulness.

In ISS, Winch exhibits some apprehension at baldly limiting the purview of the social sciences to the study of meaningful behavior, and this uneasiness mars the clarity of his presentation. The section entitled "Meaningful behavior" opens with a disturbingly equivocal paragraph:

> Wittgenstein's account of what it is to follow a rule is, for obvious reasons, given principally with an eye to elucidating the nature of language. I have now to show how this treatment may shed light on other forms of human interaction besides speech. The forms of activity in question are, naturally, those to which analogous categories are applicable: those, that is, of which we can sensibly say that they have a

meaning, a symbolic character. In the words of Max Weber, we are concerned with human behavior "if and in so far as the agent or agents associate a subjective sense (Sinn) with it." I want now to consider what is involved in this idea of meaningful behavior.

ISS: 45

What is Winch trying to say here? At first blush, it appears that he modestly proposes that the notion of rule following "may shed light on" an apparently limited class of human activities, namely those analogous to language. Why will he discuss language-like activities? Because, after all, he has just devoted the previous twenty pages to a discussion of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Winch has decided that the study of such activities in the light of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language constitutes a useful field of exploration. So far, he is not yet limiting the range of subject matter appropriate for sociological investigation. Now comes a puzzling evocation of scholarly authority: "In the words of Max Weber, we are concerned with human behavior 'if and in so far as the agent or agents associate a subjective sense (Sinn) with it'." Winch seems to be using the quote from Weber to help to characterize the kind of human activity that he has decided to discuss. However, the original provenance of Weber's words is the opening paragraph of the first section of the massive and incomplete *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, where they help to formulate the fundamental demarcation of sociology as a discipline:

> Sociology (in the sense in which this highly ambiguous word is used here) is a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects. In 'action' is included all human behaviour when and in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it.
>
> Weber 1964: 88

Given the enormous programmatic significance of Weber's words in their original setting, it is hard to believe that Winch quotes them solely in order to characterize his own merely *expedient* decision to attend to the notion of meaningful behavior. It is more reasonable to say that Winch is surreptitiously making his own programmatic claim for the centrality of meaningful behavior, a claim whose full force must be understood in light of Winch's identification of "all behavior which is meaningful" with "all specifically human behavior" (ISS: 52). When Winch writes that "we are concerned with human behavior" in so far as it is meaningful, "we" refers to all philosophically enlightened investigators of human behavior rather than to the authorial voice explaining the course of argument to be presented in ISS.

The idea that "we [presumably social scientists] are concerned" with

meaningful human behavior in particular may be understood in several ways. For instance, it may be seen as proposing a practical convention of disciplinary demarcation. An economist who studies mineral deposits with regard to the possibility of their commercial exploitation need not trouble herself over the details of their geological history. Her research will not concern itself with the presence of such deposits in topographically inaccessible regions. None of this need prohibit her believing in the existence of unexploitable mineral deposits, nor from recognizing that such deposits may serve as a legitimate object of pure geological research. She simply has no professional interest in those aspects of geology that are not of economic consequence. In the same way, one might suggest that as a discipline, sociology concerns itself solely with meaningful human behavior. This need not imply that all human behavior is meaningful, or that it would be pointless for some discipline other than sociology to study specifically non-meaningful behavior or human behavior in general without reference to the issue of meaning.

A closely related position refers to the analytical tools available to a particular discipline. If a discipline limits itself to the use of only certain kinds of explanatory schema, this may automatically limit the range of objects of its investigation. Geologists are perfectly aware of the importance of catastrophic collisions with asteroids for an understanding of the history of the Earth's surface, but they also realize that the explanation and prediction of such collisions lie beyond the scope of geology. The instruments and theories of astronomy must be brought into play. Similarly, a school of sociology that is only willing to analyze human behavior in terms of people's goals and the means they use to achieve them will be necessarily barred from explaining phenomena that do not fulfill Winch's definition of meaningful behavior. As before, practitioners of such a school need not reject the legitimacy of analytical tools that *are* capable of dealing with non-meaningful behavior. They have simply decided not to devote themselves to the application of such tools.

A more radical position might state that all human behavior is by definition meaningful. This would imply that any attempt to study non-meaningful human behavior would automatically be futile. Alternatively, it might be claimed that as a human science, sociology should devote itself to those aspects of our behavior that are peculiarly human. Presumably, some kind of argument can be produced to demonstrate that the ability to perform meaningful actions is quintessentially characteristic of humanity. Meaningless human behavior could then be relegated to the sciences of ethnology and animal psychology, just as the study of the molecular biology of human cells does not call for the founding of a special science with methods and theories unlike those of general molecular biology.

In ISS, Winch seems to drift between the positions I have described. Unfortunately, these moves are not always supported by philosophical argument, as Colwyn Williamson points out:

> If I am uncertain about whether to say that Winch is discussing the
> nature of meaningful behavior or the nature of human behavior in
> general, this is because what begins as "meaningful behavior" is trans-
> muted half way through his argument into all human behavior or "all
> specifically human behavior" ... as I can see, he never explains what
> he means by "specifically human."
>
> > Williamson 1989b: 487–8

I will attempt to sort out how Winch relates to each of the above theses
regarding the place of meaningful behavior for the social sciences. As I
have pointed out above, Winch's introduction to the topic of meaningful
behavior reads as if he were announcing his own acceptance of Weber's
disciplinary demarcation of sociology. Furthermore, Winch does mention
the category of "all behavior which is meaningful (that is all specifically
human behavior)" (ISS: 52), which would imply that while humans do
share certain meaningless behaviors with non-humans, these belong to the
more general science of animal psychology. Presumably, they include
conditioned habits and instinctive behavior such as pulling one's hand
away from a hot stove. Meaningful behavior, however, is somehow
"specifically human"[1] and thus must be studied by special *human* sciences.

Winch also *seems* to entertain a much stronger claim, i.e. that *all* human
behavior is meaningful. This claim does not appear explicitly in ISS, but it
is certainly pointed to by several of the book's rhetorical features. Winch is
hard-pressed to actually describe an instance of meaningless human
behavior. For instance, in the section of ISS entitled "Meaningful
behavior," Winch describes a series of cases of decreasing similarity to a
paradigm case of meaningful behavior. Yet the series does not end with an
example of genuinely meaningless behavior. The section "Rules and
habits" (ISS: 57–62) opposes meaningful rule-governed behavior to mean-
ingless habitual behavior. Winch writes only of *canine* habits and offers no
examples of meaningless habitual *human* behavior. Nonetheless, I do not
think it would be fair to say that Winch actually holds the very strong
thesis that all human behavior is meaningful. Rather, he avoids mentioning
interesting examples of meaningless behavior in order to create the impres-
sion that nothing of importance to human life will be missed by a
social-scientific program that is devoted solely to the study of meaningful
action. Winch is willing to grant us that "the pointless behavior of a
berserk lunatic" (ISS: 53) is in fact meaningless. But who cares about such
marginal pathologies of the human experience?[2]

Finally, Winch's concern with meaningful behavior may be seen as
limiting the variety of analytical tools available to the social sciences. As
we shall see at the end of the next chapter, Winch not only limits the
human sciences to the study of meaningful behavior but also further limits
their study to meaningful behavior *qua* meaningful behavior.[3] Once identi-
fied, meaningful behavior can be analyzed in terms of a variety of different

styles of statistical or causal analysis. Winch, however, allows for the application of precisely one particular method, i.e., the explication of meaning. If Winch had begun his work with the methodological demand that sociology busy itself only with the explication of meaning, he would have automatically limited its purview to meaningful behavior. However, Winch chooses not to prescribe the methods of the social sciences first and then designate their subject matter accordingly. Rather, he assumes that meaningfulness is the defining characteristic of humanity and human society – "all behavior which is meaningful (that is all specifically human behavior)" – and building on this ontological foundation[4] seeks out methods that are appropriate to their study.

The nature of meaningful behavior

It should now be clear how important the notion of meaningful behavior is for Winch's vision of the social sciences, but what exactly does he mean by "meaningful behavior?" As William Outhwaite has pointed out:

> The claim that social phenomena and, in particular, social action are "meaningful" tends to be made as though it were self-explanatory. The term has been so loosely used that one adds to this discussion only with considerable trepidation.
>
> Outhwaite 1975: 82

Broadly speaking, we may distinguish between what Outhwaite (1975: 13) calls the "psychological" and the "hermeneutic" understandings of meaning. The psychological meaning of some behavior consists of the actor's own beliefs, intentions, emotions, and so forth, which gave rise to the behavior. Hermeneutic meaning is attributed to the action or artifact itself. This distinction has been made most radically in regard to works of art. Some literary theorists (especially those classified with the so-called "New Criticism" as against the earlier "Romantics") have claimed that a text may be understood independently of, and in contradiction to, what its author meant to express. W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley (1971) went so far as to denounce any attempt to seek a text's meaning in its author's intentions as "The Intentional Fallacy," the title of their well-known essay. There simply seems to be much "more" to a work of art than the sum of its creator's intentions. As Wilhelm Dilthey, perhaps the greatest proponent of interpretative social science, points out: "If we only had the writer's reports on their creative activity, and all their works were lost, how little would these reports tell us!" (quoted in Outhwaite 1975: 30).

It may seem that while it is reasonable to pursue the hermeneutic interpretation of literature, such efforts are wasted on the activities and artifacts of everyday life, which constitute the chief concerns of social science. After all, art in our society is uniquely intended to provoke

original interpretations. Critics may legitimately claim that it is more important to make classic works relevant to the concerns of contemporary readers than to make the contemporary reader fully aware of the author's intended meaning. Is there any point to lavishing such exegetical extravagance on non-artistic, mundane objects and activities?

For the social sciences, the role of hermeneutic meaning is somewhat different. Hermeneutic meaning may be said to go beyond the psychology of individual actors to invoke societal consensus regarding how their various acts and utterances are to be interpreted. The availability of such agreed-upon meanings may be viewed as a necessary condition for successful social interaction and cooperation, and for the existence of social institutions and practices such as language. The assumption here is that if there is no publicly endorsed understanding of the words I speak, my listeners will have no basis for interpreting my utterances. Similarly, a political party cannot exist as an institution unless its members share a common notion of what a party is, and so on.

We must not over-simplify the ways in which hermeneutic meanings might be shared. Just as artists may be unaware of all of the interpretative implications of their work, so too individuals may be unaware of the full scope of the hermeneutic meaning of their utterances. Hillary Putnam, in his much-discussed essay "The meaning of meaning" (1975), describes what he calls the "division of linguistic labor," i.e. the phenomenon of members of a linguistic community using words without bothering to learn everything there is to know about their correct application. Putnam cites the word "gold" as an example. Practically everyone uses the word "gold," but the validity of its application to a particular bit of metal may only be established by an expert who has been trained to perform the relevant chemical tests. Lay speakers bank on the presence of such experts in the community to flesh out the complete meaning of an expression if such a need arises. In Putnam's own words:

> Every linguistic community ... possesses at least some terms whose associated "criteria" are known only to a subset of the speakers who acquire the terms, and whose use by the other speakers depends on a structured cooperation between them and the speakers in the relevant subsets.[5]
>
> Putnam 1975: 228

Putnam's semantics lends legitimacy to the hermeneutic interpretation of everyday speech. If someone claims that a certain coin is made of pure gold, their claim may be fairly understood as meaning, among other things, that the coin will not dissolve in concentrated nitric acid, even if the speaker is personally unaware of such a test for gold. An extreme version of "the division of linguistic labor" could lead us to view individual human beings as not very different from the clock that I mentioned

in Chapter 2. Although completely lacking self-consciousness, a clock may be said to be showing the wrong time. Similarly, artifacts such as clocks may express a kind of second-hand meaning, which is lent to them by their human creators and interpreters. When we participate in linguistic practices of the type described by Putnam, we too depend on others to supply at least part of the meaning expressed by our words. But what if speaking human individuals contribute *nothing* to the meaning of their utterances? Actual speakers could be little more than automatons, their speech gaining what meaning it has from the general society of speakers, or perhaps somehow from "language itself," hypostatized as the genuine agent of history.[6] The social division of linguistic labor may be extended to cover the meaning of non-linguistic behavior. Even if a Jew were completely ignorant of ancient history, their lighting of Hanukkah candles could still be understood as commemorating the Maccabean victory. Similarly, people who, as a matter of thoughtless habit, turn off the lights when they leave a room may be fairly described as conserving energy.

What then does Winch refer to with the term "meaningful?" While various approaches to meaning can mix psychological and hermeneutic elements in an endless procession of different combinations, Winch's doctrine of SNORF would lead us to think that he would propose a heavily hermeneutic view of meaning, emphasizing the *societal* contribution to the meaningfulness of the individual's behavior. In fact, Winch, following Weber,[7] proposes a strongly psychological view of meaning and associates the idea of meaningful action with action performed for a reason (that is, the *actor's* reason). He develops his theme in terms of "a certain person, N, [who] ... voted Labour at the last General Election because he thought that a Labour government would be the most likely to preserve industrial peace." In the clearest case of acting for a reason, "N, prior to voting, has discussed the pros and cons of voting Labour and has explicitly come to the conclusion: 'I will vote Labour because that is the best way to preserve industrial peace'" (ISS: 45–6). This is "a paradigm case of someone performing an action for a reason."

The parallel claims by Winch in ISS and by Weber (1964: 88) in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* that sociology must concern itself with meaningful action are, in both works, followed by a series of qualifications. After all, it would hardly be realistic to limit the purview of sociology to actions that are completely and consciously understood by those who perform them. As Weber points out:

> The line between meaningful action and merely reactive behaviour to which no subjective meaning is attached, cannot be sharply drawn empirically. A very considerable part of all sociologically relevant behaviour, especially purely traditional behaviour, is marginal between the two.[8]

ibid.: 90

Winch asks us to consider the case in which N votes for Labour without having previously formulated any reason for doing so. Winch feels that it could still be plausible to suggest that N did so in order to preserve industrial peace, granted the necessary (but apparently insufficient) condition that N grasps the concept of "industrial peace."

Upon closer inspection, it becomes difficult to see what bearing Winch's two voting examples have upon the concept of meaningful behavior. Winch seems to conflate the *concept* of meaningful behavior with the criteria by which an observer may *recognize* a case of meaningful behavior. In his first example, N "explicitly come[s] to the conclusion: 'I will vote Labour because that is the best way to preserve industrial peace'." N has publicly given a reason for his behavior, and, having heard N's reasoning, observers may cite it as an explanation of N's voting behavior. In the latter case, N "may not, prior to casting his vote, have formulated any reason for voting as he does." In that case, observers will be more wary about attributing a particular line of political reasoning to N. But the mere fact that N never *talked* about his voting decision does not make it an "intermediate example" of meaningful behavior. For all we know, N may have painstakingly analyzed the entire political situation, thinking through his arguments in sentences and paragraphs of flawless prose. Of course, we would be more comfortable *attributing* such thoughtfulness to N if we had heard him participate in a political discussion (although political discourse can also involve a mindless and habitual recitation of slogans). Nonetheless, Winch's second example brings us no farther along the continuum joining psychologically "meaningful action" and "merely reactive behavior."

In Winch's next example, borrowed from Freud's (1965) *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, "N forgets to post a letter and insists, even after reflection, that this was 'just an oversight' and had no reason." Winch allows for the validity of Freudian interpretations of such apparently unconscious mistakes, i.e. that "N's omission to post a letter to X (in settlement, say, of a debt) was an expression of N's unconscious resentment against X for having been promoted over his head" (ISS: 48). Again, Winch requires that the explanation be couched in terms of concepts available to the actor, that N "himself understand what is meant by 'obtaining promotion over somebody's head'" (ISS: 48). Even in this third, Freudian, example, Winch has not brought us much distance from his paradigmatic case of meaningful behavior. The reasoned agency of N's consciousness has been replaced by the reasoned agency of N's unconscious.

Finally, Winch comes to an example that genuinely strays from the paradigm case of meaningful behavior: "N votes Labour without deliberating and without subsequently being able to offer any reasons, however hard he is pressed ... he is simply following without question the example of his father and his friends, who have always voted Labour" (ISS: 49). Winch claims that "although N does not act here for any reason, his act

still has a definite sense. What he does is not simply to make a mark on a piece of paper; he is casting a vote." Since N has not acted "here for any reason," it would seem that the "definite sense" that Winch attributes to N's behavior must be thoroughly hermeneutic. Almost immediately, Winch reintroduces the psychological aspect of meaning:

> Let us return to N's exercise of his vote: its possibility rests on two presuppositions. In the first place, N must live in a society which has certain specific political institutions … if he lives in a society whose political structure is patriarchal, it will clearly make no sense to speak of him as 'voting' for a particular government, however much his action may resemble in appearance that of a voter in a country with an elected government. Secondly, N must himself have a certain familiarity with those institutions. His act must be a participation in the political life of the country, which presupposes that he must be aware of the symbolic relation between what he is doing now and the government which comes into power after the election.
>
> ISS: 50–1

It now becomes clear that N's not acting "for any reason" calls for a substantial psychological element. I had mentioned earlier that Winch seems to imply that "grasping" a rule involves an instantaneous quantum leap of understanding whereby one becomes initiated as an equal into the community of rule followers. Similarly, Winch contends that anyone who may be said to have voted "must be aware" of what may be a quite complicated set of "symbolic relations." Can US citizens who are unfamiliar with the Byzantine intricacies of the Electoral College be said to truly "vote" in a presidential election? Winch seems not to be describing a human world based on a social division of linguistic labor but rather a society of monads, each of which possesses a complete understanding of the society's language and practices. True, the individual monad is capable of error and depends on the others to *validate* its application of the rules. However, it does not depend on them to fill out missing details in its understanding of the rules. I would suggest that this aspect of Winch's thought underlies his antipathy to the use of statistical methods in interpretative sociology. Winch complains that "a man who understands Chinese is not a man who has a firm grasp of the statistical probabilities for the occurrence of the various words in the Chinese language" (ISS: 115). While this is obviously true, it does not confute the fact that a given word in Chinese may be understood somewhat differently by different speakers of that language. It would be perfectly reasonable to require of sociolinguists that their interpretation of a word reflect the statistical distribution of ways in which various people use it. Although Winch most wants from the social sciences that they offer us a window onto how different societies grasp reality, he never really comes to grips with the fact

that such societal world views are largely creatures of our own need to summarize the disparate thinking of intellectually heterogeneous groups of people.[9]

Besides citing action for a reason as the paradigm case of meaningful behavior, Winch adds a further general characterization of meaningful behavior that will allow him to make the leap to rule-following behavior: "Action with a sense is symbolic: it goes together with certain other actions in the sense that it commits the agent to behaving in one way rather than another in the future" (ISS: 50).

Winch admits that "this notion of 'being committed' is most obviously appropriate where we are dealing with actions "which have an immediate social significance, like economic exchange or promise keeping" (ISS: 50). He tries to show how it can also apply to "meaningful behavior of a more 'private' nature" by introducing Weber's (1977: 109) example of using a bookmark. In Winch's words, "if N places a slip of paper between the leaves of a book he can be said to be 'using a bookmark' only if he acts with the idea of using the slip to determine where he shall start re-reading" (ISS: 50). Earlier in ISS (pp. 24–7), Winch argues that the coherent use of words requires regulation by rules whose application extends to future acts of communication. This rule-governed "commitment" to accepted word use is comparable to the commitment entailed by any meaningful act. The element of "commitment" can even be found in the case of the unconscious "Freudian slip"; suppose I ask Jill if she has invited John to her party and she answers: "He's on the top of my lust." In order for me to read any special meaning into her verbal slip, I must assume that she is generally "committed" to using the word "lust" in a certain way. Now all is set for the grand programmatic conclusion, which equates meaningful behavior with rule following and thus also with social behavior:

> The notion of being committed by what I do now to doing something in the future is identical in form with the [rule-governed] connection between a definition and the subsequent use of the word defined. ... It follows that I can only be committed in the future by what I do now if my present act is the application of a rule. Now ... this is possible only where the act in question has a relation to a social context: this must be true even of the most private acts, if, that is, they are meaningful.
>
> ISS: 50

Although this passage is pivotal to the entire argument of ISS, it offers little evidence for a logical connection between rule following and commitment to future action. I will not speculate about what additional arguments may be brought in to strengthen this connection, since in his self-critical preface to the second edition of ISS, Winch himself explicitly disavows the claim that commitment to future action always involves the application of a rule: "This does *not* [emphasis in original] follow from

anything said in the previous section, nor do I think it true as it stands" (ISS: xiv). Commitment to the future can no longer serve Winch as a middle term connecting meaningful behavior with rule-governed behavior. However, although he came to reject the *argument* equating meaningful behavior with rule-governed behavior, and despite some waffling, Winch never really gave up on the *thesis* itself.[10]

Are rules ubiquitous?

Winch paints a picture of individuals whose thought and meaningful actions are guided by the rules and aims of socially founded modes of life. It is only in the context of such modes that the individual can ever be expected to invent contingently private rules. Thus, while I may follow a secret rule when choosing my socks each morning, I could hardly have developed the entire Western mode of dress while growing up on Crusoe's desert island. Winch's entire intellectual edifice may be endangered if it can be shown that he overstates the importance of rules for human behavior. Broadly speaking, there are two major strategies by which Winch's critics seek to attack this possible weakness in his position. On the one hand, some make the claim that much human behavior, even behavior that would normally be called meaningful, cannot be accurately described as rule-governed. Others forward the more radical thesis that there is no reason to assume that even social practices that involve high levels of cooperation between individuals (such as linguistic communication) involve the application of shared common rules. Let us consider these two points in turn.

Alasdair MacIntyre poses a difficult question for Winch's doctrine of rule-governed behavior:

> If I go for a walk, or smoke a cigarette, are my actions rule-governed in the sense in which my actions in playing chess are rule-governed? ... What is the wrong way of going for a walk? And, if there is no way, is my action in any sense rule-governed?
>
> MacIntyre 1967: 102

If we are intuitively repelled by the suggestion that activities such as cigarette smoking and going for a walk are governed by rules, if we cannot make sense of the notion of "going for a walk in a mistaken fashion," Winch will be in trouble. On the one hand, only rule-following behavior may be deemed meaningful. On the other hand, he certainly does not want to lump "taking a walk" with that other paradigm of meaningless behavior, "the pointless behavior of a berserk lunatic" (ISS: 53). Various interpreters of Winch[11] make largely the same point in regard to this challenge. We must differentiate between a rule for identifying a successfully executed action (which I shall call the *rule of result evaluation*) and a rule

for performing the action (which I shall call the *rule of execution*). Rules of result evaluation are actually linguistic rules determining the proper use of certain predicates such as "went for a walk," "checkmated her opponent," etc. One might say that each rule of evaluation may also be regarded as a rule of execution for the use of the relevant predicate. I may be able to identify excellent flute playing without knowing anything about the rules of technique for blowing into a flute. I can point out to a flautist that her low notes are too "breathy" while lacking any notion of how to go about producing better sounds myself. In this case, no doubt, another musician would be able to observe the flautist and perhaps comment that she is not positioning her lips properly. In other cases, we may be perfectly capable of identifying success in an activity at which no one knows how to succeed. Criteria may exist for identifying a successful cure for AIDS, although no one has yet produced a treatment that would fulfill those standards. Usually, however, we would expect rules of execution and rules of result evaluation to develop together in relation to each other. The workings of cognitive dissonance would keep people from developing standards of result evaluation that constantly find their rules of execution ineffective. On the other hand, rules of execution that do not produce results that fulfill accepted standards of utility will simply be discarded.[12]

More importantly, the fact that a well-established rule of result evaluation for some activity exists does not guarantee that people perform that activity in accordance with any particular rule of execution. Let us return to MacIntyre's example. There are rules for the proper application of the predicate "is going for a walk." If I refer to someone who is reading a book and say, "he is going for a walk,"[13] people who know the rules for *identifying* these two activities (i.e., know the rules for using the expressions "reading a book" and "going for a walk") will rightly point out my mistake. This does not mean that when people *go for a walk* (a kind of intentional action that Winch would certainly want to count as involving rules), they are themselves following rules that govern the activity of "going for a walk."

Winch's critics claim that he has conflated rules of execution with rules of result evaluation, and in consequence he over-extends the category of rule-governed behavior. In order to save Winch, we must assume that when people engage in activities such as going for a walk, they themselves must make implicit use of its rule of result evaluation. For instance, suppose we assume that one must always *decide* to go for a walk before actually doing so. Winch might further assume that such a decision involves an act of discursive thought that makes use of the concept "going for a walk."[14] But use of the concept "going for a walk" reflects the rule of result evaluation for the activity of "going for a walk!" When people decide to go for a walk, it is as if they are thinking "I will perform a set of actions to which the concept 'go for a walk' may be properly applied." If people must think about their actions in order to make them mean-

ingful, and such thought is discursive, then all meaningful behavior will be "infected" by the rule-governed nature of language. Winch himself writes:

> It is because the use of language is so intimately, so inseparably, bound up with the other, non-linguistic, activities which men perform, that it is possible to speak of their non-linguistic behavior also as expressing discursive ideas ... one needs only to recall the enormous extent to which the learning of any characteristically human activity normally involves talking as well: in connection, e.g., with discussions of alternative ways of doing things, the inculcation of standards of good work, the giving of reasons, and so on.
>
> ISS: 128–9

Even if we let pass for the moment the highly problematic notion that all meaningful behavior is inseparably bound up with acts of discursive thought, all is not yet safe for the ubiquity of rules. We must now consider the radical thesis, which denies that linguistic communication is itself a form of rule-governed behavior. The *locus classicus* for this view appears in Donald Davidson's essay "A nice derangement of epitaphs":

> I conclude that there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed. There is therefore no such thing to be learned, mastered, or born with. We must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply to cases. And we should try again to say how convention in any important sense is involved in language; or, as I think, we should give up the attempt to illuminate how we communicate by appeal to conventions.
>
> Davidson 1986: 446

Paul Roth (1987 and unpublished), working from a Quinean perspective, explicitly puts forward a critique of Winch along these lines. According to Roth, there is no reason to assume either (1) that in order to perform complicated actions such as speaking, people must direct their behavior in accordance with tacit rules, or that (2) coordinated social activities such as communication can only exist against a background of shared rules.[15] Similarly, Stephen Turner (1994) argues that there is no way to explain how shared tacit rules and concepts could have been learned by the various participants in a social practice. In a recent essay, Turner (2001) points out that connectionist theories of artificial and human intelligence can do without the notion of rules and rule following in their explanations of the acquisition and exercise of higher cognitive skills. Winch never considered the possibility that language could work without shared rules, and I shall not speculate as to how he might have met these challenges.

Winch did explicitly argue that shared ideas constitute the foundation of all *social relations*. The following section investigates Winch's claim.

Social relations and relations of ideas

The role of discursive thought is quite heavily emphasized in Winch's discussion of "The internality of social relations" (ISS: 121–8). There, Winch tries to defend his claim that "If social relations between men exist only in and through their ideas, then, since the relations between ideas are internal relations, social relations must be a species of internal relation too" (ISS: 123). The core of this section involves the example of an army sergeant who "calls 'Eyes right!' and his men all turn their eyes to the right" (ISS: 124). It is perfectly natural to describe the men as obeying a command, and, Winch claims, such a description requires that the sergeant be thought of as issuing a command. The concepts *obedience* and *command* are "internally related"; by definition, you cannot have a case of the one without the other.

There is nothing surprising about the use of internally related concepts in the description of human activities; they are also used in the description of natural phenomena – Winch (ISS: 124) claims that the concepts "thunder" and "lightning" are so connected. By identifying a noise as thunder, I commit myself to the proposition that the flash preceding it was lightning. The peculiar thing is that in order to use internally related concepts in reference to people's actions, we must assume that the actors themselves are applying the concepts in question. For example, if the soldiers did not intend to follow the sergeant's order, they could not be said to obey him. Consider a further situation. Thirty meters away on the parade ground another sergeant has suddenly forgotten which order he is to give next. Our sergeant prompts him by shouting out "Eyes right!" If the soldiers realize what is going on and still turn their eyes to the right, they may have mocked military discipline, but they cannot be described as having followed an order. Winch extends his argument from this simple example to include all social institutions. For instance, I cannot go to war unless I view "myself as a member of a belligerent country" (ISS: 128). My behavior is not merely described by the concept "war"; it is itself governed by my understanding of that concept. For Winch, this means that "the concept of war belongs essentially to my behavior" (ISS: 128). Similarly, the concept of obedience belongs essentially to the behavior of the soldiers who turned their eyes to the right.

Winch seems to believe that if a concept (e.g. "obedience") "belongs essentially" to my behavior, and this concept is internally related to concepts (e.g. "issuing a command") that "belong essentially" to someone else's behavior, then my own relationship to that other person may also be described as an internal relation. Less confusingly, Winch claims that the above discussion demonstrates that much of human behavior is essentially social in a way that goes beyond the claims of SNORF. Every time my

behavior involves social institutions it essentially involves other people and cannot be properly characterized without implicit mention of those other participants in the social institution. For instance, it would be impossible to describe my military activities without assuming the existence of an entire army of fellow soldiers.[16]

Winch himself came to see the inappropriateness of describing *all* inter-actions between people as relations of ideas. In the preface to the second edition of ISS, he mentions (1990: xviii) that in some cases relationships are governed by force rather than by a sharing of concepts. Much of Winch's (1989) book on Simone Weil deals with her analysis of how people use force against each other, the general upshot of which is that such relationships are distorted by the incapacity of one party to recognize the humanity of the other. There is little reason to think that victim and victimizer share a common understanding of the concepts guiding their interaction. His interest in the social sciences having waned, Winch never tried to create a place for an understanding of forced and violent relation-ships within the general vision offered by ISS.

In any case, it is obviously possible to use a concept such as "following orders" even in a context where no order has been given. In order to understand why the soldiers looked to their right, I do not have to assume that they actually received an order. It is enough if I know that they *thought* they had received an order. As soon as I describe their behavior in terms of what they thought, my description implies nothing in regard to the sergeant or his state of mind. There is no "internal relation" between the description "P thought he was following O's order" and the statement "O issued P an order." P may think that he was following O's order, even though O had shouted "Eyes right!" in order to remind some other sergeant what command had to be given next.

I imagine that Winch would probably dismiss the case just mentioned as being merely parasitical on the more common situation in which both commander and commanded do share a common understanding of their situation. However, even the parties to long-term relationships can disagree as to the nature of their respective roles and goals. The sergeant may think that his commands should be obeyed in deference to military tradition and in order to preserve battle readiness. His soldiers may see themselves as involved in a cat-and-mouse game whose goals are maxi-mization of leisure and avoidance of the stockade. The meaning of practically every aspect of the relationship may be contested, but coordi-nated military activity does take place. Of course, as the later Winch would be ready to point out, in a military situation the threat of force is ever present to undermine the possibility of genuine mutual understanding. However, is it not possible, and sometimes likely, that even the parties to a caring relationship (such as a marriage) may interact and cooperate for years without ever really establishing a common ground as to the goals, best interests and communicative intent that guide their actions?

What ever became of SNORF?

Winch devotes considerable effort toward demonstrating the social nature of rule following and further demonstrating that its social nature carries over to meaningful behavior, the only kind of human behavior worthy of Winch's attention. But what is the point of demonstrating that humans are social animals? After all, Winch is interested in the *Idea of a Social Science*, where a social science may be understood as naturally dealing only with "our understanding of social life" (ISS: 21). If this means that Winch is concerned with the properly *social* sciences, i.e. sociology, economics, and anthropology, it should hardly surprise us to discover that their object of study possesses a social dimension. However, later in ISS (p. 47), Winch discusses the form of explanation typical of Freudian psychology, which (although obviously concerned with the long-term effects of the interpersonal dynamics of childhood) may be characterized as a study of the human individual rather than as a social science. When, in the section "Meaningful behavior," Winch tells us that he will consider "other forms of human interaction besides speech," he has already, by definition, limited the discussion to social behavior. If Winch wants to talk about "human interactions," why does he feel it necessary to drag out the heavy Wittgensteinian artillery to demonstrate the social nature of his obviously social subject matter?

Worse yet, Winch's mobilization of Wittgenstein can only produce a very weak version of SNORF. As I have mentioned in Chapter 2, Winch does not even attempt to dismiss the possibility of contingently private rules, and, in principle, there is nothing to stop someone basing much of their meaningful behavior upon such private rules.[17] In order to maintain his central set of identities, rule-following behavior = meaningful behavior = social behavior, Winch must tacitly resort to a starkly minimalist criterion of social behavior. Social behavior becomes behavior that is possible only among persons who have undergone some degree of socialization at some time in the past (who have experienced having their mistakes pointed out to them by others). Excluding fabled children raised by wolves, every human being undergoes this requisite socialization.

Winch's very broad definition of social behavior contrasts strongly with Max Weber's use of the term. Weber makes a clear distinction between meaningful behavior, which includes "all human behavior when and in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it," and action that, in addition, may be termed social because "it takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course" (Weber 1964: 88). Weber allows for the possibility that behavior can be meaningful yet non-social. Winch (ISS: 116) takes note of his divergence from Weber and states flatly that Weber "comes down on what I must regard as the wrong side" of the issue of the social nature of rule following and meaningful behavior. This apparent disagreement is largely a product of Winch's

conflation of his own weak notion of the "social" with Weber's much stronger concept.

In his *Critique of Stammler* (1977), Weber deals with the specific issue of whether rule following is a necessarily social activity. As in the Wittgensteinian version of the debate, Robinson Crusoe is trotted out to serve as the crucial thought-experimental subject. Weber considers Rudolf Stammler's rather Winchian-sounding claim that "Robinson [as a rule follower] is causally conceivable only as a product of the 'social life' from which, by chance, he has disappeared as a castaway" (*ibid.*: 100). Weber feels that Stammler's claim has no bearing on the question of whether all rule following deserves to be called social behavior, because "the question of the causal genesis of a 'rule' is completely irrelevant to the question of its conceptual status" (*ibid.*: 100). In contrast, Winch holds that the "causal genesis" (to borrow Weber's terminology) of a rule is relevant to "the question of its conceptual status"; if a rule is first set down in a social setting, this is, for Winch, enough to establish its social nature. In fact, as we have seen, Winch is willing to grant "social" status to a *de facto* private rule merely on the grounds that it is learnable in principle by other people, and that the solitary individual who follows it has undergone some past experience of socialization. When Weber writes that social action "takes account of the behavior of others," he is concerned with the event of the action itself, not with its "causal genesis" in the past. Just because a rule was learned in a social context, this does not mean that the rule follower always "takes account of the behavior of others" in every application of the rule. It is hardly surprising that their widely divergent definitions of the adjective "social" have led Winch into a merely verbal disagreement over its application to various categories of behavior.[18]

So what does Winch achieve by advancing Wittgensteinian arguments for SNORF? At the end of the day, they largely serve as an introduction to Wittgenstein's account of social practices and of the shared, socially established rules (i.e. not contingently private rules) from which such practices are constituted. Winch's intuitively satisfying assumption that practically all human behavior takes place in the context of pre-established "modes of social life" serves implicitly to strengthen his case for the social nature of meaningful behavior. While it is plausible to imagine individuals occasionally inventing contingently private rules of conduct, it is much harder to accept the idea of a culture-founding superman who invents for himself an entire "mode of life." Furthermore, Robinson Crusoe notwithstanding, to all intents and purposes every human being is born into some societal setting. If an individual were somehow miraculously able to invent a genuinely new "mode of life" that dealt with some important aspect of human existence, it would be bound to have to take into account existing societal conditions. Unfortunately, Winch offers precious little argument for the thesis that even archetypally social practices must be understood in terms of actually shared common rules. Consider Winch's discussion of

language, which certainly serves him as both a paradigmatically meaningful and a paradigmatically social practice. Winch cannot deny the possibility of someone inventing and using a contingently private language. All he can claim is that such a language must be learnable in principle by other human beings and that its inventor has undergone an elementary process of socialization. More importantly, the same applies to our own everyday use of language. In as much as my own speech is a rule-governed activity, other people must be capable, in principle, of learning the rules involved. However, Winch never troubles himself to demonstrate that communication actually involves a process of formulating and interpreting messages according to a shared set of rules.

4 Explanation and interpretation

So far, I have described Winch's demarcation of the subject matter of the social sciences. This subject matter consists of meaningful behavior, which is, for Winch, behavior regulated by socially established rules that takes place in the broader context of a mode of social life. It is now time to consider how this choice of subject matter determines the choice of acceptable methods of investigation and explanation in the social sciences. First, I will briefly discuss the general issue of explanation versus interpretation in the social sciences, which will serve as the background for Winch's particular contribution.

When confronted with a human artifact or instance of behavior, the social scientist may choose between two general strategies of investigation, broadly referred to as explanation and interpretation. Explanation involves showing how a particular instance of behavior belongs to a general category of behaviors that are causally connected with other events or conditions in terms of some general "covering law."[1] For instance, Ned boards the passenger train and sits next to Nancy. How may we explain his behavior? We presume the validity of a general law that in a public place, a man will usually sit with his wife.[2] It so happens that Ned and Nancy are married. Therefore, Ned's behavior is explicable in terms of the general law. Explanation and prediction (which may be seen as the application of explanatory laws to future events) are usually thought of as constituting the twin goals of the natural sciences. An explanatory social science is therefore likely to call for methods and objectives analogous to those of the natural sciences. The notion that the social sciences should be created in the image of the natural sciences is a position generally called *positivism*.

Laws that can explain past behaviors causally may be mobilized to predict or even control future behavior for policy making. Yet a successfully predictive sociology would not necessarily fulfill our expectations of knowledge about society. John Searle's celebrated "Chinese room" thought experiment (1980) may serve as the model for a radically explanatory social science. Searle's experiment involves a computer program that receives a Chinese-language input of stories and related questions and

produces an output of acceptable answers to the questions, also written in Chinese. If some person "N" knew no Chinese yet understood the language in which the program's instructions were written, N could, by following the program's instructions, participate in written Chinese dialog without having any understanding of the meaning of the texts involved.

Similarly, we could imagine a computer program for predicting the behavior of members of a certain society "S" (setting aside, for the moment, the possibility that such a program might be impossible in principle). N, having no knowledge of S's culture or language, could, by carefully following the program, successfully predict its members' behavior, perhaps describing it in purely mechanical terms.[3] N might even be able to elicit predetermined responses from the people of S. Nonetheless, N's knowledge of S would be far from complete: N would completely miss the *meaning* of the observed behavior. For instance, N might correctly predict that a hundred members of S would suddenly move in a northerly direction at a speed of seven kilometers per hour for a period of twenty seconds. However, N would have no idea whether this occurred as an act of ritualized intimidation of an enemy, as a play in an organized sporting event, or as the high point of a wedding reception. N's knowledge of the phenomenon in question is sorely deficient.[4]

What N is missing is an understanding of the *meaning* of movements of the members of S. Interpretation is intended to reveal the meaning that underlies behavior. It is crucial to remember that the notion of the "meaning" of behavior is deeply ambiguous. Disagreements regarding how the hermeneutic and psychological components of meaning are interrelated, and their respective importance for the understanding of human behavior, will give rise to significantly different programs of interpretative social science.

Obviously, explanation and interpretation may be interdependent. A covering law in the social sciences may describe a causal relationship that holds between events whose identification requires an interpretative investigation. Suppose that I were to discover a law connecting the number of jokes told *per capita* in a society with the number of violent acts occurring in that society. It often requires a quite subtle effort of interpretation to determine whether a specific bit of speech constitutes a joke ("But I was only joking!") or a particular act constitutes violence (what about contact sports?).[5] Furthermore, Carl Hempel (1962; 1965), the philosopher most closely identified with covering law explanation (see note 1) has claimed that one's reasons for behaving in a certain way (the classic concern of interpretative social science) may be treated as the *cause* of the behavior, thus bridging the divide between causal explanation and the interpretation of motives. Explanatory laws may reflect the wide prevalence of particular intentions and concerns among people. For instance, consider my earlier cited general law that in a public place, a man will usually sit with his wife. This law may be seen as reflecting the fact that men usually have good reasons to sit next to their wives rather than next to strangers.

When Hempel says that one's reasons for action cause one's behavior, he links psychological interpretation with causal explanation. I find it more problematic to establish links between hermeneutic interpretation and causal explanation. One general strategy would be to connect Max Weber's (1949) concept of the "ideal type" with hermeneutic meaning.[6] As usual, Hempel defends the methodological homogeneity of the natural and social sciences. He argues that the ideal types of the social sciences are indistinguishable from analytical tools used by the natural sciences:

> the various uses of type concepts in psychology and the social sciences, when freed from certain misleading connotations, prove to be of exactly the same character as the methods of classification, ordering, measurement, empirical correlation, and finally theory formation used in the natural sciences. In leading to this result, the analysis of typo-logical procedures exhibits, in a characteristic example, the methodological unity of empirical science.
>
> Hempel 1963: 230

Winch on explanation and interpretation

Given Winch's preoccupation with issues of meaning, it is no surprise that he is universally identified as an advocate of interpretative social science. More importantly, his belief that the social sciences must deal exclusively with meaningful behavior leads him to dismiss the very possibility of soci-ological explanation and prediction along with positivist dreams of a unified science of nature and culture. The examination of Winch's argu-ments against a predictive social science will also reflect the various roles that he accords to psychological and hermeneutic meaning.

One rather simple argument claims that in as much as behavior is meaningful it is also, by definition, unpredictable. Such innate unpre-dictability rules out the possibility of describing such behavior in terms of the application of the kind of universal laws required by Hempelian expla-nation.[7] According to Winch, the notion of people behaving in a meaningful way (following rules) implies that they could have chosen to act differently (deciding not to follow the rule). Someone whose behavior is meaningful

> has the alternative of acting differently because he understands the situation he is in and the nature of what he is doing (or refraining from doing). Understanding something involves understanding the contradictory too: I understand what it is to act honestly just so far as and no farther than I understand what it is not to act honestly. That is why conduct which is the product of understanding, and only that, is conduct to which there is an alternative.
>
> ISS: 65

When I say that someone has followed a rule, I implicitly suggest that they were free not to follow the rule. By describing someone's behavior as meaningful, I have automatically assumed, in principle, that they may just as well have decided to behave differently. By admitting only meaningful behavior into the purview of the social sciences, Winch has already forsworn the possibility of causally determinative social-scientific laws.

The ever-present choice between rule following and rule breaking is not the only basis for human freedom in Winch's philosophy. Even within the confines of following a rule, there may be no way to predict how a person will apply the rule when faced with novel circumstances:

> Even if O [a hypothetical investigator of the behavior of N, another thought-experimental subject] knows with certainty the rule which N is following, he cannot predict with any certainty what N will do: where, namely, the question arises of what is involved in following that rule, e.g. in circumstances markedly different from any in which it has previously been applied. The rule here does not specify any determinate outcome to the situation, though it does limit the range of possible alternatives; it is made determinate for the future by the choice of one of these alternatives and the rejection of the others – until such time as it again becomes necessary to interpret the rule in the light of yet new conditions.
>
> ISS: 92

In the light of these arguments, we may access the roles of hermeneutic and psychological meaning in Winch's doctrine. On the one hand, it is clear that hermeneutic meaning is of great importance for Winch. He would say that socially constituted rules and "modes of life" serve as an indispensable foundation for human action. On the other hand, Winch rejects the notion of attributing *purely* hermeneutic meaning to an action. If I had been conditioned to act in accordance with some socially established rule (i.e., my behavior was hermeneutically meaningful) as a matter of sheer blind habit, there would be no reason to say that I followed the rule freely.[8] For Winch's argument to work, meaning must also exist at the psychological level. Thus Winch will not allow us to say that someone voted Labour in order to preserve industrial peace if the person involved had no grasp of the concept "industrial peace" (ISS: 47). Analogously, Winch would have to reject the notion that someone completely ignorant of ancient history could be said to celebrate the Maccabean victory of Hanukkah.

Winch's arguments for human metaphysical freedom (and against prediction in the social sciences) depend on human action being psychologically meaningful. His first argument rests on the observation that the requirement that a rule follower understand the rule they follow includes the understanding of how the rule may be broken. Clearly this "under-

standing" is an example of psychological meaning. Winch's second argument depends on the claim that the individual rule follower freely decides on how to apply the rule in a novel situation. Once again, interpretation of a rule by the individual must surely involve meaning at the psychological level.

These two arguments for the indeterminacy of human behavior do not sit well together. In the first argument, Winch applies criteria usually associated with ethical rule following (indeed, the argument appears in the context of a discussion of moral rules) to rule following in general. In order to say that someone behaves morally (follows a moral rule), we usually insist that they must know the difference between right and wrong (know the rule) and have freedom to act (to either follow or not follow the rule).[9] If we accept the conceptual similarity between moral rules and rules in general, it becomes impossible to attribute rule following to someone who (1) does not know the rule in question and/or (2) is incapable, in principle, of not following the rule. In the second argument, it is the ambiguity of rules that leaves room for indeterminacy in their application. It is no longer clear how the rule should be applied, and it is (but why?) impossible to predict how an individual will apply it. If the application of the rule has become ambiguous, can we still say that the individual *knows* the rule? And if the individual does not know the rule (as it relates to the novel situation), can we say that they are truly engaged in rule-following behavior? The whole force of Winch's book is directed toward understanding socially established rules. Winch owes us an explanation as to why the concept of a rule guarantees metaphysical freedom to those engaged in its application to a novel situation, i.e. at the moment *before* it is socially established.

There is a yet clearer way to reveal the weakness of Winch's second argument. There he is really only concerned with demonstrating that rules of meaningful behavior cannot be treated as predictive social-scientific laws; they have no predictive value in novel situations where their interpretation has not yet been fixed.[10] But what is to keep the social scientist from proposing explanatory laws that are not analogous to the social rules known to the individual in question? For example, take people who can competently categorize line drawings of faces as frowning or smiling. Present them with an ambiguous drawing. The socially accepted criteria for the recognition of facial expressions cannot help us to predict their responses. However, it would not be surprising to discover that, all things being equal, people who have eaten breakfast that morning will categorize the drawing as smiling, while those who went hungry will categorize it as frowning. Of course, no one would think of formulating a rule for themselves in these terms (i.e., when in doubt, if I am hungry I call it a frown, otherwise a smile), but that is exactly the point. It is precisely in such moments of perplexity that "meaningless" behavioral factors such as the physiology of mood states, the mechanics of perception, and blind,

conditioned habit come to the fore. The effect of such "meaningless" factors on the uniquely human vocation of following rules might be the subject of a specifically human yet explanatory science.

The process of learning a rule opens up another chink in Winch's anti-positivist armor. The learning of rules cannot always involve the application of rules, for this would involve us in an infinite regression (a point of which Winch seems to be fully aware). The vicious regression is neatly avoided simply by pointing out that everyone will eventually respond in the same way to "a certain sort of training" (ISS: 31). Consider how Norman Malcolm, a prominent colleague of Winch's, formulates this claim in his book *Wittgenstein: Nothing is Hidden*:

> We go on, all agreeing, following rules and applying words in new cases – without guidance. Other than past training, there is no explanation. It is an aspect of the form of life of human beings. It is our nature. To try to explain it is like trying to explain why dogs bark.
>
> Malcolm 1986:181

Malcolm writes more explicitly than Winch of the naturalness of the human capacity to learn to follow rules. The naturalness of human rule following invites a naturalistic, positivist treatment. Malcolm naively rebuffs any attempt to explain rule following, since "to try to explain it is like trying to explain why dogs bark." Perhaps Wittgensteinians such as Winch and Malcolm would not approve of explaining *why* dogs bark, since this would imply that dogs bark for a reason, that their behavior is meaningful. Even good positivists might shy away from framing a canine research program in such blatantly teleological terms. However, they might ask what causes or allows dogs to bark. When Malcolm says that our ability to learn rules is simply "our nature," he is banishing the learning of rules from the realm of the meaningful. But why should this uniquely human aspect of our human nature not be the subject of a natural science of human behavior? As an *explanation* of rule following, such a science would not be able to explain in terms of rule following. So here we have found the basis for a science of human behavior that does not deal solely with the interpretation of rules. It would seek, for instance, mechanisms that underlie the tendency of the student to attend to perceptual features that the teacher considers important for the following of the rule that is being taught. A trivial example: if I am using a book of photographs to teach a child to name colors, I need not be bothered by the possibility that the child is attending to the colors of the minute individual spots of ink on the page. As Quine points out, the very possibility of learning requires some innate cognitive and perceptual structure:

> If an individual learns at all, differences in degree of similarity must be implicit in his learning pattern. Otherwise any response, if reinforced,

would be conditioned equally and indiscriminately to every future episode, all these being equally similar. Some implicit standard, however provisional, for ordering our episodes as more or less similar must therefore antedate all learning, and be innate.

Quine 1974: 19

Davidson makes a similar point:

> The child, learning the word "table," has already in effect noted that the teacher's responses are similar (rewarding) when its own responses (mouthing "table") are similar. The teacher on his part is training the child to make similar responses to what he (the teacher) perceives as similar stimuli. For this to work, it is clear that the innate similarity responses of child and teacher – what they naturally group together – must be much alike; otherwise the child will respond to what the teacher takes to be similar stimuli in ways the teacher does not find similar.[11]
>
> Davidson 1992: 264

The innate limitations of human cognition may serve as another topic in the natural history of rule following. If I am teaching a child to continue a simple arithmetical series such as 1, 3, 5, 7..., I need not concern myself with the possibility that the child will understand and continue the series as designating the last digit of the trillionth, trillion + 1st, trillion + 2nd, trillion + 3rd, etc. prime numbers. It is very likely an empirical fact of human cognition that no human being will ever be able to perform such a calculation "in their head." Recent developments in cognitive psychology have suggested far less trivial examples of seemingly inborn flaws in our patterns of thought. Cherniak (1986) has produced an interesting study of these apparently innate human limitations.

   Given the fact that cognitive psychology was barely in its infancy when Winch wrote ISS, one can hardly expect him to have discussed the problems I have just raised. However, he does devote some pages of his book to the *physiologically* based psychology laid out in T.M. Newcomb's (1952) textbook *Social Psychology*. Newcomb's book is plagued with conceptual problems, not least of which is its dependence on an ambiguous notion of "bodily energy." This term conflates physiologically available chemical energy (i.e. sugar and oxygen) with some kind of psychic "energy," a term Newcomb uses to talk about shifts in attention (*ibid.*: 80). In any case, Winch's discussion of Newcomb's book offers some indication of how he would treat more successful versions of naturalist psychology. Winch complains that in order to identify motives for behavior with bodily states

> Newcomb weights the scales heavily in his own favor by relying largely on examples which involve obviously physiological drives like

> hunger, thirst and sex; and, by appealing mainly to experiments with
> animals ... he insures that only the physiological aspects of those
> drives shall be taken into account. But would it be intelligent to try to
> explain how Romeo's love for Juliet enters into his behavior in the
> same terms as we might want to apply to the rat whose sexual excite-
> ment makes him run across an electrically charged grid to reach his
> mate? Does not Shakespeare do this much better?
>
> ISS: 76–7

There is something quite ironic about Winch's argument. On the one hand,
he wants to dismiss Newcomb's attempt to use the concept of motive to
bridge the gap between psychology and physiology. On the other hand, he
rejects Newcomb's *over-emphasis* of the "physiological aspects" of "physi-
ological drives." He is clearly implying that such drives also involve
psychological aspects. One might imagine that Winch wants to replace
Newcomb's "motives" with his own "physiological drives" as the bridging
concept between physiological and psychological description!

Although Winch seems to allow for the physiological explanation of
human behavior, he feels that such explanation is so impoverished compared
with detailed interpretation of meanings that the former is hardly worth the
effort. Winch's insistence on a purely ideographic, interpretative social
science leaves him completely uninterested in the pursuit of the universal
aspects of human behavior, a prejudice shared by many twentieth-century
anthropologists (Brown 1991: 154). However, while Shakespeare may have
more to say than does the physiological psychologist or sociobiologist
about a particular pair of star-crossed lovers, he would have very little to say
about why, choosing practically any human culture picked at random, we
will find almost no cases of erotic alliances between siblings (Brown 1991:
118–29). The fact that many mammalian species demonstrate both incest
avoidance and a high rate of infant mortality in births resulting from inces-
tuous breeding suggests that human incest avoidance, as culturally expressed
in a wide range of laws, rituals, myths, etc., has a biological and ultimately
evolutionary explanation (*ibid.*: 124).

The issue of human universals brings us to a different type of argument
against the possibility of law-based explanations in the social sciences.
Winch tackles the issue of human universals head-on in his discussion (ISS:
103–11) of Vilfredo Pareto's[12] (1935) doctrine of universal practices
("residues") and their culture-specific meanings and expressions ("deriva-
tions"). For instance, Pareto might call incest avoidance a residue and the
Judeo-Christian notion that such liaisons are abhorrent to God a deriva-
tion. Winch complains that Pareto's interest in ubiquitous cultural
elements lacks any genuine objects. Since an element of a certain culture
may only be identified and understood in the context of that particular
culture, there is no way for the sociologist to choose recurrent examples of
the same element ("residue") across several different cultures. If we cannot

pick out recurrences of the same cultural element, it will be impossible for us to formulate universal, cross-cultural generalizations or anthropological *laws* regarding that element. For example, Winch mentions Pareto's treatment of the practice of ritual purification in different cultural contexts and observes that no universal criteria exist for differentiating between hygienic and ritual practices. Furthermore, says Winch, "a Christian would strenuously deny that the baptism rites of his faith were really the same in character as the acts of a pagan sprinkling lustral water or letting sacrificial blood" (ISS: 108).

Paradoxically, one might say that Pareto was too close to Winch for his own good. Pareto's term "residue" refers only to forms of behavior that have a "quasi-intellectual or symbolic content" (ISS: 107), such as the category of "ritual purification." Dan Sperber (1996: 49) argues that "anthropological typologies" that are based on "interpretative considerations" (i.e., shared or similar cultural meaning) are "from a causal-explanatory view ... quite arbitrary." The reason for this is that Sperber's own project of a naturalized social science ("the epidemiology of representations") rests upon genetically inherited universals of human cognition. These universals must have developed through extended processes of biological evolution that took place across hundreds of thousands of years. Evolutionary change is not fast enough to reflect differences between cultural environments that have existed for only relatively short (i.e. historical) periods of time. According to Sperber, the most fundamental aspects of human behavior and cognition must be understood against the backdrop of the extremely primitive conditions in which humanity evolved, rather than in terms of the relatively young societal contexts studied by anthropologists. For instance, incest between siblings may be condemned in different societies for different reasons: some may view it as an abomination against God; others might consider it an affront to family honor. Despite the various meanings associated with (or even to some extent defining the limits of) incest in different societies, incest avoidance may have developed as a deeply ingrained ("hard-wired") aspect of human psychology in response to long-term evolutionary pressures.[13]

Winch offers another argument against the reduction of psychological to culture-independent physical description.[14] He claims that such a reduction involves the same kind of conceptual error as is involved in the reduction of the description of an injured cat as "writhing" to a mechanical description of its movements:

> The reaction of a cat which is seriously hurt is "very much more complex" than that of a tree which is being chopped down. But is it really intelligible to say that it is only a difference in degree? We say the cat "writhes" about. Suppose I describe his very complex movements in purely mechanical terms, using a set of time–space co-ordinates. This is, in a sense, a description of what is going on as

much as is the statement that the cat is writhing in pain. But the one statement could not be substituted for the other. The statement which includes the concept of writhing says something which no statement of the other sort, however detailed, could approximate to. The concept of writhing belongs to a quite different framework from that of the concept of movement in terms of time–space co-ordinates; and it is the former rather than the latter which is appropriate to the conception of the cat as an animate creature. Anyone who thought that the study of the mechanics of the movement of animate creatures would throw light on the concept of animate life would be the victim of a conceptual misunderstanding.

ISS: 73–4

There is something strikingly peculiar about how Winch describes his study of feline behavior. He is not interested in the nature of animate life itself but rather in "the concept of animate life." Surely the disinterested analysis of the concept of animate life (better: the various concepts of animate life held by various people at various times) is a topic of interest for philosophers and historians of science. The scientists' concern is to devise concepts that are conducive to the flourishing of their discipline.

While past scientific concepts disallowed the possibility of reducing biology to chemistry, modern molecular biologists may define life precisely in terms of essential chemical processes. Of course, "the study of the mechanics of the movement of animate creatures" does not "throw light on the concept of animate life." The layman's concept of animate life may be largely divorced from any framework of scientific thinking whatsoever. However, such study may lead scientists to exchange their "concept of animate life" for a more fruitful theoretical framework.

Naturally, Winch's statement on the study of cats strongly parallels his views on the conceptual nature of the social sciences (after all, the cat example is offered as an analogy to the reduction of psychological to physical description). Earlier in ISS, Winch explicitly stated:

Many of the more important theoretical issues which have been raised in those [social-scientific] studies belong to philosophy rather than to science and are, therefore, to be settled by *a priori* conceptual analysis rather than by empirical research. For example, the question of what constitutes social behavior is a demand for the elucidation of the concept of social behavior.

ISS: 17–18

Obviously, "the elucidation of the concept of social behavior" used by a particular school of sociology may be of great importance for its progress. If sociologists are using their concepts in incoherent ways, they are in need of philosophical illumination. However, Winch's talk of "the concept of

social behavior" implies that we already possess a perfectly fine conceptual framework for the understanding of human behavior, and all that is left for us to do is to make that framework sufficiently explicit to ourselves. Nothing that happens in the world could lead us to consider improving our concepts:

> In dealing with questions of this sort there should be no question of "waiting to see" what empirical research will show us; it is a matter of tracing the implications of the concepts we use.
>
> <div align="right">ISS: 18</div>

Such an attitude constitutes an *a priori* ceiling on the development of the social sciences. Worse yet, it requires Winch to view his own conceptual framework of rules, criteria, modes of social life, etc. as somehow pre-existing in the (somewhat mythical) generally accepted (by whom?) concept of social behavior. After all, Winch is only interested in elucidating concepts, not in inventing them.

5   Winch on the use of technical concepts in the social sciences

The interpretative autonomy of meaningful behavior

One might say that Winch's idea of a social science is doubly conceptual. First, he believes that the elucidation of our own basic concepts relating to human society constitutes a principle (perhaps *the* principle) concern of theoretical work in sociology. Second, Winch holds that the proper object of empirical social-scientific investigation is meaningful behavior, i.e. behavior with an implicit conceptual content. Winch goes so far as to say that

> A man's social relations with his fellows are permeated with his ideas about reality. Indeed, "permeated" is hardly a strong enough word: social relations are expressions of ideas about reality.
>
> ISS: 23

So a Winchian sociologist will always be busy analyzing concepts. Either she is resolving theoretical issues by attending to her own concepts or she is involved in empirical studies, which consist of analyzing other people's concepts.

For Winch, meaningful action is *psychologically* meaningful; it reflects the actor's own concepts. Furthermore, since meaningful action always takes place within the context of application of particular rules and of participation in particular modes of social life, any attempt to study meaningful behavior will have to respect the interpretative autonomy of the modes involved. In other words, the description and interpretation of meaningful behavior must reflect its meaning as perceived by the actors themselves. As Winch mentions in his discussion of Pareto, it is impossible to determine whether a particular activity belongs to the category of hygiene or to the category of ritual purification without applying the criteria subscribed to by the actors themselves. More generally speaking:

> 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 social investigation. But here we run up 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: 86–7

The main goal of sociology becomes, for Winch, to gain an appreciation of people's actions that is true to their own view of their actions. Of course, social science itself constitutes a social practice or mode with its own particular rules, concepts, and goals. What room does interpretative autonomy leave for the use of technical social-scientific concepts that may be unfamiliar to the very people who are being studied? Winch explains:

Although the reflective student of society may find it necessary to use concepts which are not taken from the forms of activity he is investigating, but which are taken rather from the context of his own investigation, still these technical concepts of his will imply a previous understanding of those other concepts which belong to the activities under investigation.

ISS: 89

It would appear from this passage that Winch will allow for the introduction of concepts alien to some society into the description and understanding of its members' behavior, just so long as those concepts are used to analyze lower-order descriptions made in terms of concepts native to the society being studied. This would seem to create great leeway for prospective theory builders in the social sciences. However, Winchian social scientists would constantly court the danger that their technical concepts might taint the aboriginal purity of the lower-order descriptions. Winch is aware of this difficulty and offers examples from economics and psychoanalysis of the proper use of technical concepts in the explanation of human behavior. I will now show why these examples are somewhat deceptive and how Winch's purposes might be better served by an example I take from the discipline of linguistics.

Borrowing from economics, Winch offers "liquidity preference" as a concept

not generally used by businessmen in the conduct of their affairs, but by the economist who wishes to *explain* the nature and consequences of certain kinds of business behavior. But it is logically tied to concepts which do enter into business activity, for its use by the economist presupposes his understanding of what it is to conduct a business,

which in turn involves an understanding of such business concepts as
money, profit, cost, risk, etc.

                                                                    ISS: 89

The choice of "liquidity preference" as an illustrative concept is strange.
At first blush, one would think that economics, the most highly quantified
and theory-driven social science, would be the last place in which Winch
would find an example of methodological rectitude. Neoclassical
economics commits both major sins of positivism. First, its theories are
explicitly designed to be predictive. Second, it assumes that people from a
wide variety of cultural backgrounds all act in accordance with an iden-
tical and particularly narrow form of rationality.

In fact, Winch manages to pick out a quite primitive concept belonging
to the theory of the individual economic agent. Although it sounds impres-
sively technical, "liquidity preference" simply refers to the absolute
amount of money (not even percentage of total assets) that an individual
would like to hold as cash. Any adult with money in an interest-bearing
account must consider his "liquidity preference" each time he makes a
cash withdrawal. By making an example of "liquidity preference," Winch
could create the impression that his doctrine allows for the legitimacy of
modern economic theory without really committing himself to accepting
any of its more philosophically problematic elements, such as utility aggre-
gation and "invisible hand" explanations. Even if Winch had mentioned
aggregate liquidity preference or the liquidity preference function (which
are also hardly representative of more technically abstract economic
concepts), it would have signaled a greater openness to theory building in
the social sciences.

Winch's other example is the psychoanalytic explanation of neurotic
behavior. He allows that "a psychoanalyst may explain a patient's neurotic
behavior in terms of factors unknown to the patient and of concepts which
would be unintelligible to him." Yet the description of the events in the
patient's life referred to in the psychoanalytic explanation "will presuppose
an understanding of the concepts in terms of which family life, for example, is
carried on in our society" (ISS: 90). Winch's openness to technical explana-
tions in psychoanalysis seems to contradict an earlier statement of his views:

> Explanations of the Freudian type, if they are to be acceptable, must
> be in terms of concepts which are familiar to the agent as well as to
> the observer. It would make no sense to say that N's omission to post a
> letter to X (in settlement, say, of a debt) was an expression of N's
> unconscious resentment against X for having been promoted over his
> head, if N did not himself understand what was meant by "obtaining
> promotion over somebody's head." It is worth mentioning here too
> that in seeking explanations of this sort in the course of
> psychotherapy, Freudians try to get the patient himself to recognize the

> validity of the proffered explanation; that this indeed is almost a
> condition of its being accepted as the "right" explanation.
>
> ISS: 48

Even if the apparent contradiction between these two passages on Freud
can be patched over, Winch's other discussions of psychological theory
seem to preclude the possibility of his accepting the application of the
"factors unknown to the patient and of concepts which would be unintelli-
gible to him" taken from Freudian theory, and this simply because they
belong to a *causal* explanation of behavior. Winch condemns J.S. Mill[1]
and Newcomb for advocating causal explanations of human behavior (ISS:
75–83), and he must reject Freud for exactly the same reason.
Psychoanalytic theory (despite the efforts of those devoted to its
"hermeneutic" interpretation, i.e. Ricouer (1970)[2]) is fully committed to
giving a *causal* account of psychological phenomena. "Psychic deter-
minism" has been called one of the "two fundamental hypotheses" of
psychoanalysis (Brenner 1957: 2). Wittgenstein himself was aware of
Freud's commitment to causal explanation and condemned it repeatedly in
his conversations with Rush Rhees (Wittgenstein 1966: 42, 49). Winch
gives no explanation as to why Freudian causality is less objectionable
than any other form of causal explanation of behavior.[3]

As in the case of "liquidity preference," Winch is trying to convince us
that his doctrine does not make the social sciences impossible in principle
by offering examples of social-scientific concepts that he is supposedly
willing to accept. First, he mentions a specific economic concept so primi-
tive as to be of no philosophical interest; next, he points in the general
direction of psychoanalytic theory, which, by all indications, he would
have to reject if he would only trouble himself to discuss it in any detail.

I propose a fresh start for showing how Winch could establish the legiti-
macy of technical concepts in the social sciences. In his discussion of
meaningful behavior, Winch states clearly that "the test of whether a man's
actions are the application of a rule is not whether he can formulate it but
whether it makes sense to distinguish between a right and a wrong way of
doing things in connection with what he does" (ISS: 58). Winch has no
problem accepting the possibility that people may follow a rule without
knowing how to express it verbally. In such circumstances, the social
investigator may find herself discursively formulating the unspoken rules
of a society in a way that is accurate yet employs technical concepts that
are unknown to the people being studied. The discipline of linguistics
offers useful examples of such a situation. Certainly, people may be
capable of speaking a language grammatically and of correcting each
other's grammatical errors even when they are incapable of formulating
the rules involved. The very idea of delineating the formal grammar of a
language obviously post-dates the first use of language by several
millennia.

The process of learning to use a language without being able to express its rules clearly is a phenomenon observed in children learning their native tongue. Consider the rule for forming questions from declarative sentences in English described by Noam Chomsky:

> The child analyzes the declarative sentence into abstract phrases; he then locates the first occurrence of "is" (etc.) that follows the first noun phrase; he then proposes this occurrence of "is," forming the corresponding question.
>
> Chomsky 1976: 31

Although small children may be completely unable to make conscious use of technical grammatical terms like "noun phrase," Chomsky contends that their linguistic behavior is sufficiently sophisticated that it cannot be accurately described without the use of such jargon. Given the complexity of language, it should not surprise us that someone (or even an entire speech community) could fail to describe their own intuitive linguistic practice accurately. Winch might well say that while we must consider the members of a linguistic community to be the sole arbiters of correct usage of their language, we need not assume that they are always successful in codifying their judgments in formal rules. The terms and concepts of the comparative linguist offer better examples of legitimate technical social-scientific concepts than those offered by Winch himself.

Although the example from linguistics may seem intuitively sound, it does not immediately solve all of Winch's difficulties. Winch's doctrine may create problems of *reflexivity* for the social scientist. In connection with Freudian psychoanalysis, Winch finds it important to mention that "Freudians try to get the patient himself to recognize the validity of the proffered explanation; that this indeed is almost a condition of its being accepted as the 'right' explanation" (ISS: 48). The patient's acceptance of the therapist's explanation is a very peculiar type of confirmation. It is a confirmation that is thought to be therapeutically beneficial. In other words, the very fact that the patient has come to agree with the psychoanalyst's explanation of his neurotic symptoms should itself bring about an alleviation of those symptoms. The explanation of the neurotic phenomenon cannot be verified without mitigating the phenomenon itself. One might say that Winch requires "destructive testing" in psychoanalysis, like a chemist who must change the make-up of a material in the course of discovering its *original* composition. If Winch were to extend this demand to other human sciences, it would create further problems. If native speakers are asked to endorse a certain codification of the grammar of their language, their reflective attention to the mechanics of their language would be likely to bring about changes in the way they speak.

If we do accept Winch's views on the question of technical concepts in the social sciences, its most important application will be to his own philo-

sophical system, including its technical terms, i.e. "rules," "criteria," and "modes of social life." These concepts must be universally applicable to the understanding of all cultures and practices. Winch must be sure that by talking about various cultures in terms of these concepts, he is not sinning against interpretative autonomy. In the words of David Bloor:

> Clearly, [for Winch] the activity called "philosophy" must represent a breakthrough to a realm of intellectual freedom. It must be an activity unconstrained by its relation to existing cultural resources; a mode of discourse conducted with the highest degree of self-awareness. It would be difficult to imagine a more un-Wittgensteinian conception.
>
> Bloor 1983: 177

Bloor's complaint is well taken but not necessarily as damaging as he might think. In ISS, Winch does indeed represent philosophy as a kind of universal discipline that can succeed in unearthing the epistemological foundations of any social practice in particular and of all possible practices in general (ISS: 18–21). Only in UPS does Winch really confront the difficulties involved in "translating" concepts from one culture or social practice into terms belonging to another (i.e., belonging to the community to which the social investigator must report her findings). There is no guarantee that the results of such translation will be perfect.

We must avoid conflating two different aspects of technical concepts, both of which are acceptable to Winch. A social scientist may find it necessary to use concepts unavailable to the people she studies, because (1) technical concepts may be used to formulate a rule discursively more accurately than can the rule followers themselves, or (2) technical concepts may be used to formulate a rule discursively in a way that, while perhaps sacrificing accuracy, is more immediately comprehensible to the social scientist's *audience*. For example, the grammatical rules formulated by a linguist may (1) more accurately describe the workings of a language than any rule currently known to speakers of the language, or (2) serve as an aid to foreigners who are trying to gain some proficiency in the language quickly. Obviously, these two possibilities are not mutually exclusive.

Might not Winch's own philosophy be "relativized?" Could it not be viewed as a peculiarly Western enterprise, a discipline that should inform *Western* understanding of human action and serve as a bridge for Westerners to understand other cultures? Perhaps people from a less philosophically inclined culture would develop entirely different ways to build bridges to other societies (although I find it difficult to imagine how). I will leave, for now, the analysis of the relationship between the discourse of the philosopher/social scientist and that of the subjects of her study for the latter part of this book, when the case of Azande witchcraft and magic will lend the discussion better focus.

6   Winch and interpretative charity

In this chapter, I will reformulate some of Winch's thoughts on the human sciences in terms of a principle of interpretative charity. *Reformulate* is a word worth emphasizing here, because Winch himself does not explicitly employ or even mention such a principle.[1] By introducing the notion of interpretative charity into my account of Winch's philosophy, I have placed myself in a position analogous to that of the social scientist who talks about a culture's practices using technical terms that are absent from its own language. According to Winch's own stipulations, such terms of art must be firmly rooted in concepts that are native to the culture being studied. I hope to show that a certain version of interpretative charity is implicit in Winch's thinking, and that by making it explicit our under-standing of Winch will gain in clarity.

Generally speaking, the expression "interpretative charity" refers to the often held[2] notion that when trying to understand the speech or action of fellow human beings, we should assume that they are not stupid, ignorant, untalented, or evil. When choosing between two possible interpretations of someone's speech or conduct, we should favor the interpretation that presents the person involved in a better light. When this kind of bias is formulated as an explicit rule, it is known as a *principle of interpretative charity* (or simply a *principle of charity*).

In the best of all possible worlds, a Winchian student of humanity could live through the entire process of socialization and become a fully fledged participant in whatever mode of social life she was interested in. Practically speaking, social scientists must use hermeneutic short-cuts like the principle of charity to choose between competing interpretations. (It is possible that contingent facts of psychology make the socialization option completely unavailable. Think of the difficulty that adults have in learning the correct pronunciation of a second language). Furthermore, since the job of the social scientist is also to describe alien social practices to an audience that does not participate in them, the principle of charity may serve as a guide to choosing between different descriptions of the same practice, both for the author who is struggling to describe the practice properly and for the reader who wishes to compare descriptions.

In order to understand the precise nature of interpretative charity found in Winch's philosophy, we must first return to a statement that I dealt with at the end of Chapter 1, and which must surely be the most widely quoted words in Winch's entire corpus:

> the point around which the main argument of this monograph revolves: that criteria of logic are not a direct gift of God, but arise out of, and are only intelligible in the context of, ways of living or modes of social life. It follows that one cannot apply criteria of logic to modes of social life as such. For instance, science is one such mode and religion is another; and each has criteria of intelligibility peculiar to itself.
>
> ISS: 100

Throughout his career, Winch has been attacked for making the above statement. He has been called a "Wittgensteinian Fideist" (Neilsen 1967) as well as a "conceptual relativist" (Trigg 1973: 14–22; Esposito 1977). When one first encounters his writings, it may seem that Winch means to undermine the status of scientific knowledge, that he believes in the existence of witches, that he has abandoned the standards of rational thought. I believe that such charges are in an important way unjustified, although Winch has not always been careful enough about avoiding misunderstanding.[3]

As I have tried to demonstrate in the previous chapters, Winch demands that the social investigator be aware that each of the various social phenomena ("modes of life" or "ways of life") she studies has its own, and sometimes strikingly idiosyncratic, criteria of intelligibility. It is the job of the social investigator, who for Winch is a kind of vagabond philosopher, to try to understand and appreciate differing modes of life in accordance with their various criteria of intelligibility:

> To take an uncommitted view of such competing conceptions is peculiarly the task of philosophy; it is not its business to award prizes to science, religion, or anything else. It is not its business to advocate any *Weltanschauung.* ... In Wittgenstein's words, "Philosophy leaves everything as it was."
>
> ISS: 103

The problem with this program is that while the thought that each mode of life has its own criterion of intelligibility may justify an unwillingness to rank the relative rationality of several modes of life according to a "universal" criterion (this was exactly what Winch derided in Pareto), it does not eliminate the possibility that some modes of life could be systematically unintelligible even when viewed under their native criteria of intelligibility. In fact, this kind of internal inconsistency serves as the motor of social change in dialectical theories of history. In order to avoid this

possibility, Winch must tacitly accept the following additional principle: when understood in terms of its peculiar criterion of intelligibility, a practice will not appear to be irrational or unintelligible in a systematic way. This may be restated in terms of a negative principle of interpretational charity:

> If a mode of life appears to be systematically irrational or unintelligible when viewed in terms of a particular criterion of intelligibility, then that criterion is not appropriate to the mode of life being studied.

The force of this principle becomes clearer when we compare the interpretation of an individual's actions with the interpretation of a society's mode of life. Suppose that we were to come across someone who seemed to be busy calculating consistently incorrect solutions to simple exercises in arithmetic. We could come to one of three conclusions: either the person was not doing the kind of arithmetic to which we are accustomed; or they had not learned arithmetic properly; or they suffered from some sort of cognitive disability. When dealing with an entire society, Winch would say, the second and third options are not available. The idea of doing arithmetic improperly is parasitic on a more general social practice of doing arithmetic properly. In a society where no one did arithmetic properly, arithmetic would simply not exist, and some other practice involving the manipulation of symbols would be going on in its place.

The example of doing arithmetic points to another important advantage of interpretative charity in Winch's philosophy of the social sciences. I mentioned that someone who was incapable of learning basic arithmetic might be diagnosed as suffering from a *cognitive disability*. Instead of interpreting that person's behavior, we explain it in terms of causal (perhaps even biochemical) factors. This is a common strategy in the human sciences. When behavior appears intelligible, we seek its meaning. When behavior becomes unintelligible, we seek its cause. In other words, if intelligibility (or rationality, consistency, etc.) is a prerequisite for interpretability, then that which is unintelligible is no longer susceptible to interpretation and thus becomes fair game for causal explanations. Since Winch is interested in promoting an entirely interpretative, non-explanatory social science, he must avoid the possibility of the kind of unintelligibility that invites causal explanation. While he might be prepared to admit grudgingly that unintelligibility may occur in the human individual, he is certainly unwilling to admit its possibility at the societal level. Winch's principle of charity serves as a bulwark against causal explanations in the social sciences.[4]

Can Winch account for social change?

Winch has been attacked repeatedly (MacIntyre 1967; Gellner 1970; Jarvie 1970) for his alleged inability to account for social and conceptual change.

The basic problem is that everyone agrees that in the course of a society's history, great changes can occur in its ways of thinking and living, and that such changes involve moments of self-critical thinking. Communities are perfectly capable of condemning their own earlier concepts and practices. According to Winch, such self-critical thoughts would have to be couched in terms of the society's existing conceptual framework. Surely such internal attacks must always target inconsistencies within the framework itself. If, as Winch seems to be saying, naturally occurring conceptual frameworks are always internally consistent (at least in accordance with *their own* internal criteria of consistency), how can people who think in terms of such conceptual frameworks ever mount attacks against them?

While Winch does accept the reality of social and conceptual change, he does not describe it in terms of a dialectical process of self-criticism. Instead, he prefers to talk in terms of developing traditions and new applications of existing concepts. Ideas change largely in reaction to changes in the social and natural environment, and human history "is the story of how men have tried to carry over what they regard as important in their modes of behavior into the new situations which they have had to face" (ISS: 64–5). Winch is willing to admit that "The development of an historical tradition may involve deliberation, argument, the canvassing of rival interpretations, followed perhaps by the adoption of some agreed compromise or the springing up of rival schools" (ISS: 93). However, even such pluralistic and creative processes spring ultimately from the inherent indeterminacy involved in the application of a rule "in circumstances markedly different from any in which it has not previously been applied" (ISS: 92).

There is at least one section of ISS that appears to consider an instance of discontinuous conceptual change, i.e. change involving the creation of new concepts rather than reinterpretation of the old. The opening paragraph of the final chapter of ISS (pp. 121–2) offers a description of the invention of the germ theory of disease that is remarkably prescient of Thomas S. Kuhn's celebrated book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Winch contrasts the discovery of "a new germ which is responsible for a certain disease" with the "first introduction of the concept of a germ into the language of medicine." He describes the former as "a discovery within the existing framework of ideas" (a very near equivalent to Kuhn's "normal science"), while the latter constitutes "a completely new way of looking at the whole problem of the causation of diseases, the adoption of new diagnostic techniques, the asking of new kinds of question about illnesses" (again, not a bad approximation of Kuhn's "revolutionary science"). Unfortunately, while Winch obviously grants the historical reality of revolutionary conceptual change, he does not tell us how it takes place. The *fall* of an existing paradigm might be explained by Winch along the same lines as his attribution of the "breakdown" of "traditional customary modes of behavior" to the "strain" imposed by novel situations (ISS: 64). If a set of concepts is simply inapplicable to new circumstances,

it will fall into disuse. The *origination* of the new conceptual framework remains unintelligible for Winch. I think Winch's difficulty here stems from his doctrine of SNORF. On the one hand, he understands conceptual change as being environmentally driven. Changes in natural and human conditions force new applications of existing concepts. However, to say that such environmental factors could give rise to the creation of radically *new* concepts would seem to suggest that concepts (and the rules for their application) might result directly from the interaction of individuals with their environment. In principle, Winch could excuse these new concepts and rules as being merely contingently private in origin. It would still be something of an embarrassment for Winch's broader vision of the inherent sociality of human thought if the very core of a new conceptual framework were held to be the creation of *individuals* responding to their environment. Winch's *reactive* view of social and conceptual change also poses a threat to his anti-naturalism and to the autonomy of social practices. In as much as a society changes in reaction to natural conditions, the natural sciences can have a direct bearing on the prediction and explanation of such change. For instance, if veterinary epidemiologists were to predict that the cattle herds of the Sudanese Nuer were about to be devastated by a newly discovered disease, it would also be reasonable for anthropologists to predict that the sacrifice of cattle would soon become less central to the practice of Nuer religion. Furthermore, this prediction would be based on the use of concepts (vector of transmission, rate of mutation, and so on) that could be completely alien to Nuer thinking. No doubt a civilization whose science is more advanced than that of the modern West would make use of an understanding of cancer that we have not yet achieved in order to explain our own inability to cure that disease.

There remains much to be said about Winchian charity, but I think that at this point it would be preferable to go on to a discussion of the main application that Winch made of his ideas to the study of actual social phenomena, i.e. Winch's interpretation of magic and religion. His most important writing on these issues appears in UPS, in which he criticizes epistemological assumptions made by the anthropologist Sir Edward E. Evans-Pritchard in his book *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937). Before discussing Winch's essay, I must first review some main themes of Evans-Pritchard's book.

7 Evans-Pritchard's study of Zande mysticism

Sir Edward E. Evans-Pritchard is universally acclaimed as one of the greatest anthropologists of the twentieth century. His first important book, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (hereafter, *Witchcraft*), published in 1937, had a profound influence on an entire generation of anthropologists (Evens 1996: 23) and continues to stimulate the interest of both social scientists and philosophers. Although Peter Winch was not the first philosopher to discuss *Witchcraft*,[1] UPS was largely responsible for making Evans-Pritchard's book the ethnographic text perhaps most frequently cited by philosophers. In *Witchcraft*, Evans-Pritchard describes the system of "mystical" beliefs and practices held by the Sudanese Azande, a traditional culture that supports itself through a combination of agriculture, hunting, fishing, and gathering. According to Evans-Pritchard, the Azande use their mystical ideas to make seemingly chance events (especially misfortunes) more intelligible and controllable. In our own culture, misfortunes are often analyzed in terms of predictable, causally explicable, processes working in combination with largely unpredictable factors, which are, for all practical purposes, random. The Azande account for these random factors in terms of "witchcraft." One of Evans-Pritchard's own examples should clarify these ideas:

> In Zandeland sometimes an old granary collapses. There is nothing remarkable in this. Every Zande knows that termites eat the supports in course of time and that even the hardest woods decay after years of service. Now a granary is the summerhouse of a Zande homestead and people sit beneath it in the heat of the day and chat or play the African hole-game or work at some craft. Consequently it may happen that there are people sitting beneath the granary when it collapses and they are injured, for it is a heavy structure made of beams and clay and may be stored with eleusine as well. Now why should these particular people have been sitting under this particular granary at the particular moment when it collapsed? That it should collapse is easily intelligible, but why should it have collapsed at the particular moment when these particular people were sitting beneath it? ... The Zande knows that

the supports were undermined by termites and that people were sitting beneath the granary in order to escape the heat and glare of the sun. But he knows besides why these two events occurred at a precisely similar moment in time and space. It was due to the action of witchcraft. If there had been no witchcraft, people would have been sitting under the granary and it would not have fallen on them, or it would have collapsed but the people would not have been sheltering under it at the time. Witchcraft explains the coincidence of these two happenings.

Witchcraft: 69–70

A Western-educated engineer might say that the collapse of the granary at a particular moment resulted from the interplay of incalculably numerous parameters: the microstructure of various segments of the supporting beams, wind speed and direction, shifting and settling of the stored grain, etc. The Azande make sense of the apparently chance aspect of misfortunate events by blaming them on witchcraft.

But to what does the term "witchcraft" apply in the Zande setting, and what does it mean to be a "witch"? A Zande witch (or *boro mangu*) is a seemingly normal man or woman who secretly exercises evil, psychic powers that do injury to, or cause problems for, other people. The physiological seat of these powers is "witchcraft-substance," a material substance whose presence may be discovered by autopsy in the bodies of dead witches. Furthermore, the presence of witchcraft-substance (i.e. being a witch) is a condition inherited by men from their fathers and women from their mothers.

Although post-mortem examination is an accurate method for the identification of witches, it is obviously of little practical usefulness. A witch who is responsible for someone's death must be identified while still alive in order to be killed in vengeance.[2] A witch who is merely causing problems must be identified and pacified. As is their custom in dealing with otherwise unsolvable dilemmas, the Zande turn to their oracles to identify troublesome witches. In particular, the most prestigious oracle, known as the *benge* or poison oracle, is used for locating the perpetrators of witchcraft. The poison oracle begins with the asking of a question; the death of a fowl is declared as indicating the truth of one possible answer, while its survival points to a different answer. A special poison is then administered to a fowl, and how the bird copes with being poisoned determines the oracle's message in the way previously specified. Next, the oracle's response is verified by repeating the whole procedure on a different bird, this time letting the death of the bird indicate the answer previously associated with survival, and *vice versa*. If both trials are consistent, the oracle is a success. If the answers indicated are not consistent, it is assumed that some technical difficulty (e.g. the breach of a taboo, poor quality of the poison) has interfered with the workings of the oracle.

Protection against witchcraft is available to the Azande in the form of

special whistles, medicines, and other magical devices and techniques. Sometimes, Azande will consult ritual specialists, whom Evans-Pritchard calls witch doctors. These are not as awe-inspiring as their name would suggest; they do not enjoy special social status, and their ability to identify witches and neutralize witchcraft is hardly held to be infallible. Besides counteracting witchcraft, Azande magical practices may be directed toward other practical goals; travelers may use magic to keep the sun from setting before reaching home, and one simple technique allows one to appear in someone else's erotic dream! Furthermore, while magic in general is held by the Azande to be somewhat effective, different techniques enjoy quite different reputations for reliability, and individuals may select techniques in accordance with their own opinions and practical experience.

Evans-Pritchard on the epistemological status of mysticism

In the second chapter of *Witchcraft*, Evans-Pritchard defines a number of ethnographic categories "to which" he was fully aware "some students may object" (*Witchcraft*: 11). Together, these categories constitute a system for ranking the epistemological status of various beliefs and the rationality of various behaviors:

> MYSTICAL NOTIONS. These are the patterns of thought that attribute to phenomena supra-sensible qualities which, or part of which, are not derived from any observation or cannot be logically inferred from it, and which they do not possess.
> COMMON-SENSE NOTIONS. These are patterns of thought that attribute to phenomena only what men observe in them or what can logically be inferred from observation. So long as a notion does not assert something which has not been observed, it is not classed as mystical even though it is mistaken on account of incomplete observation. It still differs from mystical notions, in which supra-sensible forces are always posited.
> SCIENTIFIC NOTIONS. Science has developed out of common sense but is far more methodical and has better techniques of observation and reasoning. ... Our body of scientific knowledge and logic are the sole arbiters of what are mystical, common-sense, and scientific notions. Their judgments are never absolute.
> RITUAL BEHAVIOR. Any behavior that is accounted for by mystical notions. There is no objective nexus between the behavior and the event it is intended to cause. Such behavior is usually intelligible to us only when we know the mystical notions associated with it.
> EMPIRICAL BEHAVIOR. Any behavior that is accounted for by common-sense notions. Such behavior is usually intelligible to us without explanation if we see the whole of it and its effects.
> *Witchcraft*: 12

Evans-Pritchard's typically straightforward presentation of his epistemo-logical categories may create the impression that he was trapped in a naively positivistic mind-set. Worse yet, his definitions suffer from an internal, logical problem. Evans-Pritchard seems to be engaged in making a category error. From his own words, we might understand that using science to determine the presence or absence of mystical qualities is as wrong-headed as using a light meter to measure the brilliance of a mathe-matical proof. Evans-Pritchard says that science is based on observation. How then can science possibly judge the presence or absence of mystical qualities, which are "supra-sensible," i.e. qualities that by definition are not susceptible to empirical observation? This difficulty brings up deep issues, which, as we shall see, are closely related to Winch's own critique of Evans-Pritchard. The immediate question is what does Evans-Pritchard mean when he calls mystical qualities "supra-sensible?" Are they not susceptible to sensory detection in principle, like the brilliance of a mathe-matical proof, or are they qualities whose sensory detection is logically possible but which lack any empirical reality? Occasionally, Evans-Pritchard clearly supports the former interpretation, as when he writes that "Magic is very largely employed against mystical powers, witchcraft and sorcery, since its action transcends experience it cannot easily be contra-dicted by experience" (*Witchcraft*: 475). Be that as it may, *Witchcraft* offers many examples of Zande beliefs involving the purportedly sensory observation of clearly mystical phenomena. As I have already mentioned, witchcraft substance was thought to appear as a material substance detectable by autopsy in the bodies of dead witches. More dramatically, the logical possibility of physically observing mystical phenomena is evidenced by Evans-Pritchard's description of his own "encounter" with an apparition of witchcraft flying towards its victim:

> I have only once seen witchcraft on its path. ... About midnight ... I noticed a bright light passing at the back of my servants' huts towards the homestead of a man called Tupoi. ... I followed its passage until a grass screen obscured the view. ... Shortly afterwards, on the same morning, an old relative of Tupoi and an inmate of his homestead died. This event fully explained the light I had seen. I never discovered its real origin ... but the coincidence of the direction along which the light moved and the subsequent death accorded well with Zande ideas.
>
> *Witchcraft*: 34

So are mystical phenomena observable, or are they not? I propose a clarifi-cation of Evans-Pritchard's definitions. A mystical occurrence may be thought of as involving three elements: a cause, an outcome, and a causal mechanism connecting the two. Often, the cause of a mystical phenomenon, i.e. a magic ritual, will be easily available to observation. Furthermore, the result of the mystical occurrence, i.e. someone's recovery

from illness, is also clearly evident. However, the causal mechanism connecting the magic ritual to the patient's cure is rarely observable. If direct observability of causal mechanisms were the sole criterion separating the "mystical" from the "scientific," much of modern physics would have to join Zande magic in the category of "mystical" beliefs.[3] This is why Evans-Pritchard adds the important clause stating that the presence of mystical qualities is "not derived from any observation or cannot be logically inferred from it." I understand Evans-Pritchard to be basically saying the following: that mystical properties are not directly observable by definition, and that it so happens that they fail to serve any legitimate explanation in relation to the phenomena of empirical reality that might indirectly justify the presumption of their reality.

   A proper appreciation of the role of Evans-Pritchard's list of definitions in his ethnographic work must take into account his own explicit caveats regarding their use:

> These definitions will be sufficient for our purposes at the *commencement* [my emphasis] of our study ... a social fact is generally complex and can seldom be placed wholly in any one analytical category. ... We will create new tools when the need for them is felt ... our categories are intended to class only certain notions ... and not all notions.
> *Witchcraft*: 12

Zande "medicines" offer a good example of how one aspect of a culture can straddle different epistemological categories:

> Some Zande medicines actually do produce the effect aimed at, but so far as I have been able to observe the Zande does not make any qualitative distinction between these medicines and those that have no objective consequences. To him they are all alike *ngua*, medicine, and all are operated in magical rites in the same manner. A Zande observes taboos and addresses fish-poisons before throwing them into the water just as he addresses a crocodile's tooth while he rubs the stems of his bananas with it to make them grow. And the fish-poison really does paralyze the fish while, truth to tell, the crocodile's tooth has no influence over bananas.
> *Witchcraft*: 316

Furthermore, although Evans-Pritchard categorized the Zande oracles as "mystical," he did not mean by this to demean the Zande way of life or label the Azande as crazy. In Clifford Geertz's words, Evans-Pritchard was "extraordinarily interested to picture Africa as a logical and prudential place" (Geertz 1988: 70). For instance, he writes that while living in the Sudan, he "always kept a supply of poison for the use of my household and neighbors and we regulated our affairs in accordance with the oracle's

decisions." Evans-Pritchard states (apparently only half-ironically) that he "found this as satisfactory a way of running my home and affairs as any other I know of" (*Witchcraft*: 270). One might say that the main goal of *Witchcraft* is to explain how a generally astute and practical people such as the Azande could believe in so many apparently fantastic mystical ideas.

Evans-Pritchard's twenty-two explanations of just how mystical beliefs and practices manage to persist (obviously built on the earlier work of Edward Tylor; see Evans-Pritchard 1933: 285–6) are set out in the crucial twentieth section of the second chapter of part four of *Witchcraft*. These include:

2 Witchcraft, oracles and magic form an intellectually coherent system. Each explains and proves the others. Death is proof of witchcraft. It is avenged by magic. The achievement of vengeance-magic is proved by the poison oracle. The accuracy of the poison oracle is determined by the king's oracle, which is above suspicion.
   ...
4 Scepticism, far from being smothered, is recognized, even inculcated. But it is only about certain medicines and certain magicians. By contrast it tends to support other medicines and magicians.
5 The results which magic is supposed to produce actually happen after rites are performed. Vengeance-magic is made and a man dies. Hunting-magic is made and animals are speared.
6 Contradictions between their beliefs are not noticed by Azande because the beliefs are not all present at the same time but function in different situations. They are therefore not brought into opposition.
7 Each man and kinship group acts without cognizance of the actions of others. People do not pool their ritual experiences.
8 A Zande is born into a culture with ready-made patterns of belief which have the weight of tradition behind them. ... Many of his beliefs are axiomatic, a Zande finds it difficult to understand that other peoples do not share them.
   ...
10 The failure of any rite is accounted for in advance by a variety of mystical notions – e.g. witchcraft, sorcery and taboo.
11 Magic is only made to produce events which are likely in any case.
12 Not too much is claimed for magic. ... It is not claimed that without the aid of magic a man must fail.
   ...
15 Success is often expressed in terms of magic – e.g. a successful hunter gets a reputation for magic ... whether he possesses medicines or not.
   ...
18 Not being experimentally inclined, they do not test the efficacy of their medicines.

Witchcraft: 475–8

What is perhaps most striking about Evans-Pritchard's explanations is their immediate intelligibility to the Western reader. Everyone has come across the action of such mechanisms in the construction of his or her own beliefs. Reason 8 simply expresses the authority of popular opinion, while reason 11 neatly parallels the universal tendency of politicians to credit even the most unavoidable aspects of public well-being to their own administrative skills. Reason 10 is reminiscent of Thomas Kuhn's (1962) description of how normal science uses *ad hoc* apologies to protect itself from observations that contradict the ruling scientific paradigm. Barnes (1968) has explicitly developed a comparison between Azande attitudes toward witchcraft and the thinking of scientists regarding currently normal science.

Winch's critique of Evans-Pritchard

Although Winch appreciates Evans-Pritchard's ethnographic acumen, he rejects the application of the epistemological categories defined in *Witchcraft* to the description of Zande magical beliefs and practices. Evans-Pritchard states that "our body of scientific knowledge and logic are the sole arbiters of what are mystical, common-sense, and scientific notions." Furthermore, he has defined mystical notions as attributing to phenomena "supra-sensible qualities which, or part of which, they do not possess." In other words, our science and logic serve as the ultimate tribunal of reality. When science decides that the Zande concept of "witches" is a mystical notion, it has also determined that there are no such people as witches. Winch is perfectly willing to accept the fact that Western science and Zande mysticism hold different ideas about the nature of reality. However, Winch complains, "Evans-Pritchard is not content with elucidating the differences in the two concepts of reality involved; he wants to go farther and say; our concept of reality is the correct one, the Azande are mistaken. But the difficulty is to see what 'correct' and 'mistaken' can mean in this context" (UPS: 23).

It is important to understand the precise nature of Winch's criticism. Winch is not merely making the skeptical philosopher's point that Evans-Pritchard was naive in calling Zande magic "false" and Western science "true." Skeptical doctrines are often radical enough to endorse, in principle, an agnostic attitude toward any intellectual conflict whatsoever, be it between wizards and scientists or between geographers and flat-Earthers. A deep understanding of the details of any particular conflict is relatively unimportant for the application of the general skeptical position. If Winch were such a skeptic, he would be saying nothing about the validity of Evans-Pritchard's interpretation of Zande magic, oracles, etc. He would merely be chastising Evans-Pritchard for making philosophically infelicitous judgments regarding the truth and rationality of mystical beliefs and practices. The only anthropological cash value of such a skeptical exercise

would be to require Evans-Pritchard to address the question "Why do the Azande disagree with our judgment of the futility of their magic?" instead of his actual question: "Why [do] Azande ... not perceive the futility of their magic?" (*Witchcraft*: 475).[4] In reality, Winch's disagreement with Evans-Pritchard is much deeper. Evans-Pritchard's rejection of Zande magic as futile points to his underlying assumption that the goal of magic is to produce useful, practical results. Rather than quarrel with Evans-Pritchard's estimation of the utility of Zande magic, Winch suggests that it was never intended to serve as a type of technology to begin with. The next chapter deals with Winch's own views on how magic should be understood.[5]

8   Winch's interpretation of magic
       and religion

For Winch, the proper understanding of religion and the proper under-
standing of magic are closely related projects. On the one hand, Winch
proposes that we think of primitive magic (and religion – Winch tends to
conflate the two) in comparison with Western religion rather than with
Western science. On the other hand, Winch feels that even within our own
society, people are not fully aware of the radical differences between scien-
tific and religious practices. How great a chasm divides religion from
science? In this connection, it is worth recalling Wittgenstein's celebrated
list of language games:

> Giving orders, and obeying them – Describing the appearance of an
> object, or giving its measurements – Constructing an object from a
> description (a drawing) – Reporting an event – Speculating about an
> event – Forming and testing a hypothesis – Presenting the results of an
> experiment in tables and diagrams – Making up a story; and reading it
> – Play-acting – Singing catches – Guessing riddles – Making a joke;
> telling it – Solving a problem in practical arithmetic – Translating from
> one language into another – Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting,
> praying.
>
> Wittgenstein 1968: I: 23

Is the difference between the religious/magical and scientific uses of
language comparable with that between, say, giving orders and speculating
about an event? Or perhaps it is as great as that between describing the
appearance of an object and singing catches? Winch seems to have
wavered on this crucial issue. Does primitive magic offer an alternative
way of thinking about the world, or is it like music, which although it is
somehow expressive, cannot be said to be "about" anything in particular?
It is my contention that the corpus of Winch's writings is gravely
ambiguous regarding this question, and that his lack of clarity on this issue
is responsible for a great deal of the negative comment on his work.
   Given Winch's implicit principle of interpretative charity, it is possible
to delineate two opposing strategies for understanding magic and religion,

each with its own characteristic strengths and weaknesses.[1] Interpretations that I call instrumentalist[2] assume that spells, amulets, and oracles are meant to be instrumentally effective, just as scientific technologies are in Western societies. For example (says the instrumentalist), when a priestess performs a ceremony in the home of a disease-stricken child, she intends to effect a cure, just as if she were a Western physician prescribing antibiotics. Similarly, literalist interpretations hold that talk about witches, angels, and what-not refers literally to supernatural beings that exist in much the same way as do ordinary mortals. Expressivist interpretations of magic and religion offer an alternative to instrumentalism. Expressivist interpretations require that magic and religion be seen as concerned with the contemplation and expression of human emotions, hopes, values, etc. rather than with the achievement of practical goals. Although instrumentalism and literalism do not necessarily imply each other (someone could believe in the instrumental efficacy of wholly metaphorical spells, or in the merely expressive function of petitions made to a very real god), usually they do go together. In the so-called "intellectualist"[3] school of anthropology, the literal meaning of magical and religious utterances is seen as expressing a world view that supports belief in the instrumental utility of magical and religious practices, much as Western science supports Western technology.

The intellectualist interpretation appears to enjoy the advantage of simplicity; it allows us to avoid the task of deciphering would-be symbolic actions and utterances. If a shaman says that he is trying to bring rain, then that is exactly what he is trying to do, just as an airplane pilot seeding the clouds with silver iodide. However, Winch's principle of charity (most clearly in Henderson's (1987) version) poses great difficulty for such an explanation. If we say that the point of the shaman's activity is to make rain, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that we have construed his way of life as incorporating ineffective means to his society's ends, and that we have therefore misconstrued his way of life. Apparently, our only avenue of escape is to propose an unorthodox (to say the least) interpretation of the meteorological data that demonstrates the effectiveness of the shaman's rainmaking. This mode of interpretation is not always as crazy as it may sound, especially in the case of magical treatment of disease, when strong psychological factors may be in evidence.[4]

The expressivist interpretation of magic and ritual may seem more congenial to Winchian charity. Here, the idea is to find a safe cultural and linguistic framework for these phenomena that will make them more palatable to a modern Westerner. This is something akin to how Hollywood could make *The Wizard of Oz* into an entirely reasonable story: five minutes before the end of the last reel, Dorothy wakes up to discover that her fantastic adventures were all a dream! There is nothing peculiar about saying that people really *can* dream about talking lions and evil witches. Actually, even the dream device was not necessary to make the cultural presence of the film entirely rational. The studio produced the

film in order to make money, and the audience watched it in order to be entertained. Once we know the point of producing such a film, we see that it is a very effective means to the society's ends. Similarly, as soon as we realize that the real point of the shaman's "rainmaking" is, for example, to entertain, it too becomes eminently reasonable. It is no longer necessary to pore over the weather reports seeking confirmation of the shaman's abilities. However, we may find ourselves rechecking our ethnographic notes. If we never catch the shaman out of role, and his audience never seems to put an end to its "suspension of disbelief," we will find ourselves searching for the hint of a knowing wink in the ethnographic record with the same desperate diligence that we had previously applied to finding evidence of the shaman's rainmaking prowess in the meteorological record.

Many writers have assumed that Winch considers cultural systems such as Azande practices surrounding witchcraft to involve alternative ways of viewing reality. In UPS (p. 14), Winch asks himself whether "it is in fact the case that a primitive system of magic, like that of the Azande, constitutes a coherent universe of discourse like science, in terms of which an intelligible conception of reality and clear ways of deciding what beliefs are and are not in agreement with this reality can be discerned." He never answers this question in a decisive way. On the one hand, he writes that "Zande notions of witchcraft do not constitute a quasi-scientific understanding of the world" (UPS: 26). Yet he immediately qualifies this statement with the footnote: "Notice that I have not said that Azande conceptions of witchcraft have nothing to do with understanding the world at all. The point is that a different form of the concept of understanding is involved here." In a similar vein, Winch is at pains to explain away apparent contradictions in the system of Azande oracles, since "a set of beliefs and practices cannot make sense insofar as they involve contradictions" (UPS: 19), while at the same time he is willing to allow for certain internal contradictions in the Zande witchcraft beliefs, since these are problematic only for the "European, [who], obsessed with pressing Zande thought where it will not go – to a contradiction – is guilty of misunderstanding, not the Zande" (UPS: 26).

Until this point, it would seem that Winch considers Zande witchcraft beliefs to be somehow descriptive, albeit in a non-scientific way, of reality as it is experienced by the Azande. But perhaps things are not so simple. In his later essay, "Meaning and religious language" (Winch 1987b: 107–31), he tries to clarify his interpretation of religious language (which can fairly be extended to his understanding of religious and magical phenomena in general) by comparing it with the language of mathematics:

> While geometry does not describe the properties of empirical structures, it does have an application in such descriptions and makes possible ways of thinking and techniques (for example, of measurement) in dealing with them which would not be otherwise possible.

This is its "relation to reality" which does not lie in its being a description
of some "other realm of reality" distinct from that to which empirical
structures belong. ... Religious uses of language equally, I want to
say, are not descriptions of an 'order of reality' distinct from earthly life
with which we are familiar. ... The uses do, however, have an application
in what religious people say and do in the course of their life on earth;
and this is where their "relation to reality" is to be sought.

ibid.: 126

According to Winch, the religious person experiences the world in terms of
a conceptual framework peculiar to his or her faith. However, the status of
this conceptual framework for the believer is not comparable to that of a
scientific theory for the (unsophisticated) scientist. The scientist may
believe that her theory describes actual structures in the "real" world, but
the faith of Winch's *homo religiosus* is a purely formal conceptual frame-
work, populated by entities as blatantly abstract as the dimensionless
points of Euclidean geometry. A loss of faith is not comparable to the kind
of change that occurred in astronomy when scientists stopped believing in
the existence of a special non-terrestrial substance of which celestial bodies
were thought to be composed. It is closer to the way in which a (modern)
mathematician would react to the discovery that algebraic topology, rather
than Euclidean geometry, is best suited to the solution of a certain type of
problem. The validity of geometry would remain intact, but it would
become less important for the mathematician's understanding of nature.
Perhaps the mathematical analogy (even if Winch himself proposed it) is
too bloodless to compare fairly with religion. An analogy with ethics
would be more appropriate. Consider R.M. Hare's discussion of *prima
facie* moral principles in the third chapter ("Archangels and proles") of his
book *Moral Thinking* (1981: 44–64). He describes two extreme styles of
moral thinking, each of which is associated with a fictional moral being,
i.e. "archangel" and "prole." While the archangel is capable of basing his
moral decisions on an omniscient understanding of the consequences of his
actions, the prole is limited to applying general *prima facie* principles in
the hope that in the majority of cases the consequences of their application
will be positive. Hare proposes that the moral thinking of real human
beings should lie somewhere between the two extremes. On the one hand,
we are simply not equipped with angelic omniscience and unlimited
powers of reason. If we tried to act as archangels, we would be paralyzed
by indecision. On the other hand, there are situations where the blind
application of *prima facie* principles is clearly contra-indicated by our
reasonable expectations of unacceptable consequences. It would not be
surprising if a society were to grant some of its more fundamental *prima
facie* principles the status of divine law, of being "God's will." Such funda-
mental principles, far from serving as mere rules of thumb for the solution
of moral quandaries, would constitute the conceptual categories in which

moral thinking may take place. One need only consider the role of the concept of "rights" in Western moral discourse in order to see how such categories can take on lives of their own. Winch seems to grant talk about "God" a relationship to reality similar to that enjoyed by talk about "rights." We may interpret our existence morally in the light of a doctrine of natural rights and/or religiously in the light of faith in God. No empirical investigation can directly disprove the "existence" of either God or human rights. However, if despite our adoption of a rights-based morality we were to be forced over and over again by life's complexity to adopt the stance of Hare's archangel, if we were to find the doctrine of rights systematically unequal to the moral challenges of our existence, we would seek a new moral framework. Similarly, if a religious person came to the conclusion that she could no longer make sense of her life in terms of her relationship to God, she might undergo (or Winch might say this would constitute) a loss of faith.

A crucial difference remains between mathematics and ethics on the one hand and religion and magic on the other. While ethics and mathematics do utilize abstract theoretical terms, such as "the right to privacy" or "parallel lines," these terms are not used *symbolically*. In contrast, religion and magic trade heavily on symbolic or metaphorical meanings.[5] Analogously, Winch insists upon the symbolic nature of the speech and actions relating Azande witchcraft beliefs: "We have a drama of resentments, evil doing, revenge, expiation, in which there are ways of dealing (symbolically) with misfortunes and their disruptive effects on a man's relations with his fellows" (UPS: 40).

Unlike our own scientific activity, Zande magic (according to Winch) is not concerned with manipulating nature but with action and speech used symbolically to allow people to relate to the world in a certain way. What then is the point of magico-religious language (and by extension magico-religious practices)? What new way does it afford people to relate to the world? It does not, as we have seen, denote "empirical structures"; nor does it describe some "other realm of reality." Rather, religious and magical uses of language "have an application in what religious people say and do in the course of their life on earth; and this is where their 'relation to reality' is to be sought." What exactly is this "application?" We have already seen that they serve to express something symbolically. That "something" for both Christian prayer[6] and Zande witchcraft is an attitude toward the contingencies of life:

> I do not say that Zande magical rites are at all like Christian prayers of supplication in the positive attitude to contingencies which they express. What I do suggest is that they are alike in that they do, or may, express an attitude to contingencies, rather than an attempt to control these.
>
> UPS: 39–40

What is the *point* of expressing these attitudes? To allow life to go on in the face of adversity whose control is beyond the technological capabilities of the society in question:

> He may wish thereby, in a certain sense, to free himself from dependence on it [on something important to his life yet over which he has imperfect control]. I do not mean by making sure that it does not let him down, because the point is that, whatever he does, he may still be let down. The important thing is that he should understand that and come to terms with it.
>
> UPS: 39

The problem of human limitations goes beyond the realm of technology and even enters into dimensions of life such as ethics and morality. In his essay "Meaning and religious language," Winch describes the plight of a religious person facing a moral dilemma whose rational solution is beyond his abilities:

> A man is threatened by a horrible death which I have the power to prevent. I know him perhaps to be an evil man whose continued existence is far more likely to result in more evil in the world than would his death, however horrible. ... I may feel, however, that I cannot, that it is impossible for me, simply to leave him to his fate; and, if I am a religious man, this impossibility may present itself in the form that it is God's will that I should save him.
>
> Winch 1987b: 130

Winch describes a situation where someone is caught in a classic dilemma involving a conflict between a deeply felt duty to help a fellow human being and the consideration of consequences that favor the other's death. Here, the notion of "God's will" somehow allows the religious person to go on with life, to avoid paralysis in the face of an impossible decision.

So far, I have delineated Winch's interpretation of magic and religion. According to this view, the role of magic and religion is to allow people to contemplate and express, through indirect means (symbolically or metaphorically), their attitudes toward the contingencies of life so as to allow them to go on living in the face of these contingencies. Now we may see how magic as understood by Winch fulfills his principle of charity.

Magic, religion, and the constraints of charity

Winch's choice of an expressivist interpretation of magic and ritual may be seen as supported by an argument from charity against the instrumentalist alternative. For the purpose of illustration, we may turn to Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's The Golden Bough* (1979) for some

rather simple versions of the anti-instrumentalist argument. Here, for example, is what it has to say about Sir James Frazer's attempt to defend the instrumentalist interpretation of a rainmaking ceremony:

> Frazer says it is very difficult to discover the error in magic and this is why it persists so long – because, for example, a ceremony which is supposed to bring rain is sure to appear effective sooner or later. But then it is queer that people do not notice sooner that it does rain sooner or later anyway.
>
> Wittgenstein 1979: 2e

Clearly, an argument from interpretative charity is at work here. *We* know that whether or not the ceremony is performed, the rain will eventually begin of its own accord. To think that the performers of the rain ceremony are any less well informed than we are ourselves would be an affront to interpretative charity. Therefore, we must conclude that the participants have something other than making rain in mind when they perform the ceremony. So goes the claim. Since Wittgenstein does not think that such rituals are performed in order to procure material benefits, he must assign them another role in the lives of their societies. For Wittgenstein, as for Winch after him, this other role belongs to the expressive rather than instrumental category of social action: "And magic does give representation to a wish; it expresses a wish" (*ibid.*: 4e).[7]

Similarly, addressing Frazer's instrumentalist explanation of the strange complex of rituals involving the King of the Wood in ancient Nemi, Wittgenstein comments bluntly: "But it never becomes plausible that people do all of this out of sheer stupidity" (*ibid.*: 1e).

Once more he proposes an expressivist interpretation of the ritual: "Put that account of the King of the Wood at Nemi together with the phrase 'the majesty of death', and you see they are one. The life of the priest-king shows what is meant by that phrase" (*ibid.*: 3e).

Winch may be seen as making a similar argument against instrumentalist interpretations of magic. Winchian charity demands that if a given interpretation of a set of social practices finds them to be systematically irrational, we may conclude only that that interpretation has applied criteria of intelligibility which are inappropriate to the practices being studied. In the present instance, if the practice of magic appears utterly foolish when considered in instrumental terms, this only goes to show that we have misconstrued the "point" of magic, and we must reject the application of instrumentalist criteria of intelligibility to it.

Winch's interpretation of magic and religion fulfills the requirements of charity by completely removing the sting of cultural diversity. What began with a bang as a heroic project of understanding alternative "criteria of rationality" (UPS: 31) ends with a whimper, a non-realist Zande apologetic. First, magic is deemed symbolic. Whenever we might think that

something has gone wrong with magic, it may be countered that we have misinterpreted its symbolism. But even if we succeed in deciphering magical symbolism, we still have no basis for criticizing magic, since it is not meant to describe or control "empirical structures" but rather to express something much more slippery, namely "attitudes." According to Henderson (1987), the idea that magical notions are expressive of attitudes is Winch's main strategy for interpreting magic in a way that satisfies his general principle of charity. By interpreting magical beliefs as expressive of attitudes, (Henderson claims) Winch achieves two results. First, "expressions of attitudes (such as groaning or kissing a loved one's picture) do not have truth conditions. Thus they cannot contradict [or be contradicted by] indicative statements" (*ibid.*: 161). Second, it would be exceedingly difficult to prove that a mode of expression does not serve well the goal of expressing life's concerns and worries in a way that "allows life to go on." By assigning magic and religion such a weakly defined role, Winch assures that they will conform to his principle of charity.

All in all, Winch has completely insulated magic and religion from possibly presenting any challenge to the standard, secular, Western view of reality. Rather than daring us to peer over the epistemological abyss to spy promised new worlds, these new worlds have been thoroughly homogenized with our own. Ironically, Winch's explanations are *too* successful at making primitive magic intelligible to modern man. Witchcraft becomes as harmless as any expressive art; we do not criticize the accuracy of Zande oracles any more than we expect the performance of military music to win battles.

What is Winch being charitable about?

I would like to end this chapter with a brief discussion of an additional aspect of Winchian charity that comes up in his later writings. As we have seen, Winch's charity seems to leave him open to the charge of relativism. If social practices must be understood as not systematically failing their purposes, and different social practices that are devoted to the description of the world do so in apparently conflicting ways, relativism seems unavoidable. If we must respect all of the beliefs held by the various human communities of the world, even when these are in deep disagreement with each other, what will become of objectivity and truth? In his later writings, Winch attempts to counter this criticism by protesting that he is not concerned with beliefs but rather with the *languages* in which beliefs are stated. Answering Roger Trigg (1973), Winch writes:

> Unlike Trigg, I did not speak of a language as expressing a community's beliefs about reality. On the contrary, my main objection to Evans-Pritchard's treatment of Zande thought was precisely that he did so treat their language. ... But it is speakers of a language who

attempt to say what is true, to describe how things are. They do so in the language they speak; and this language attempts no such thing, either successfully or unsuccessfully.

<div style="text-align: right">Winch 1987d: 195–6</div>

One might say that Winch is here limiting his charitable assumptions to the internal conceptual structure of a language, rather than to its actual application in specific cases. Two points can be made in regard to this idea. First, we should not underestimate the implications of charitable assumptions regarding what Wittgensteinians like to call the "grammar" of the language used in connection with a social practice. It is entirely conceivable that such a "grammar" could be internally inconsistent. For instance, the "grammar" of a language could include the following rules:

1   All pink flowers and only pink flowers should be called "roses."
2   All red flowers and only red flowers should be called "roses."
3   Pink objects cannot also be red, and *vice versa*.

It would be entirely fair to say that there is something wrong with the "grammar" of flower identification described above. Such a system of classification can be applied without contradiction only to a world in which there are no roses at all. How can we be sure that similar problems do not lay hidden in socially established taxonomies? Winch assures us that "the appearance of incoherence springs from our substituting for the actual application of such concepts another application, suggested by misleading grammatical analogies, which will not permit them to retain their original sense" (*ibid*.c: 201). I can only say that this appears to require a remarkable leap of faith in the collective cognitive abilities of the speakers of a language.

The second problem here is that the reification of language involved in Winch's reply to Trigg is quite out of step with the general tenor of his philosophy. Winch usually emphasizes that a way of speaking is integrally related to a particular form of life. Here, language appears as some kind of pristine Platonic entity standing above the abuses and follies committed by those who speak it. Interestingly, when Winch does address the problem of self-contradiction in Azande culture, he does not choose an example of inconsistency that is internal to Azande concepts but rather one that arises from the interaction between Azande concepts and their observations of nature. In the chapter of *Witchcraft* entitled "Witchcraft is an organic and hereditary phenomenon," Evans-Pritchard informs us that witchcraft is "transmitted by unilinear descent from parent to child" (*Witchcraft*: 23). That is to say, all of the sons of a man possessing witchcraft will also possess it, as will all of the daughters of a woman possessing witchcraft. Evans-Pritchard further points out that since all members of a given clan are related to each other biologically through the male line, "To our minds

it appears evident that if a man is proven a witch the whole of his clan are *ipso facto* witches." However, although the "Azande see the sense of this argument … they do not accept its conclusions, and it would involve the whole notion of witchcraft in contradiction were they to do so" (*ibid.*: 24). Presumably, the Azande should face a crisis of confidence in their system of beliefs every time it is discovered through autopsy that a witch belongs to a clan that had previously been proven to be free of witchcraft, and *vice versa*. In fact, the "Azande do not perceive the contradiction as we perceive it because they have no theoretical interest in the subject, and those situations in which they express their beliefs in witchcraft do not force the problem upon them" (*ibid.*: 25). In response to this apparent deficiency in Zande rationality, Winch claims that Zande witchcraft beliefs are not a "theoretical system" designed to conform to strict rules of self-consistency, and so "It is the European, obsessed with pressing Zande thought to where it would not naturally go – to a contradiction – who is guilty of misunderstanding, not the Zande. The European is in fact committing a category-mistake" (UPS: 26). Winch then goes on to argue that the notion of coherence itself must be seen to take different forms in different cultural settings.

As I mentioned above, it must be noted that the contradiction here discussed is not internal to the "grammar" of the way the Azande talk about witchcraft. There is nothing logically impossible about the organic symptoms of witchcraft actually being transmitted through unilinear descent. It is entirely imaginable that Evans-Pritchard could have come to discover that some clans were populated solely by witches, others solely by non-witches, and that the deviations from this pattern could be quite reasonably explained as the product of adulterous relations. Biologists might flock to Africa to unravel the genetic basis of the appearance of witchcraft substance. In any case, the only reason why anyone speaks of a contradiction here at all is that the distribution of witchcraft substance in the population, as discovered by traditional means of detection, does not square with Zande notions of witchcraft inheritance. Traditional concepts are contradicted by traditional observation. Winch is extending interpretative charity not merely to the reified *language* of witchcraft but also to the whole practice surrounding witchcraft in its interaction with external reality.[8] Winch does this by taking the radical expressivist step of denying that any such interaction was ever really thought to take place.

9   Winch and instrumental pluralism

Consider Sir Alfred Ayer's comment on Wittgenstein's example of the rain ceremony:

> If the believers in the efficacy of the rain dance never omit to perform it, what ground do they have for concluding that the rain would arrive anyway? One might despise them for failing to experiment, but this could well be a risk that they were not prepared to take.
>
> Ayer 1985: 89

Ayer offers an explanation of how people whom we can view as basically reasonable come to maintain belief in what seem to us to be patently false ideas. In Winchian terms, one might say that Ayer and Wittgenstein agree that there is only one criterion of instrumental reason, and they only disagree as to whether or not performance of the rain dance, considered as an instrumental action, fulfills that criterion. Ayer thinks it does. Wittgenstein thinks not, clearing the way for an expressivist interpretation of the ceremony.

Ayer's comment underlines how parochial[1] a view of instrumental rationality Wittgenstein brings to the understanding of primitive culture. Wittgenstein thinks that the participants would realize that their ceremony does not change the weather. But the only way to check the ceremony's efficacy would be to create a "control" situation in which no ceremony was performed. Given that the performance of the rain ceremony did not make excessive demands on the community's resources, the only motive for trying such a risky experiment (what if the rain really does depend on the ceremony?) would be a theoretical interest in knowledge for its own sake. But certainly no reasonable principle of charity could be so strong (and so Eurocentric) as to imply that all cultures share the West's obsession with the scientific study of nature.[2]

Instrumental monism and pluralism

Instrumental monism is the idea that all societies share the same basic criteria of instrumental rationality and intelligibility. Winchians who

accept instrumental monism have no difficulty rejecting the instrumentalist interpretation of traditional magic. Winch's doctrine requires that if a given interpretation of a set of social practices finds them to be systematically irrational, we may conclude only that that interpretation has applied criteria of intelligibility which are inappropriate to the practices being studied. Secular Westerners think that magic is a ridiculous means to practical ends. By definition, instrumental monists assume the unavailability of alternative criteria of instrumental intelligibility under which magic could appear reasonable. Therefore, they conclude that magic stands outside the category of instrumental action and seek some criterion of non-instrumental rationality that would allow magic to make sense. Ironically, the instrumental monist has fallen victim to the same mistake that Evans-Pritchard (1933: 303) diagnosed as spoiling the theories of the French philosopher and anthropological theorist Lévy-Bruhl, a man whose intellectual company Winch would hardly find flattering (see UPS: 9–10):

> He [Frazer] might have compared empirical behavior with magical behavior among the savages of Australia and observed their interaction, their social inter-relations, and their concomitant psychological states, with some chance of reaching valid conclusions about the differences which exist between them. Lévy-Bruhl, who took an exactly opposite point of view, holding that magical thought and scientific thought stand to each other as black to white, made the same mistake of comparing our science with savage magic instead of comparing savage empiricism with savage magic.
>
> Evans-Pritchard 1933: 303

By insisting on comparing "savage magic" with "our science," the instrumental monist guarantees that magic, considered as an instrumental practice, will be laughed out of court. Instead, we must consider what might happen when the comparison between "savage magic" and "savage empiricism" is drawn.

What I am suggesting is that Winch's brand of interpretative charity does not require the rejection of the instrumentalist interpretation of magic. Instead of embracing an expressivist interpretation, he could stick with instrumentalism, but with an instrumentalism appropriate to the society being studied.[3] The notion that different societies might entertain significantly different criteria of instrumental rationality might be termed *instrumental pluralism*. If there were available some alternative criterion of instrumental rationality that could make sense of magic, Winchians would no longer be forced to reject the instrumentalist interpretation of magic.

Natural limits to instrumental pluralism

The usual arguments against positions resembling what I have termed

"instrumental pluralism" are based on the notion of an objective natural world whose workings are independent of the concepts and inclinations of human beings. Nature limits the diversity of instrumental action from both "within" and "without." From within, human beings, as natural, biological organisms, share certain basic needs (food, shelter, etc.) and are endowed with similar basic physical and mental capacities. From without, all people are forced to contend with fundamentally similar natural environments. Granted these natural parameters, an evolutionary argument can be made for instrumental monism. If a society were to adopt a brand of instrumental rationality that approved technologies that do not exploit nature in ways that fulfill basic human needs, that society could not function. It simply would not survive. Humans are forced to play the technological game by nature's rules, and evolutionary pressures guarantee that only those with the right criteria of instrumental rationality will survive.

The evolutionary argument against instrumental monism does not seem to limit the range of criteria related to non-instrumental practices. Emile Durkheim (1974) makes this point by distinguishing between "moral" and "utilitarian" rules. Violations of the latter bring about "unpleasant consequences," which result "mechanically from the act of violation. If I violate a rule of hygiene that orders me to stay away from infection, the result of this act will automatically be disease" (*ibid.*: 42). The consequences of the violation of a moral, socially conventional rule depend completely on the reactions of my fellow human beings. Thus my act of killing a fellow human being will have different consequences depending on whether or not it occurred within the social context of war (*ibid.*: 43). Wittgenstein[4] himself seems to have been well aware of the crucial difference between socially conventional practices such as language and instrumental practices that involve the manipulation of nature for practical purposes, e.g. cooking:

> Why don't I call cookery rules arbitrary and why am I tempted to call the rules of grammar arbitrary? Because "cookery" is defined by its ends, whereas "speaking" is not. That is why the use of language is in a certain sense autonomous, as cooking and washing are not. You cook badly if you are guided in your cooking by rules other than the right ones; but if you follow rules other than those of chess you are playing another game; and if you follow grammatical rules other than such and such ones, that does not mean you say something wrong, no, you are speaking of something else.
>
> Wittgenstein 1970: §320

The point of Wittgenstein's comment is that some practices, such as language, are essentially conventional in nature. Grammar is "arbitrary" in the same way that (at least for structuralist linguistics) the signified is related arbitrarily to its signifier. The rules of language could always have been different, as long as all the language users involved had been taught

the variant rules. Not so with cooking. If someone follows a rule of leaving a steak on the grill for twenty-four hours, the resulting pile of ash will itself, so to speak, condemn the rule of all-day grilling.

There is something missing in Wittgenstein's account of cooking. While the outcome of following a particular rule of cooking is dictated by nature, the evaluation of the outcome is still dependent on human standards. One person's (or society's) burnt steak is another person's (or society's) well-done steak. I have already mentioned that we must distinguish between knowing how to perform an action (rule of execution) and knowing how to judge the *success* of an action (rule of result evaluation). It would be reasonable for Wittgenstein to deny that the rules for cooking a perfect soft-boiled egg are merely conventional. However, it is up to social convention and individual taste to determine which eggs are thought to be properly cooked. Once a cook knows how his customers like their eggs prepared, he must follow proper procedures to achieve the desired result. Even so, the cook still has some latitude in choosing his method of cooking. One cook (or society) may be satisfied with a method that works most of the time, while someone else may demand universally perfect results. A certain method may become standard for a particular society ("that's just the way we do it") despite its imperfections. If I have only learned how to cook eggs using a different yet equally efficient method, people in that society might well say that I "don't know" how to soft-boil an egg.

Obviously, some broad natural restraints must remain. Even so, there is no reason to assume that the universal requirements of human survival are so restrictive as to dictate instrumental monism. Granted, a society could not long survive if it completely disregarded the need to feed itself. This is far from saying that it has no leeway at all to engage in what are by our lights instrumentally irrational practices. As has been recently and amply documented by Robert Edgerton in his book *Sick Societies* (1992), human societies are perfectly capable of (at least by our standards) massively stupid and self-defeating behavior.[5] The central message of Edgerton's book is that in order for a social practice to survive it need not be positively beneficial for its practitioners, merely non-fatal. It is certainly possible for a society to continue its survival while embracing positively harmful technologies. I doubt that the Azande have any magic as hopelessly ineffective and as outright dangerous as Western medicine was until well into the nineteenth century.[6] If European society could survive the practice of therapeutic bleeding, there is no reason to assume that the Azande's instrumental use of magic would be fatally inefficient.[7]

Alternative criteria of instrumental rationality

What would alternative criteria of instrumental rationality look like? In order that they all be legitimately called "instrumental," they must share an underlying concern for the achievement of practical goals. However,

they may differ in what they consider to be acceptable levels of technical effectiveness. Such differences in standards of instrumental rationality may be observed between different practices in our own society. Consider, for instance, the standards applied to the various psychotherapeutic "talking cures" as compared with those of civil engineering. Our society turns to both psychotherapists and engineers as highly trained professionals who are expected to handle very real problems. However, the theoretical basis of psychotherapy is notoriously less rigorous than that of civil engineering. More importantly, imagine an engineer whose success rate in repairing bridges was comparable with that of a psychotherapist in treating neurosis! The very use in one sentence of the word "success" in relation to both bridge mending and soul mending seems odd. Yet both practices are clearly aimed toward achieving practical results. Similarly, traditional societies that practice magic may have standards of instrumental rationality that differ from ours. This could work in various ways. We might want to investigate very general standards of instrumental rationality that apply to a wide range of social practices. It is plausible that in traditional societies these criteria will reflect what we would call the less developed state of their technology. Members of such societies may entertain systematically lower expectations of success from their technologies than do Westerners from theirs. For them, magic might be sufficiently effective to remain within the range of instrumentally rational activities. After all, why should someone who is used to depending on "natural" technologies of limited usefulness expect consistent success from his supernatural technologies? Consider the "primitives" described by Jarvie and Agassi:

> We suggest that primitive people do not sow seeds and then perform irrational magic ritual, but that they grow crops in a very inefficient way, having no tractors and not knowing that ritual or no ritual makes no difference.
>
> Jarvie and Agassi 1970: 193

In such a situation, the performance of magic ritual and the planting of seeds do not occupy separate cultural compartments. Poor farming techniques and useless magic together form an integrated (yet by our standards inefficient) agricultural practice that must be understood on its own terms. Even those techniques that we would categorize as non-magical might seem so inefficient that it would be difficult to say that they reflect our own standards of instrumental rationality. Unless these "primitives" had acquired the disciplined observational skills and methods so hard-won by the West, even those aspects of their agriculture that *do* make sense to us may not have resulted from what we would call a rational process of technological development.[8]

Another possibility is that the practice of magic (like our own psychotherapy) enjoys its own particularly lax criteria of instrumental

rationality, which are not common to all of the society's instrumental practices. This seems to be Evans-Pritchard's opinion in regard to the Azande:[9]

> To what extent have Azande faith in magic? I have found that they always admit that the issue of a rite is uncertain. No one can be sure that his medicines will achieve the results aimed at. There is never the same degree of confidence as in routine empirical activities.
>
> *Witchcraft*: 466

> Magic may be an alternative to empirical means of attaining an end, but it is not so satisfactory a method. ... The use of a magical technique is secondary to the use of an empirical technique. It cannot normally replace it. It is an aid rather than a substitute.
>
> *ibid.*: 467

The Azande's lack of confidence in the effectiveness of magic reflects their uncertainty regarding the nature of witchcraft against which magic is meant to protect them:

> They do not profess to understand witchcraft entirely. They know that it exists and works evil, but they have to guess at the manner in which it works. Indeed, I have frequently been struck when discussing witchcraft with Azande by the doubt they express about the subject, not only in what they say, but even more in their manner of saying it, both of which contrast with their ready knowledge, fluently imparted, about social events and economic techniques. They feel out of their depth in trying to describe the way in which witchcraft accomplishes its ends.
>
> *ibid.*: 81

It is fairly clear from these passages that the Azande differentiate between what Evans-Pritchard calls "empirical" and "mystical" techniques, and they judge them by different criteria that reflect different expectations of success. Indeed, Evans-Pritchard lists the fact that "Not too much is claimed for magic" (*ibid.*: 476) among the reasons why "Azande do not perceive the futility of their magic" (*ibid.*: 475). It is precisely because their magic is judged by its own criteria of *instrumental* rationality that Winch's argument from charity does not defeat the instrumentalist interpretation of Azande magic.

So far, I have been discussing differing expectations of success merely because it is the most immediately comprehensible parameter for differentiating between various criteria of instrumental rationality. Other factors, such as the appreciation (or lack of appreciation) of empirical knowledge for its own sake, and differing attitudes toward risk taking, can also inform varying criteria of instrumental rationality. Let us return to the

rainmaking example. As I have already pointed out, only a keen interest in knowledge for its own sake could justify the experimental discontinuation of the rain ceremony. This point can be expanded into the more general observation that it is far from obvious that scientific investigation *per se* must be universally regarded as an instrumentally rational activity. We have come to learn from historical experience that scientific knowledge will often pay instrumental dividends to society in the form of new technologies. Be that as it may, the practice of science itself is consciously divorced from instrumental concerns. As the phenomenologist Alfred Schutz has stated:

> The attitude of the "disinterested [scientific] observer" is based upon a peculiar *attention a la vie* as the prerequisite of all theorizing. It consists in the abandoning of the system of relevances which prevails within the practical sphere of the natural attitude ... unlike man in daily life, he is not passionately interested in the question whether his anticipations, if fulfilled, will prove helpful for the solution of his practical problems.
>
> Schutz 1967: 246–7

Our idea of a rational way to go about solving a practical problem has been strongly colored by our historical experience with science. That experience has taught us that when confronted, for example, with a new disease, it is worthwhile to gain a comprehensive understanding of the pathogen involved, even though such research will almost never immediately produce a clinically useful treatment. It would not be surprising if people from a non-scientifically oriented society would consider our response to the new disease unintelligible in terms of their standards of instrumental rationality. They might view the attitude of the "disinterested observer" as a completely incomprehensible reaction to a medical catastrophe.

　Another outcome of our scientific orientation is that we are hesitant to use a technique that has been proven effective if we do not understand why it works. We have trouble swallowing our epistemological pride. It would not be surprising if a culture less concerned with the theoretical explanation of natural phenomena would be more willing to apply a mysteriously effective technology. For example, Evans-Pritchard's statements, which I quoted above, seem to imply that the Azande's lack of understanding of how magic works does not deter them from using it; rather, it merely tempers their expectations for its success.

　A culture's version of instrumental reason might also be colored by values unrelated to epistemological concerns. Aesthetic value might play such a role. I have even heard Western industrial designers say things such as "If it isn't beautiful, it won't work." It is not difficult to imagine a society whose members are as uncomfortable depending on a sturdy yet

ugly boat to stay afloat as *we* are prescribing a clinically proven medical treatment whose biological basis remains shrouded in mystery.

Confusion about Winch

Winch's philosophical doctrine makes room for instrumental pluralism, and he sometimes seems to stand on the verge of announcing something of the kind. As I have been hinting at heavily, half of the problem with Winch's doctrine is that he engages in misleading rhetoric. Winch's interpretation of magic and religion has been so often misunderstood because of the great discrepancy between the expectations created by his programmatic statements and his actual exercises in cultural interpretation. This discrepancy also serves to cloud over Winch's genuine support for instrumental monism. In UPS, for instance, Winch creates the impression that he is going to discuss alternative views of reality. He criticizes Evans-Pritchard for talking about "objective reality" as if it were independent of cultural context (UPS: 11). Continuing his discussion of the cultural underpinnings of "reality," Winch gives the example of "a scientific illiterate, [who when] asked to describe the results of a scientific experiment which he 'observes' in an advanced physics laboratory, could not do so in terms relevant to the hypothesis being tested"(UPS: 13). Although the example has some bearing on the idea of a social practice, it creates the completely incorrect impression that, like modern physics, Azande magic will also be concerned with the depiction of reality in terms of a conceptual framework not available to the (Western) layman.

This false impression is reinforced by Winch's reply to I.C. Jarvie's paper "Understanding and explanation in sociology and social anthropology" (Winch 1970). There, Winch develops a hypothetical example of a people whose biological peculiarities and way of life leave them no application for the concept of height. As far as a member of such a society would be concerned, our practices of measuring height would seem pointless, our statements regarding height meaningless. Winch goes on to make the connection with our understanding of magic: "What I am saying is that the Westerner who feels there is no reality in Zande magic may be in a position very analogous to that of the 'heightless' stranger *vis-à-vis* our society" (*ibid.*: 256).

Once again, Winch creates the impression that he believes Azande magic to constitute an alternative conceptual framework for the description of empirical reality, similar to our framework that includes concepts such as "height." He is disregarding his own claim that magic can only be properly understood if compared with religion, rather than science. It would never occur to anyone reading Winch's reply to Jarvie that for Winch, Zande witchcraft notions constitute "a drama of resentments, etc." that "symbolically" deals with "misfortunes" rather than a systematic description of certain aspects of the world of instrumental action.

At the end of the day, Winch gives way to instrumental monism and adopts an expressivist interpretation of magic and religion.[10] Not only does he avoid representing Azande magic as a view of nature in competition with Western science but he also seems to assume that the Western notion of causation (as he idealizes it) is the only one applicable to the natural world: "the Azande do, in the course of their practical affairs, apply something very like our technical concept [of causation]" (UPS: 38). In regard to the language game of oracular pronouncements, Winch writes: "A person using such a language may of course fall into confusion and into superstitiously expecting results which reflection would show to be irrational" (Winch 1987d: 205). How can Winch, of all people, write naively about reflection showing an expectation to be "irrational?" Irrational according to whose criterion of instrumental rationality?[11]

Once we understand that Winch was an instrumental monist, the relationship between his own work and the "rationality debates" that it inspired must be seen in an ironic light. It is odd that anti-relativist arguments of the kind collected by Brian Wilson (1970) and Hollis and Lukes (1982) are used to attack UPS. Winch (like all good Wittgensteinians) is not particularly impressed by skeptical arguments meant to undermine our view of everyday reality. I imagine that he would dismiss any radically skeptical or relativistic attack on the "reality" of "reality" as an outbreak of philosophical disease, an intellectual disorder that occurs when "language goes on holiday." This lack of skeptical curiosity helps to explain what may seem to be a problem for my identification of Winch as an instrumental monist. Usually, people (e.g. Hollis 1982) who believe in some form of instrumental monism make a lot of noise about its forming the bedrock of intercultural understanding. If all human beings more or less agree as to the nature of the everyday world of practical activity, this mutual understanding should serve as the great bridgehead of intercultural interpretation. If Winch was an instrumental monist, why did he never adopt the bridgehead position?

I think that Winch and the "bridgehead" theorists were simply not interested in the same questions. The bridgehead theorists compared the task of the anthropologist with the thought experiments invented by Willard Quine and Donald Davidson, i.e. the projects of radical translation and interpretation. They set out from the question of how any kind of intercultural understanding could be possible at all. Winch, for his part, was less concerned with demonstrating the theoretical possibility of intercultural understanding than with explaining the occasional failures and difficulties of such understanding. Perhaps this is why he was so often falsely accused of denying the possibility of intercultural interpretation altogether. In as much as he held that the logic of practical activities is universal, it never offered him interesting cases of intercultural misunderstanding. Although he never admits to it explicitly, Winch always assumes that a bridgehead of agreement on practical matters (instrumental

monism) will link any two human cultures. He never really considers the possibility of a *completely* untranslatable language of the kind dismissed by Davidson (1984b). Instead, he is concerned with the quite *partial* difficulties of translation generated by religious and ethical differences between cultures.

In this light, we can also better appreciate the list of human universals that Winch discusses at the end of UPS. It is somewhat surprising that after criticizing Newcomb for over-emphasizing "obviously physiological drives like hunger, thirst and sex" (ISS: 76), Winch claims in UPS that the overtly biological phenomena of "birth, death, [and] sexual relations ... are inescapably involved in the life of all known human societies in a way which gives us a clue where to look, if we are puzzled about the point of an alien system of institutions" (UPS: 43). Why did Winch choose such a low common denominator, which is shared not only by all human cultures but also by a very broad class of animals? Why not include other necessary biological functions, such as sleeping and eating, or more particularly human activities, such as the construction of shelters and weapons? In context, it becomes clear that Winch has chosen universals that are particularly pertinent to his interest in the spiritual aspects of cultures, or, as Horton (1976: 159) puts it, "these are precisely the situations which, in Western culture at least, favour *homo poetico-religiosus* as against *homo scientifico-technologicus.*"[12] Winch explicitly traces his choice of universals back to Giambattista Vico's *The New Science*, where, according to the section quoted by Winch as the conclusion of UPS, sex and death are all deemed important for the ritual, rather than the practical interest they receive in human societies:

> We observe that all nations, barbarous as well as civilized, though separately founded because remote from each other in time and space, keep these three human customs: all have some religion, all contract solemn marriages, all bury their dead. And in no nation, however savage and crude, are any human actions performed with more elaborate ceremonies and more sacred solemnity than the rites of religion, marriage and burial.
>
> quoted in UPS: 47

The grounds of Winch's instrumental monism

Why, when it comes to the interpretation of magic and ritual, does Winch shy away from instrumental pluralism? I now suspect that evolutionary considerations played an important role in Winch's rejection of instrumental pluralism.[13] Unfortunately, it would be difficult to accommodate an evolutionary argument to some other aspects of Winch's doctrine. Stephen Stich points out that such evolutionary premises are empirical rather than conceptual:

[Evolutionary] arguments ... do not maintain that the hypothesis of widespread or systematic irrationality is conceptually impossible. Rather they contend that significant irrationality is empirically impossible or unlikely since it is incompatible with well-established theories about evolution and the processes that underlie it.

<div align="right">Stitch 1990: 55</div>

Winch, however, seeks to transform sociology into a conceptual rather than an empirical discipline. He is especially concerned that methodological issues in the social sciences should be dealt with at a purely conceptual level: "It is not a question of what empirical research may show to be the case, but of what philosophical analysis reveals about what it makes sense to say" (ISS: 72). It would be somewhat damaging if the ultimate grounding of his rejection of instrumental pluralism was empirical rather than conceptual.[14] I fear that this rejection may actually lack independent philosophical validity. In fact, I will argue that Winch's own religious commitments and prejudices regarding traditional societies also had a hand in blinding him to the pluralist option. But first I will examine the difficulties that the ethnographic record poses for Winch's interpretation of magic.

10 Winch and the ethnographic record

Before determining to what extent the ethnographic record supports Winch's interpretation of Zande mysticism, I should point out that Winch would need unusually strong evidence to make his case. As we have seen, he denies that primitive magic or religious rites are performed in order to serve instrumental purposes. The first and most fundamental ethnographic datum with which Winch must contend is the fact that, as far as can be known from Evans-Pritchard's descriptions, the Azande *always* describe their magic as being practiced in order to attain practical benefits and *never* describe it as a medium for the expression and contemplation of their attitudes toward the contingent nature of human existence. Winch's take on Azande magic is similar to claims made by him and at greater length by his close colleague, D.Z. Phillips, regarding the nature of Western Christianity, i.e. that Christian prayer is not directed toward the enlistment of God's help in the satisfaction of material needs.[1] One does not have to be an ethnographer to know that Phillips's depiction of Christianity is at odds with the self-descriptions offered by many, perhaps even the majority, of the Christian faithful. They will tell us that they enjoy many earthly benefits gained through the agency of prayer. Quite appropriately, Sutherland is troubled by Phillips's claim to be merely describing Christianity rather than offering a program for its reform:

> Much stimulus to the philosophical discussion of religious belief is to be found in the writing of D.Z. Phillips, but equally much sterile debate has resulted because both Phillips and his opponents have at times argued as if one appropriate criterion of the acceptability of his accounts of, say, petitionary prayer or the belief in eternal life, is whether or not this is what Christians really believe. Phillips has given weight to this by his interpretation and application of Wittgenstein's dictum that "philosophy leaves everything as it is." This is not the place for a full discussion of Phillip's views. It suffices to define my own enterprise over against his (and his opponents') by pointing out that I welcome his accounts of petitionary prayer and the belief in eternal life; but I welcome them as interesting constructions upon or

revisions of the Christian tradition rather than as they are apparently offered, descriptions of the most essential or continuing elements of that tradition. It is not clear that Phillips would accept my emphasis on the terms "construction" or "revision."

<div align="right">Sutherland 1984: 7</div>

In his reply to Sutherland, Phillips (1991) insists that he is not involved in theological prescription and that people may not be relied upon to offer accurate analysis of their own thoughts and actions. Phillips's reply might seem plausible if he was talking about a case similar to that of the linguist whom I mentioned above. Just as people speak a language without being able to explain its rules to the satisfaction of a professional grammarian, so too do they pray to God without being able to explain their purpose to the satisfaction of a philosophical theologian. However interesting the argument from linguistics may be, it falls far short of justifying the kind of redescription of religion and magic that has been the subject of my discussion. Here, we must recall that Winch writes about the *rules* belonging to a certain practice as well as about the *point* of that practice. The linguist may systematize the *rules* of a language's grammar in a way superior to and even in conflict with the native speakers' grammar manual. However, the linguist is extremely likely to agree with the native speakers that the *point* of their language is communication. Winch and Phillips do not wish to propose reformulations of the rules involved in the practice of religion and magic more felicitous than those current among the practitioners of religion and magic themselves. Rather, they claim to propose descriptions of the *point* of these practices that are superior to those offered by the practitioners themselves. For instance, Winch does not argue that the Azande do not know how to state clearly the rules guiding their magical procedures. Rather, he implicitly claims that the Azande's own description of the *purpose* of their magic (which they unequivocally characterize as instrumentalist) fails to correctly express its true spiritual nature.[2] Similarly, Phillips faults Christian worshippers for misdescribing the true point of their petitionary prayer.

How can we square the suggestion that people can consistently misdescribe the point of their activity with Winch's claim that for people to behave meaningfully, they must understand what they are doing? Is it really plausible that the Azande somehow genuinely understand the expressive point of their magic while always claiming to seek practical benefits through its practice?

One strategy for dealing with this problem is to distance the practitioners' apparent self-description as far as possible from the kind of self-description that finds its home in Western philosophy. For instance, it might be claimed that the opinions expressed regarding magic by its practitioners "form part of the practice [of magic] itself"[3] rather than represent their genuine attempt to characterize the nature and aims of their own

behavior. This might be compared with a ringmaster's boast that his circus is the "greatest show on Earth." The boast itself is part of the performance. Similarly, utterances may gain significance when spoken as part of a ritual performance that has little to do with their plain meaning. For instance, the traditional *kol nidrei* prayer, which opens the services of the Jewish Day of Atonement, is commonly associated with the themes of sin and repentance, although these have little to do with its literal content (a legalistic disclaimer of the validity of future personal vows). If the ringmaster were to believe the literal truth of his "claim" regarding the circus, we might say that he had become confused about his own use of language. If worshippers insisted on the pre-eminence of the *kol nidrei* prayer's literal meaning, they would be hard put to explain its prominent place in the liturgy.[4]

Winch himself offers an interesting example of an analogous gap between stated and real aims in his discussion of Karl-Otto Apel's program of "Transcendental Pragmatics":

> We *can* speak of the "aim" of a discussion in cases where we have not established this by asking the participants what their aims are, but where we have rather read it off, as it were, from our understanding of the course the discussion has taken. It may well be that the participants themselves have not thought explicitly about their aims or formulated them to themselves. It may be that they would not be able to say, when asked, what their aims are, even after reflection. Nevertheless, the manner in which they engage in the discussion may still provide overwhelming grounds for saying they have certain aims. This evidence may even, in some cases, be so strong as to override any disclaimers they may make. We feel that their way of participating in the discussion makes no sense unless they are assumed to have those aims; that their disclaimers can only be indicative of confusion on their part.
>
> Winch 1979: 65

Here, Winch is presumably describing a discussion that took place between members of his own society in a language that he understands. He is familiar with the way that such discussions proceed and so may recognize the true aim of the discussion (for instance, people insisting that they are airing their differences may actually be involved in a mere name-calling competition). Similarly, my other examples (the circus and *kol nidrei*) involve practices with which *I* am personally well acquainted. One might well wonder how, when faced with a practice alien to our own culture, an anthropologist might be expected to uncover its genuine purpose in spite of the constant misrepresentation of that purpose by the practitioners themselves. Certainly, such a judgment would have to rest on overwhelmingly convincing evidence. If, for instance, the ethnographic record stated

that the Azande uniformly laughed in the face of anyone who seemed to be using magic for instrumental purposes, Winch might be justified in rejecting the literal interpretation of Zande descriptions of the aim of their magic. Unfortunately for Winch, as we shall now see, although his rejection of the Azande's self-description requires him to offer incontrovertible evidence for his own interpretation of their behavior, the ethnographic record offers practically no support for his position.

Winch and the ethnographic record

Many writers have faulted Winch for his mishandling of (or outright disinterest in) ethnographic materials on primitive magic and religion. Among others, H.O. Mounce (1973), John W. Cook (1983), and Robin Horton (1976) have accused Winch of misreading Evans-Pritchard's original account of Azande witchcraft. Horton has also drawn upon his own studies as well as upon the work of others in the field of African religion in order to attack Winch's interpretation of Azande society. David Lamb (1977) has attacked both Evans-Pritchard and Winch for their alleged blindness to the political and economic interests that support Azande witchcraft notions, as well as Winch's unwillingness to entertain the possibility of a political critique of witchcraft rooted in ideas acceptable only to the disinherited sectors of Azande society.

One line of criticism makes the simple point that the ethnographic evidence gives us every reason to believe that the purpose of performing primitive magic is to obtain particular practical results. Cook (1983) offers a series of quotations from Evans-Pritchard testifying to the Azande's concern for the practical effectiveness of each particular brand of magic, and how they cite past experience to validate the effectiveness of a magical practice. The Azande are also quoted as speaking of performing actions (e.g. slaying an adversary) with the aid of magic. Horton (1976) claims that the instrumentalist bent of African spirituality is so strong that the expectation of practical results from magic and religion is not limited only to indigenous belief systems. Even the European Christianity introduced by missionaries has been "Africanized" by the natives in order to mobilize God more directly for the acquisition of the material needs of the faithful. Perhaps the most damning comment on this point comes from the anthropologist J.H.M. Beattie, whose strong emphasis on the symbolic interpretation of magical practices should make him one of Winch's natural allies. Having temporarily forgotten Winch, Beattie (1970: 250) wrote of the view that magic is practiced without concern for practical results that "the position ... has never been held by anyone."

Another aspect of Winch's reading of Evans-Pritchard that has been criticized is his attempt to demonstrate that the affective attitudes displayed by natives toward magical practices and when engaged in them differ from those displayed toward instrumental practices. Winch believes

that this alleged difference of affective attitude reflects the radical differ-
ences between instrumental and magical realms. In the Azande case,
Winch writes:

> Since their attitude to and thought about their magical rites are quite
> different from those concerning their technological measures, there is
> every reason to think that their concept of magical "influence" is quite
> different [from that of empirical causation].
>
> UPS: 38

As I mentioned above, the difference in attitude mentioned by Winch was
largely dictated by the Azande's feelings of uncertainty regarding their
understanding of, and control over, magic. Correct appreciation of Zande
magic must take into account an observation made by Evans-Pritchard
quoted by Winch himself just ten pages earlier: "When a Zande speaks of
witchcraft he does not speak of it as we speak of the weird witchcraft of
our own history. ... To him there is nothing miraculous about it" (as
quoted in UPS: 15).

In addition, with regard to this point, Horton mentions that according to
Evans-Pritchard, the usual reaction of an Azande to the failure of his magic to
produce results is to become angry. He further points out that the Azande
explicitly explain certain natural phenomena, such as the germination of
seeds, in terms borrowed from the vocabulary of magical causation.

A complete catalog of ethnographic references that contradict Winch's
interpretation of magic would include a great portion of the literature in
this field. Not surprisingly, neither Winch nor his allies have attempted a
chapter and verse defense of his reading (one might say dismissal) of the
ethnographic record in general and of Evans-Pritchard in particular. A
different strategy is called for, one that will validate Winch's interpretative
project as a whole. The closest thing to such a defense offered by Winch
himself consists of occasionally pulling his punches: "The philosophically
important point here is not the correctness or otherwise of any particular
suggested interpretation of Zande thought so much as the kind of
reasoning needed to support an interpretation" Winch (1987d: 202).

One feels bound to reply: Would it not have been more appropriate to
develop this "Prolegomena to any future anthropology" around an exem-
plary interpretation that was not unacceptable to practically everyone who
has been personally acquainted with African magic?

Winch and the "myth of primitive piety"[5]

Given that Winch has so often been accused of disregarding the ethno-
graphic data relating to the Azande, it is not surprising that he may be
shown to have largely missed the point of Evans-Pritchard's description of

their society. In fact, Winch was caught in the grip of what the anthropologist Mary Douglas has called *the myth of primitive piety*:

> It seems to be an important premise of popular thinking about us, the civilized, and them, the primitives, that we are secular, skeptical and frankly tending more and more away from religious belief, and that they are religious.
>
> Douglas 1975: 73

Douglas explains how the myth of primitive piety has served both religious and anti-religious ideologies, and, more particularly, how it has thwarted the proper development of the anthropology of religion. There is always a risk in studying the religious life of traditional people: they may turn out to be thoroughly secular. In that case, the ethnographer is left to make an uncomfortable choice between publishing the heretical finding that "My tribe hasn't got any religion" (*ibid.*: 76) and blindly assuming that native secretiveness makes their faith impenetrable to outsiders. Most anthropologists avoid the problem altogether by attending to safer issues such as politics and economics. Furthermore, the assumption of a universal (and static) traditional piety makes a genuinely comparative study of religion impossible: they (the "primitives") are religious, while we (the "civilized") have become, after a long and twisted spiritual history, secular. Such a view hardly leaves room for any enlightening application of insights gained from the study of traditional societies to the analysis of the Western religious heritage or of our own contemporary spiritual situation. This predicament leads Douglas to proclaim the importance of the recognition of primitive secularity and heterodoxy for the understanding of religion: "Unless we can think of tribes as secular, or given to mystery cults, dualist philosophies, or heterodoxies about the nature of grace and the godhead, the questions that have unleashed historic wars and mass executions, we have hardly begun the anthropology of religion" (*ibid.*: 81).

As I have explained above, the idea of "dealing with misfortunes" is fundamental for Winch's interpretation of Zande "mysticism." Every human society is limited by the effectiveness of the technologies it has developed for the preservation and promotion of that which it holds dear, i.e. life, health, prosperity, security, and so on. While improved technology may remove a particular source of anxiety, it cannot offer a complete solution to the human predicament, because something can always go wrong. Like Christian prayer, Zande "mysticism" offers a spiritually valid means of giving voice to these concerns. Both prayer and magic alike allow people to recognize their own limitations without being paralyzed into inaction. According to Winch, magic has added a dimension of spirituality to Zande life that we have difficulty appreciating because of our own deadening materialism and "alienation": "Our blindness to the point of

primitive modes of life is a corollary of the pointlessness of much of our own life" (UPS: 42).

What would Evans-Pritchard say to all of this?[6] Would he accuse Winch of perpetuating the myth of primitive piety? Winch himself has always been aware that the relationship between his philosophy and Evans-Pritchard's ethnography is far from simple:

> The relationship between [Alasdair] MacIntyre, Evans-Pritchard and myself is a complicated one. MacIntyre takes Evans-Pritchard's later book, *Nuer Religion*, as an application of a point of view like mine in *The Idea of a Social Science*; he regards it as an object lesson in the absurd results to which such a position leads, when applied in practice. My own criticisms of Evans-Pritchard, on the other hand, have come from precisely the opposite direction. I have tried to show that Evans-Pritchard did not at the time of writing *The Azande* agree with me enough; that he did not take seriously enough the idea that the concepts used by primitive peoples can only be interpreted in the context of the way of life of those peoples. Thus I have in effect argued that Evans-Pritchard's account of the Azande is unsatisfactory precisely to the extent that he agrees with MacIntyre and not me.
>
> UPS: 27–8

While Winch is discussing meta-interpretative aspects of studying another culture in the above paragraph, it might apply equally to the actual content of particular interpretations of traditional societies. Here again, Evans-Pritchard's later work seems more congenial to Winch's views. While Winch implies that the Evans-Pritchard of *Witchcraft* underestimates the religious depth of traditional mystical practices, *Nuer Religion* (1956) is a virtual panegyric to primitive spirituality. Most strikingly, Evans-Pritchard concludes his book on the Nuer with a statement that might as easily be applied to any of the great monotheistic religions:

> Though prayer and sacrifice are exterior actions, Nuer religion is ultimately an interior state. This state is externalized in rites which we can observe, but their meaning depends finally on an awareness of God and that men are dependent on him and must be resigned to his will. At this point the theologian takes over from the anthropologist.
>
> Evans-Pritchard 1956: 322

Now that is exactly the kind of spirituality that Winch wanted Evans-Pritchard to discover in Zande magic. Recognition of one's dependency on God and resignation to his will constitute the classic monotheistic solution to the problem of coming to terms with the contingencies of life. Winch's reference to Evans-Pritchard "at the time of writing *The Azande*" implies a process of change of heart. The old Evans-Pritchard was partially blind to

the diversity of human experience; the new Evans-Pritchard is capable of appreciating Nuer society on its own terms. Similarly, one might think that the old Evans-Pritchard saw primitive ritual as false technology, while the new Evans-Pritchard recognizes its true spiritual depth. Evans-Pritchard himself had disavowed the errors of *The Azande* ten years before Winch's article was published!

I reject this interpretation of Evans-Pritchard's development. A more careful examination of Evans-Pritchard's writings reveals that rather than a change of heart, we have here a change of subject matter. According to Evans-Pritchard, the Azande and the Nuer are informed by fundamentally different attitudes toward life, as was immediately apparent to him upon encountering the latter:

> I had previously spent many months among the Azande people of the Nile–Uelle divide. From my earliest days among them I was constantly hearing the word *mangu*, witchcraft, and it was soon clear that if I could gain a full understanding of the meaning of this word I should have the key to Zande philosophy. When I started my study of the Nuer I had a similar experience. I constantly heard them speaking of *kwoth*, Spirit, and I realized that a full understanding of that word was the key to their – very different – philosophy.
>
> Evans-Pritchard 1956: vi

Another important difference between the two peoples involves their respective dependence on magic and medicine:

> Coming to the Nuer from Zandeland, where everyone is a magician and medicines are legion and in daily use, I was at once struck by their negligible quantity and importance in Nuerland, and further experience confirmed my first impression. I mention them chiefly for the reason that their rarity and unimportance are indicative of the orientation of Nuer thought, which is always towards Spirit.
>
> *ibid.*: 104

Not only are the Azande more interested in witchcraft and magic than they are in Spirit, but Evans-Pritchard believes that these concerns actually bar their way to approaching God:

> Witchcraft ideas play a very minor role [in Nuer religion], and magic a negligible one. Both are incompatible with a theocentric philosophy, for when both fortune and misfortune come from God they cannot also come from human powers, whether innate or learnt.
>
> *ibid.*: 316–17

It is now possible to reappraise Evans-Pritchard's view of the Azande.

Evans-Pritchard is completely aware of the importance for people of finding a way to deal with the contingencies of life. Like Winch, he does not believe that it is possible to address the spiritual implications of the reality of human frailty by undertaking yet more practical measures. It is exactly for this reason that he refuses to attribute spiritual depth to Zande magic and witchcraft, for these notions teach that "both fortune and misfortune come from human powers." Azande magic does not point to human finitude, it is viewed "as a tangible weapon of culture deriving its power from the knowledge of tradition and the abstinence of living men" (Evans-Pritchard 1929: 20). Far from offering a way to "express an attitude to contingencies, rather than an attempt to control these," Evans-Pritchard implies that Zande mysticism instills false confidence and blinds its practitioners to the real extent of their control over nature.

As we have seen, Evans-Pritchard argues that only theism, rather than magic, can foster a spiritually rich sensitivity to life's contingencies. Do the Azande, in addition to their magic, possess a theistic sensibility? In his essay "Zande theology" (1962), which could have been less deceivingly titled "Zande atheology"), Evans-Pritchard completes his picture of Zande spirituality (or lack of it) by discussing the notion proposed by other writers that "the idea of a Supreme Being is deeply anchored in Zande mentality" (*ibid.*: 291). Not surprisingly, Evans-Pritchard finds that theistic concepts and practices play a very minor role in Zande life. They have little or no concern for God and gods, they have almost no mythology to explain the relationship between the divine and human realms, and they spend practically none of their time in worship, prayer or sacrifice. For instance, he describes how the name of *Mbori*, a vague supernatural entity considered by some ethnographers to be the Zande Supreme Being, enters into day-to-day speech:

> As a fieldworker I must record that I have never heard a Zande pray and that I have seldom heard people utter his [*Mbori*'s] name, and then only as an ejaculation of emotional intensity and with only the vaguest suggestion of doctrinal significance. I must confess also that I have found the greatest difficulty in either obtaining information about *Mbori* or arousing any interest in him.
>
> *ibid.*: 299

One could imagine that *Mbori* could somehow play the same role as the God of the great monotheistic religions, but in fact the Azande do not cultivate an attitude of dependence on *Mbori* similar to the notion of "God's will" preached by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.[7] Even at the hour of death, *Mbori*'s providence is rarely mentioned:

> In sickness and death he [the Azande] thinks of witchcraft as their cause, and not of *Mbori*, who does not interfere in such matters, and

he seeks to cure disease and avenge death through magical and orac-
ular processes against witches and not by prayers to *Mbori*.
Nevertheless, it appears that death is sometimes vaguely attributed to
Mbori when no other cause can be discovered.

ibid.: 300

All in all, Evans-Pritchard paints a picture of a thoroughly secular Zande
culture whose members take more or less effective practical measures to
protect and promote their interests but who are unwilling or unable to face
up to the limitations of their powers. Their magic is not a proper medium
for piety, their theistic faith almost non-existent. This description sounds
startlingly familiar. A similar attitude has been central to the Western
sensibility since the Enlightenment, which promoted "the view that the
experiences of contingency and problems of meaning that were previously
interpreted in religious terms and worked off in cult practices can be radi-
cally defused" by technological solutions (Habermas 1984: 149). The
Azande have their magic and we our technology; neither society is particu-
larly comfortable with the idea that some contingencies will always remain
beyond its control. Although our hubris may be better founded than that
of the Azande (our technology works better than their magic), both
cultures (to the extent that the West is as thoroughly secular as the
Azande!) share essentially the same spiritual condition.

In the first section of UPS, Winch suggests that the reason why anthro-
pologists often depict magic as an irrational form of technology is that
they accommodate their explanations to their own (Western) culture: "a
culture whose conception of reality is deeply affected by the achievements
and methods of the sciences" (UPS: 9). What I am suggesting is that a
broader and more careful reading of Evans-Pritchard's writings reveals
that far from being the product of a narrowly Western, secular, and instru-
mental sensibility, Evans-Pritchard's studies of the Azande constitute a
critical analysis of such a secular sensibility, which happens to inform a
traditional society. While Winch claims (but never in such harsh terms)
that Evans-Pritchard was blind to Zande spirituality, it may be said that
Evans-Pritchard explains why the Azande themselves are blind to the kind
of spirituality embraced by Winch. Just as we are in danger of losing our
ability to appreciate a religious perspective due to our "conception of
reality," which is "deeply affected by the achievements and methods of the
sciences," the Azande never developed such a perspective due to their own
conception of reality, which is deeply affected by the achievements and
methods of magic. That is exactly the kind of comparative hypothesis
sought by Mary Douglas in her essay "Heathen darkness." It would be fair
to say that in the 1930s, Evans-Pritchard had already laid the cornerstone
for Douglas's reformed anthropology of religion.

At the limits of instrumental action

Winch seems to suggest that besides considerations of charity, there is a second line of argument for viewing magic's role as purely expressive rather than instrumental. Humans, no matter what their level of technological sophistication, are never in complete control of the satisfaction of their own basic needs. Both the Azande farmer and the modern cardiac surgeon reach a point in their endeavors, each having exhausted the techniques made available to them by their respective societies, when there is no more that they can do to ensure the success of their efforts. They require the means to deal with the reality of their limitations, to "go on living" in the full recognition of the truth that things may not work out as planned. This, says Winch, is the time for the technologist to bow out and the magician and priest to begin their work. Winch assumes that it would not make sense for an act that gives expression to the recognition of these limitations to have an instrumental aspect. The whole point of such measures is not to make "sure that it does not let him down, because ... whatever he does, he may still be let down." Rather, "the important thing is that he should understand that [he may be let down] and come to terms with it" (UPS: 39).

I have no problem accepting the psychological reality of the problem that Winch is describing, and it may indeed be a universal requirement of human life that people find a way of dealing with those contingencies of existence that will always remain beyond the grasp of available technology. Furthermore, I can appreciate that in order for a culture to reconcile itself with human finitude in a spiritually deep way (e.g. Nuer rather than Azande) it may favour resorting to expressive rather than instrumental practices. However, I cannot accept the impossibility of a spiritually satisfying yet instrumentally oriented religion. By rejecting such a possibility, Winch seeks to interpret all religions in terms of a universal criterion of spirituality whose model is a very late non-foundationalist form of Western Christianity. As Horton (1976: 178) has pointed out, this Kierkegaardian strain of Christianity developed in reaction to challenges stemming from developments in the natural sciences, a pedigree that makes it an especially inappropriate model for the understanding of religions in non-scientific cultures.[8] The result is, for instance, an interpretation of African religions that makes them impregnable to attack by Enlightenment *philosophes* or logical positivists yet leaves them blatantly unequal to the demands that native African cultures make on their religions. In fact, when European Christian churches are introduced into Africa by missionaries, their rituals and doctrines undergo a process of "Africanization," which promotes instrumentalist elements (such as belief in the practical efficacy of prayer) in ritual and doctrine.

There is no need here to even speak of religion. I see no reason to believe that an act that symbolically demarcates the limits of technological control cannot itself belong to the realm of technology. The symbolic value

of such ultimate technological interventions is most salient when they involve dramatic and/or costly procedures. Would it be surprising to hear that a father or mother had gained peace of mind after managing to arrange for their grievously ill child to undergo a liver transplant, even though they realized that the operation by no means guaranteed success? And even if the child were to die, would not the thought that they "had done everything possible" offer them some comfort? One's recognition of the fact that "everything possible" has been done implies one's acceptance of the limits of human control. This is exactly what Winch is referring to when he talks about coming to terms with the contingencies of life.

In the case I have described, an eminently practical yet costly and dramatic procedure, i.e. a liver transplant, is emblematic of the recognition that "everything possible" had been done. Sometimes, quite ordinary technology can serve a similar purpose. Faced with the ever-present possibility of a fatal collision, a modern traveler might find herself incapable of driving a car. When a modern traveler buckles her seat belt, she is both taking an instrumentally rational precaution and symbolically expressing an appropriate degree of concern for her own safety. The act of buckling the seat belt allows her to "go on," knowing that she may still find herself involved in an automobile accident. Similarly, a traditionalist traveler may recite an incantation before setting out on a journey. Although neither the buckling of seat belts nor the recital of incantations offers unfailing protection against the dangers of travel, both moderns and traditionalists may derive a similar peace of mind from these procedures. There is no reason to suppose that the traditionalist believes any less in the effectiveness of incantations than does the modern traveler believe in the effectiveness of her seat belt. One might even say that the expressive value of these actions derives from their purported instrumental value.

11 Evidence and interpretation

As I have shown above, there are good reasons to suspect that Winch's disagreement with Evans-Pritchard stems from both his failure to understand magic and his misreading of Evans-Pritchard's ethnographic writings. I mentioned earlier that Winch rejects Evans-Pritchard's instrumentalist assumptions regarding Zande magic in a way reminiscent of Wittgenstein's very similar arguments against Sir James Frazer's classic study of primitive magic and religion, *The Golden Bough* (1890). Wittgenstein went so far as to write:

> What narrowness of spiritual life we find in Frazer! And as a result: how impossible for him to understand a different way of life from the English one of his time! Frazer cannot imagine a priest who is not basically an English Parson of our times with all his stupidity and feebleness.
>
> Wittgenstein 1979: 5e

The juxtaposing of these two instances of a philosopher criticizing an anthropologist is far from capricious. In a footnote, Winch (UPI: 320) states that Wittgenstein's comments on Frazer inspired his own interpretation of the Upper Nile's Azande society. Furthermore, Wittgenstein and Winch make similar complaints about the respective targets of their criticisms; both Frazer and Evans-Pritchard are accused of interpreting the mystical practices of other cultures as if their role were similar to that of science and technology in Western society. Wittgenstein rejects Frazer's key thesis that the practitioners of primitive magic and ritual seek the kind of prediction and control of natural phenomena associated with modern science. Winch criticizes Evans-Pritchard for characterizing Zande mystical notions as false, a move that Winch claims unfairly assumes the universal applicability of the epistemological criteria associated with Western science.

A great historical chasm separates these two instances of a philosopher criticizing an anthropologist. Although Frazer had much broader acquaintance than did Wittgenstein (or most likely anyone else for that matter)

with the ethnographic materials of his time and was also the greater classi-
cist, both Frazer and Wittgenstein were essentially "armchair" analysts of
human cultural diversity. Neither had conducted anything resembling
anthropological fieldwork. In contrast, Evans-Pritchard and Winch wrote
in the wake of the revolution in anthropological method associated with
the teachings of Bronislaw Malinowski.[1] According to this new thinking,
participation in fieldwork is a veritable rite of passage to be undergone
by anyone wishing to assume the status of "social anthropologist."
Furthermore, only someone who has been personally immersed in a radi-
cally foreign culture could hope to achieve the kind of open-mindedness
and objectivity necessary for the proper interpretation of human societies.[2]
While this scientific revolution may dismiss both Frazer and Wittgenstein
equally as representatives of the old, benighted paradigm, it must discrimi-
nate between Winch, the academic philosopher, and Evans-Pritchard, the
grand master of ethnographic fieldwork. What then are we to make of
Winch's armchair assault on Evans-Pritchard's first-hand ethnographic
report in the post-Malinowskian era?

   Given the nature of Winch's criticism, it is clear that he disagrees
profoundly with Evans-Pritchard's interpretation of Zande culture. He
seems to be saying that Evans-Pritchard lived among the Azande, spoke
their language, witnessed and participated in their ceremonies, befriended
and interviewed many of them, and yet somehow misunderstood the
whole point of the practices that he was most keen to investigate.
Furthermore, Winch claims to have uncovered this deep misunderstanding
of Zande culture and offers up his own suggestions for more fruitful
avenues of interpretation, all from the safety of his proverbial armchair.
Poor Malinowski must be spinning in his grave!

   In addition to the question of how Winch's lack of field experience
might effect his ability to contribute to the understanding of Zande
culture, there remains the further issue of how Winch manages to defend
his interpretation when all the empirical data he uses are borrowed from
Evans-Pritchard's own writings. In the remainder of this chapter, I will
address these two issues, especially in the light of W.W. Sharrock and
R.J. Anderson's interpretation of Winch's project.

   In their essay "Magic witchcraft and the materialist mentality" (1985a;
hereafter, MWMM), Sharrock and Anderson develop a diagnosis of
Winch's detractors that is essentially an expansion of Wittgenstein's
comment on Frazer's "narrowness of spiritual life." It is worth mentioning
from the start that in their paper Sharrock and Anderson follow a policy
that allows clarity to be sacrificed to good manners. Almost all of their
harsher accusations of "complete insensitivity and obtuseness" (MWMM:
359) are directed against Sir James Frazer, a safe target who is long dead
and whose work has been roundly condemned by all parties involved, not
least by Evans-Pritchard himself.[3] John Cook, whose 1983 critique of
Winch and Wittgenstein Sharrock and Anderson take as "exemplary" of

the conventional anti-Winch and anti-Wittgenstein view, is at worst described as displaying "the very mentality against which Winch and Wittgenstein are struggling" (MWMM: 358). Evans-Pritchard, perhaps in acknowledgment of his great ethnographic achievement, is allowed to remain above the fray. Be that as it may, Winch's article is largely a critique of statements found in *Witchcraft*. Sharrock and Anderson cannot get around the fact that by maintaining Winch's position, they are implicitly rejecting that of Evans-Pritchard. More disturbingly, Sharrock and Anderson offer no reason for avoiding the conclusion that the spiritual diagnosis of "narrowness," "insensitivity," etc. should not extend to include Evans-Pritchard himself. This being said, we may go on to a detailed consideration of this alleged spiritual malady and its proposed cure.

Sharrock and Anderson wish to explain why so many people make the mistake of thinking that the point of "primitive" magic is to achieve practical goals. They adopt Winch's view, which they summarize as being "that the materialistic attitude of science can see nothing in magic except its own empirical and instrumental pre-occupations" (MWMM: 360), a somewhat harsh and categorical distillation of the opening paragraphs of UPS. The only way to combat the blindness associated with the "materialist mentality" of their essay's title is to cultivate "a spiritual sensibility" (MWMM: 361), which will allow one to appreciate "the point" of primitive social practices. This sensibility, like musical or literary sensibilities, can only be developed in our fellow human beings by their "being given a great deal of guidance as to what to look for in the examples we invite them to inspect." I should point out that Winch himself never makes this claim for the need to inculcate an appropriate "sensibility" in those who wish to understand primitive magic. Winch makes the much more modest point that if our only access to Zande mysticism is through comparison with one of our own Western modes of thought, we would do better to compare it with Christian prayer, for example, than with modern science and technology (UPS: 39). Be that as it may, Sharrock and Anderson's claims for "spiritual sensibility" create new difficulties.

One might ask how Winch *himself* gained his insight into Zande culture. Given Sharrock and Anderson's concern with "sensibility," Winch's lack of personal acquaintance with the Azande is no longer simply a technical or, one might say, a political disability. It is not merely a matter of a philosopher entering into the discussions of professional anthropologists without first establishing his credentials in fieldwork. Everything Winch knows of Zande magic he learned from Evans-Pritchard's book. But since the whole point of UPS is that Evans-Pritchard seriously misunderstood the Azande, *Witchcraft* could not have offered the proper sequence of examples "and great deal of guidance" required for the cultivation of the proper sensibility for understanding Zande magic. Winch's correction of Evans-Pritchard becomes a psychological impossibility. If we accept Sharrock and Anderson's account of sensibility, Winch's critique of

Evans-Pritchard becomes a case of someone sawing off the very branch on which he sits.

Sharrock and Anderson's description of the role of "sensibility" in the project of cultural interpretation is also puzzling. In response to those who believe that the ethnographic evidence tells against Wittgenstein's and Winch's non-materialist interpretation of primitive magic, Sharrock and Anderson make the strange claim that Winch and Wittgenstein "wish to reject the notion that *every* problem can and must be resolved by the consideration of evidence" (MWMM: 361). Following my usual policy, I will not venture an opinion as to what Wittgenstein really thought about this issue, as the majority of his corpus (including his *Remarks on Frazer*) consists of a vast quantity of private notes and typescripts never properly prepared for publication. Although Winch seems to believe that method-ological issues in the social sciences may be addressed without consulting empirical evidence,[4] I find no reason to believe that he would exempt any aspect of his interpretation of the Azande from the requirement of having some evidential basis. What Sharrock and Anderson are missing here is that while the same evidence may be cited to support several different interpretations, it may not be used to support *any* imaginable interpreta-tion. They dismiss the "piling up" of evidence as if its presentation lacked any logical structure. In fact, Sharrock and Anderson seem to refuse a place for reason in the act of interpretation altogether. Instead, they make a plea for "spiritual sensitivity," which must be "cultivated." We are never informed how Winch, whose experience of primitive cultures has been limited to the wilds of Swansea, London, and Illinois, developed this sensi-bility, while Evans-Pritchard, the patron saint of participatory observation, remained imprisoned in his Western parochialism. Evans-Pritchard was, after all, the only party to this debate who, besides "piling up" ethno-graphic data in a certain way, also observed these various bits of behavior as they occurred in the context of a functioning way of life. Furthermore, even the slightest acquaintance with Evans-Pritchard's biography makes strange the claim that he was spiritually obtuse. How did someone trapped in the "materialist mentality" decide to join the Roman Catholic Church?

Sharrock and Anderson do seem to be making exactly this claim. They appear to be saying that there exist two mutually exclusive interpretations of Zande magic, each of which explains all of the data, and that the correct choice between these interpretations can only be made by the exer-cise of the aforementioned "spiritual sensibility." Even if we were to admit the philosophical validity of the doctrine of interpretative indeterminacy, it remains a difficult (and perhaps impossible) task to establish that the choice between a particular pair of interpretations of some actual social practice is indeterminate. Lest I be accused of misrepresenting their posi-tion, I had better quote Sharrock and Anderson rather extensively:

In any event, it is easy enough to show that what is at issue is not the scope or scale of the evidence, its appositeness and weight, but its interpretation. ... All the further evidence which Cook calls upon does not begin to solve anything. All it does is provide yet another replication of the original problem. Indeed, the evidence could just as easily be used in support of the emotivist position [the term used by Cook to describe what he considers to be the position of Winch and Wittgenstein] as against it.

MWMM: 361

I must confess that I find it difficult to accept the idea that ethnographic evidence has no part to play in resolving a dispute over the role of particular practices in a particular society. Perhaps a more careful review of what Winch *et al.* see as the nature of the materialist misunderstanding of the Azande would be of some help. Sharrock and Anderson's views on this issue almost caricature Winch's own ideas. In their presentation, it is possible to isolate at least two distinguishable attitudes (I will spare the reader a delineation of other attitudes hinted at by Sharrock and Anderson) toward magic and its interpretation.

One statement of Sharrock and Anderson's position (I will call it "position 1") has it that "we and the primitives both have empirical knowledge of the course of nature, but whilst the knowledge of nature's regularities is much the same, *the magic is different* [emphasis in original]" (MWMM: 366–7). Here, we have a typical instrumental monist claim. According to this version, the Azande are perfectly capable of our type of instrumental, "rational" thought. The materialist errs by assuming that magical beliefs belong to the instrumentalist realm of Azande thought. What, then, is the realm to which magic belongs? Something like the realm to which belong the superstitions of our own culture, such as "touching wood," carrying rabbits' feet, and the like (MWMM: 368). Just as these compulsions are without any importance for the scientific views of those who perform them, so too magic has no bearing on the Azande's understanding of the natural world. While it is true that the Azande do entertain certain beliefs about their magic, these somehow do not form part of their view of the world but rather "form part of the practice [of magic] itself" (MWMM: 369). I suppose this would be similar to the status of our notion that breaking a mirror brings seven years of bad luck. Even people who are troubled by such beliefs cannot offer a further explanation of why the bad luck lasts seven years rather than six or eight.

Position 1 makes the Azande appear surprisingly similar to Westerners, differing only in regard to superstitious behavior, which no one takes seriously anyway. If the issue between the Wittgensteinians and the materialists were really so simple, it is hard to see why, as Sharrock and Anderson claim, ethnographic evidence could not be brought to bear toward its resolution. In fact, Sharrock and Anderson do present two such

arguments from evidence, which have their source in Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer*. One line of argument says that if people really depended on magic as they depend on materialist technologies, they would not feel the need to supplement magic with materialist technology. Yet, Sharrock and Anderson point out, "People undertake magic to protect themselves on sea journeys, but still sail their craft to the best of their abilities" (MWMM: 364). [5] Therefore, we can say that these people do not really depend upon magic to protect them. Unfortunately, the same line of reasoning could be used to defend a non-materialist interpretation of electric circuit breakers and fuse boxes. "People install automatic circuit breakers in their homes, but still make sure that their electric wiring and appliances are as safe as possible." We can therefore say that these people do not really depend on automatic circuit-breakers to protect them! All we really have here is people hedging their bets by taking all available precautions. A related argument has it that if people thought that they could depend on magic as they do on materialist technologies, they would apply them when their effect is most needed. Yet, state Sharrock and Anderson,[6] "People do make rain ceremonies, but do so just before the rains are due and not in the depths of the dry season when they might be supposed to need them" (MWMM: 364). It should be unnecessary to even point out that magic and ritual are used in response to desperate, even hopeless situations. As for the rain ceremony, it may be countered with an example from our own technology:

> People do send up airplanes to seed the clouds with silver iodide, but they do so only when clouds have already appeared in the sky and not in the depths of the cloudless dry season, when they might be supposed to need rain.

People will generally not apply a technology if the conditions for its success are not in evidence.[7]

The second position (position 2) that may be found in Sharrock and Anderson's article holds that the Azande's world is informed by an entirely different metaphysics than that of the West. What they propose is no less than a full-blown conceptual relativism. Since we do not share a metaphysics with the Azande, we cannot possibly begin to disagree with them about facts that can only be defined in the context of a shared metaphysical position. We can no longer say, as did Evans-Pritchard, that the Azande were wrong to believe in the existence of witches, because "what external reality might be, as well as how to deal with it, are given within a metaphysics" (MWMM: 371). Thus far, Sharrock and Anderson could be understood as claiming that the truth or falsity of a description depends on the conceptual framework in which its terms are couched. They seem to be embracing instrumental pluralism, but it is a purely conceptual brand of pluralism freed from any concern with the viable functioning of human

societies. And so, Sharrock and Anderson can blithely make the radical claim that "the idea of testing a theory against external reality is part of our metaphysics and completely absent from the Azande's" (MWMM: 371). Add to this Sharrock and Anderson's claim that the "Zande are not ... perturbed by the prospect of inconsistency" (MWMM: 369)[8] and I would heartily agree that one would require a rather incredibly developed "sensibility" in order to understand what on Earth the Azande were talking about and how they ever manage to feed themselves. One is reminded of the kind of radically alien way of ordering reality discussed by Donald Davidson in his classic paper "On the very idea of a conceptual scheme" (1984b: 183–98). I should think he would say that if we were to encounter a people who neither checked their beliefs "against an external reality" nor were "perturbed by the prospect of inconsistency," we would never think of interpreting their utterances as language or their behavior as purposeful action.

Regardless of the outlandishness of Sharrock and Anderson's Zande metaphysics, I see no reason to think that the question of which metaphysics is held by a particular society is not susceptible to considerations of evidence. The source of confusion here might be that we are used to the idea that metaphysical questions may be discussed in an empirical vacuum. One may compare Descartes' metaphysics with that of Berkeley without performing a single experiment or making a single observation. However, the claim that the man Descartes was a dualist and that the man Berkeley an idealist are historical claims that must be supported by documents and other evidence. Similarly, a sufficiently creative thinker need not perform any empirical investigation before constructing a speculative metaphysics that allows for the existence of supernaturally powerful witches and effective magic. It is not possible to prove that a certain people living in eastern Africa actually live by this metaphysics without consulting the ethnographic evidence.

It goes almost without saying that position 1 directly contradicts position 2. Zande mystical beliefs, which in position 1 were "part of the practice [of magic, etc.] itself," mere epiphenomena of ritual practices, have now in position 2 been promoted to the status of a full-blown metaphysics. How could the Zande "knowledge of nature's regularities ... [be] ... much the same" as our own if they do not share with us even the idea of testing beliefs against external reality? In the section explaining what I call position 2, Sharrock and Anderson introduce the example of the practice of Zande travelers of placing a stone in a tree in order to prevent the sun setting before they reach their destination. If this had been mentioned in relation to position 1, we would expect Sharrock and Anderson to write: "of course after placing the stone in a tree they continue walking as quickly as possible, thus proving that they have no false beliefs about the sun's apparent motion." Instead, they write: "It is part of Azande metaphysics that time, the sun and clocks can be controlled" (MWMM: 373).

How do they know this? What would we think of a Zande anthropologist who claimed that it is part of Western metaphysics that breaking a mirror brings seven years of bad luck? Perhaps an additional dose of "sensibility" is required in order to determine whether position 1 or position 2 applies to a particular bit of magic.

Consideration of the two positions I have cited has merely complicated Sharrock and Anderson's case. Neither position appears unsusceptible to considerations of evidence. Worse yet, the evidence does not particularly favor either position over that of the "materialists." Even if it all comes down to the issue of "sensibility," excluding Evans-Pritchard himself, none of the participants in this debate have spent enough time with the Azande to develop any intuitive sense or "sensibility" regarding which interpretation is correct. Perhaps Sharrock and Anderson are right and the ethnographic record may be read either way. One might still well wonder how Sharrock and Anderson have come to be so *sure* of their critique of the "materialists." Sensibility might be the primary tool of *discovery* in the social sciences, but validation cannot amount to an *ad hominem* affair of extolling the spiritual prowess of a particular investigator and then blindly accepting that investigator's interpretations of social phenomena. Like Wittgenstein and Winch, Sharrock and Anderson end up basing their confidence on assumptions of interpretative charity.

In their article "Wittgenstein and comparative sociology" (1984), Sharrock and Anderson (together with J.A. Hughes) produce a list summarizing seven objections made by Wittgenstein of Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. Of the seven, five do not directly undermine Frazer's theses; rather, they merely point to a broader horizon of interpretation than was apparently available to him. The remaining two involve interpretative charity. The charity I refer to is double-edged: it makes broad claims both about human behavior itself and about the project of interpreting human behavior. Objection number four warns that "To infer a set of beliefs from a set of practices is to run the risk of making the holders of those beliefs out to be unbelievably stupid" (Sharrock *et al.* 1984: 270). In other words, it is a fact of human nature that people can only be so stupid. The idea that some society might be sufficiently stupid to believe, for instance, in the technological efficacy of magic contradicts this basic fact. On the other hand, objection number seven states that "the *point* [my emphasis] of understanding a practice cannot be to find it to be stupid" (*ibid.*: 271). This would seem to constitute a kind of desideratum for the social sciences; it rejects as somehow deeply inappropriate an interpretation of the Azande, for instance, which makes them out to be stupid in regard to their magic and witchcraft. Sharrock and Anderson are suggesting something like the old adage "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." We should try to derive maximum spiritual benefit and wisdom from our study of other cultures. The anti-materialist view of magic is superior because it allows Winch and Wittgenstein to "see a spiritual discrimination and

awareness [in some forms of magic] that is not matched in the views of those who dismiss magic" (MWMM: 360).

Both types of charity mentioned by Sharrock and Anderson are problematic. Their protests against interpretations that make out people to be "unbelievably stupid" are based on an undefended assumption of instrumental monism. As I have already mentioned, Edgerton (1992) has amply documented the surprisingly common presence of social practices that must be judged to be, by current Western standards, massively stupid and self-defeating. If the study of human societies and history has taught us anything, it has taught us the danger of refusing to accept reports of a phenomenon because of its *prima facie* "unbelievability" (although I would risk making an exception for Sharrock and Anderson's speculations regarding the Azande's *total* obliviousness to logic and empirical reality). If it is believable that European doctors were capable of asserting the therapeutic value of bleeding, there is no danger of the "materialist" interpretation of magic making out the Azande to be "unbelievably stupid."

As for the notion that "the point of understanding a practice cannot be to find it to be stupid," this very principle seems to militate against Sharrock and Anderson's own insistence on the importance of "sensibility." While developing the notion of sensibility, they mention the case of "someone [who] feels Jane Austen to be a nineteenth century Barbara Cartland" (MWMM: 362) as an example of lack of literary sensibility. What of someone who thinks Barbara Cartland to be a twentieth-century Jane Austen? Surely such a judgment would likewise bespeak a lack of literary sensibility. The point is that sensibility and unbridled charity can be opposing tendencies. A critic should have sufficient comprehension of both the nineteenth-century novel and the twentieth-century mass-market romance to rate Austen as superior to Cartland. My comparison of Zande culture with that of the Nuer suggests that Zande culture is not blessed with a deep religious consciousness. Zande society may promote the development of political and economic acumen, but judged by standards of spirituality and piety, perhaps Azande society belongs in the Barbara Cartland section of religious traditions, along with the faith of Wittgenstein's stupid and feeble English parson. Might not Sharrock and Anderson be trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, imposing the subtleties of Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion on a genuinely profane and mercenary magic?

12 Instrumental action in Winch's philosophy of the social sciences

Human actions can be crudely divided into two categories, the instrumental and the communicative. I have already used the term *instrumental* at several points in this book, and with it I gesture toward practical, goal-oriented activities usually involving exploitation and control of the natural world. *Communicative* action is here meant to include behavior geared toward the expression and interpretation of information, attitudes, and so forth.[1] Of course, most human activities possess both communicative and instrumental aspects. A daring medical procedure may communicate the message "we have done everything possible," while a technician may speak into a microphone in order to test how well it is working.[2] However, it is worth making the analytical distinction between these categories, if only to help us to stand guard against the danger that one of them might monopolize our interest in human behavior to the detriment of a more balanced understanding of what it means to be a human being.

Each aspect of human action, the instrumental and the communicative, gives rise to a criterion of humanity based upon participation in some paradigmatically human practice. Communicative action finds its paradigm in the use of language, giving rise to the venerable tradition[3] that defines human beings as *speaking* animals. Instrumental action finds its paradigm in tool making, giving rise to the more recent tradition[4] that defines human beings as tool-making animals. Both of these criteria of humanity imply that humans are somehow superior to all other creatures, and the proponents of human uniqueness react anxiously to any report that non-humans have encroached upon them. If chimps appear to have grasped the meanings of some individual gestures in sign language, syntax will be declared the essence of human language. The same process has taken place in regard to the tool-making criteria of humanity:

> First it was claimed that humans alone *use* tools, until animals were found that did the same. ... Then it was claimed that only man *makes* tools, until the animals again proved our equals. ... Nowadays, however, many students of human and animal behavior confidently

declare that they have at last discovered an unassailable rubicon: man, it is said, is the only animal who *uses tools to make tools.*

Ingold 1986: 58

The rhetorical analysis of ISS reveals that Winch avoids mentioning instrumental behavior.[5] He describes a world in which people vote, converse, and play games. It is a very different world from that, for instance, of Heidegger (1962), which contains hammers and other "equipment," or from the world of Marx, with its various "modes of production." None of this would be particularly distressing if Winch had said plainly that he wishes to restrict his attention to communicative action alone. After all, he does tell us that he is interested in meaningful behaviors that have a "symbolic character" and to which categories "analogous" to those used in "elucidating the nature of language" are "applicable." The problem is that Winch also claims to be concerned with meaningful behavior defined as action performed "for a reason." For Winch, the contrast class to "meaningful behavior" is not non-communicative behavior but rather thoughtless, animalistic habit and "the pointless behavior of a berserk lunatic" (ISS: 53). The consideration of instrumental actions may tear asunder these different aspects of meaningfulness, which Winch would rather keep together.

It is not surprising that Winch chooses to emphasize the communicative, non-instrumental side of human action. Generally speaking, the study of communicative action is more supportive of SNORF. Communication is by definition a social affair. In order to communicate effectively, one must use words or other signs in a fashion that may be correctly understood by the receiver of the message. Presumably, this requires that both sender and receiver share identical rules of language use, rules that are typical of the kind of socially established rules that Winch hopes to find everywhere. This is not true for practical action. Suppose that one morning I discover a large boulder blocking the sidewalk in front of my house. Just before I begin trying to push it aside with brute force, it occurs to me that I might make the job easier by lubricating the path with detergent. Passers-by who see me emptying a bottle of detergent on the pavement may have no idea what I am up to. There is no established rule of boulder shoving that calls for a detergent libation. In fact, if I want other people to assist me, I may intermittently make a great show of trying to push the boulder before I finish greasing the path. People are more likely to understand my intentions if they see me engaged in a typical boulder-moving strategy than they are if they see me attempt a more original method. However, if I am not interested in soliciting the sympathy of others, I have no reason to apply a socially recognized rule to the execution of my task.[6]

Some practical activities (such as my use of detergent in the boulder-pushing example), while performed "for a reason," are not intended to express a "symbolic" meaning. Winch's disinterest in coming to grips with

practical activities becomes most obvious in his choice of an example of meaningful behavior that does *not* exhibit "an immediate social signifi-cance" (ISS: 50). He describes the use of a bookmark, which merely constitutes a message that one sends to oneself, rather than a strictly instrumental act intended to transform nature.

None of this would be exceptionable if Winch could uncover the communicative side of all meaningful behaviors. Turner's (1980) strongly Winchian *Sociological Explanation as Translation*, interprets Winch's work along such lines. Trying to meet MacIntyre's (1967: 102) challenge that Winch explain how going for a walk and lighting a cigarette might be described as rule-governed activities, Turner writes:

> In order for us to call an act "meaningful", it must count as some-thing. To "count as something" is to be governed by a rule – the rule that determines what it counts as; whether it is to count, for example, as an insult or a promise, as courageous or as foolish.
>
> We can see the misunderstanding clearly in MacIntyre's choice of exemplars of acts that are apparently not rule-governed: going for a walk and smoking a cigarette. The reason we cannot see how these actions are rule-governed is that MacIntyre has not provided us with the context in which they can be said to be "meaningful acts." If we fill in the context in such a way that they are meaningful acts, the examples lose their appearance of being non-rule-governed. Consider the case of a man whose physician has told him that he shows early signs of lung cancer and that it is almost certain to advance if he does not quit smoking immediately. He is still reluctant to quit, and his wife begs him to do so, in consideration of her and their children. He sits before her, coolly lights up a cigarette, and smokes it. We would naturally take this as nothing but an insult to the wife. We might say: "It could be meant as nothing but an insult." And it is meant (and taken) this way according to a rule. Moreover, this rule could be of considerable sociological interest. We could imagine a society in which such an act would be taken differently, as an affirmation of masculinity, an act of *machismo*. We would expect that relations between men and women in a society that followed such a rule would be very different from relations in our own.
>
> Turner 1980: 26–7[7]

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Turner unwittingly reveals the weakness of Winch's program. In order to make lighting a cigarette into a communicative act, Turner must propose a complicated and rather unusual context involving a distraught wife and imminent death. One feels compelled to ask, paraphrasing Freud: "Sometimes, isn't a cigarette just a cigarette?" Of course, any action can become communicative in the proper circumstances. Surely MacIntyre would agree. A baseball pitcher may arrange a set of signals with his catcher according to which a scratch of the

nose signals that the next pitch will be fast and low. However, we certainly do not need such peculiar circumstances in order to understand that nose scratching is performed *for a reason*, usually to relieve an itch. Similarly, in most cases, people light a cigarette not in order to aggravate their wives, signal the start of a bank robbery, or demonstrate contempt for cigar smoking. They light up a cigarette simply because they feel like smoking. The same is true of many other instrumental actions; they are not performed in order to send a message but rather to achieve a result. They lack any communicative purpose, so it is hard to understand why such actions must be performed according to socially established rules.[8]

While the examples of scratching one's nose and my earlier anecdote of greasing the boulder may undermine Winch's general emphasis on the importance of socially founded rules, they do not really strike at the heart of SNORF. Winch could simply respond that such behaviors might be governed by contingently private rules. It would be much more damaging to the philosophical underpinnings of Winch's position if it proved possible for a solitary person to follow instrumental rules while growing up in complete social isolation. Let us first examine the way in which instrumental activities are usually learned.

Suppose that I am apprenticed to a carpenter. I am helping him and his colleagues to build the frame of a house. My master has given me some limited instruction in the use of hammers, and he has taught me to distinguish between properly and improperly driven nails. I raise my hammer and swing it down in accordance with the few rules I have learned, but when the nail is struck it bends over to one side. What should I think of this situation? On the one hand, I have followed the rules I was taught. On the other hand, I also realize that my hammering did not achieve its purpose. Something must have gone wrong. In a sense, the nail itself tells me that my technique must be further improved. As I experiment with various possible refinements of my hammering, each new nail lets me know how I am progressing in my study of carpentry.

The processes by which I learn the skills of hammering and speaking are dissimilar. My attempts to learn speech are guided by the reactions of my fellow human beings. While, to a great extent, children "pick up" the ability to understand and produce speech, it is not entirely unreasonable to schematize language learning to the kind of formal teacher/pupil interactions so often described by Wittgenstein and his followers. When I learn to hammer, the process is substantially different. I am taught as much by boards and nails as I am by my master. The materials I manipulate as a carpenter offer their own "external check on what I do."[9]

In fact, Winch's unspoken instrumental monism implies that I learn entirely *too* much from the materials and tools of my trade. If universal natural conditions and human needs are *so* restrictive of the possible range of our practical activities that all cultures share the same criteria of instrumental rationality, then perhaps I am not in need of further human

instruction in order to learn rules of practical action.[10] Rules for the evalu-
ation of instrumental action will be dictated by nature. Nature itself will
point out my mistakes. But if non-human nature can serve as my critic,
then I can learn to follow rules without the benefit of human companion-
ship. What will become of Winch's claim that the notion of rule following
can only be learned in a social context?

   This is precisely the question addressed by Winch's close colleague,
Rush Rhees, in an article cited by Winch in ISS (p. 37). Rhees, in his paper
entitled "Can there be a private language?" (1966), comes to Wittgenstein's
defense against Alfred Ayer's (1966) criticisms of the private language
argument (which, for our purposes, may be understood as Wittgenstein's
special proof of SNORF as applied to the rule-governed use of language).
Rhees must come to terms with the example of Ayer's hypothetical loner,
Robinson Crusoe, who has lived his entire life in isolation from other
human beings. In his article, Rhees is not concerned with intrinsically
human behavior in general but only with language. It is still interesting to
hear what he has to say about the possibility of Crusoe's making a
mistake, that hallmark of rule following (and thus meaningful) behavior,
while living in his solitude:

> Ayer's Crusoe may make the kind of mistakes animals do. He may
> mistake a bird which he does not like to eat for one which he likes.
> This is not like a mistake in understanding the meaning of an expres-
> sion, or a mistake in following what was said.
>   "Why not? He calls the edible bird ba, and when he sees the ined-
> ible one he says 'ba' and kills it."
>   That is not a mistake in following the meanings of words. He could
> have made the same mistake without using words at all. (Perhaps it is
> roughly the kind of mistake that is corrected through negative feed-
> back.) You cannot ask whether he made the other kind of mistake; any
> more than you can ask this of a machine.
>
> *ibid.*: 282–3

Since Rhees is concerned with the problem of solitary (or *private*)
language, he is content to point out that Crusoe is not doing anything that
really requires language: "he could have made the same mistake without
using words at all." (*ibid.*: 283) But then he goes further and relegates such
non-linguistic behavior to the realm of self-moving yet non-human objects,
i.e. animals and machines. Today, almost fifty years after the paper's orig-
inal publication, Rhees's trivialization of animal and machine cognition
seems a bit naive. He can hardly be blamed for not anticipating develop-
ments in connectionist artificial intelligence and primate psychology.
However, it is surprising that Rhees would assume that stripped of a social
context, human thought is in no essential way different from that of other
animals or from the workings of the cybernetic feedback systems that were

all the rage back in the 1950s. Even if we grant the point that there is an essential difference between mistakes made by a socialized human and the mistakes of an unsocialized human, there is no foundation for Rhees's assumption that no essential difference remains between a mistake made by an unsocialized human and the mistakes of animals and machines (especially of the kind that were imaginable to him at the time of his writing). I find it likely that even the basic concepts needed for making such comparisons will only *become available* to us pending further advances in the study of human, animal, and machine cognition.

When Robinson Crusoe discovers that he has mistakenly captured inedible prey, is his situation really identical with that of a cat that has discovered that it has been chasing an inedible plastic toy? Is there nothing unique to the cognition of human beings that sets apart even their solitary behavior from that of animals? In Heidegger's analysis, for example, it is exactly such situations of defeated expectation that lead to the kind of representational intentionality typically associated with human thought.[11]

Since his analysis focuses on the overly simple task of identifying edible prey, Rhees avoids having to consider the possibility of a Robinson Crusoe who performs more uniquely human behaviors. Consider Kirk's imaginary race of "Cyclopes":

> Their behaviour is remarkable. They are a race of solitaries, and there is no evidence of any system of communication between them. But the most striking feature of the behaviour of these creatures – let us call them Cyclopes – is their skill and interest in the construction of mechanical devices, some of which are labour-saving equipment, while others appear to be toys. The techniques used in the construction of these devices are more advanced than the kind of thing commonly found among primitive peoples.
>
> Kirk 1967: 370

> There is a progressive increase in the sophistication of the devices introduced one by one into the technological repertoire of any Cyclops. A Cyclops which has just started its independent existence relies on naturally available food, water and shelter. Soon, however, it begins to use simple tools (stone hammers, wooden levers, and so on) and develops more and more advanced methods (e.g. the use of bows and arrows, bow-drills, fire, wheels, pulley systems, water-wheels, hydraulic systems, cogwheels, etc.) as it grows older, thus compressing into a few years the equivalent of millennia of human development. The systematic use of experimental models also grows gradually.
>
> *ibid.*: 373

Kirk introduces his Cyclopes in order to demonstrate that solitary rational behavior is not conceptually impossible. Perhaps Winch and Rhees would

refuse, on principle, to call the Cyclopes' behavior "rational." However, it would be an affront to common sense not to recognize that there is something about the Cyclopes that makes them essentially different from mere animals.[12]

While Rhees describes Crusoe's mistake as merely animalistic, he is willing to describe him as having mistaken an inedible bird for an edible one. We might very well ask by whose criterion of edibility might Crusoe be said to have made a mistake. After all, Rhees is talking about birds that Crusoe "likes to eat." Assuming for the moment the validity of Wittgensteinian arguments against private language and private rules, instrumental pluralism creates the conceptual space for different standards regarding such practical questions as what constitutes a mistake in the identification of a bird as edible. Winch (and Rhees) could then extend their argument for SNORF by asking where Crusoe learned his standards of instrumental rationality. If he had no such standards, then Crusoe could more legitimately be characterized as having "made a mistake" in a non-human, animalistic sense.

Conclusion

Winch's compunctions regarding instrumental action seriously damage the scope of his idea of a social science. He equates meaningful (i.e., rule-following) behavior with "specifically human behavior," the only subject worthy of consideration by the human sciences. To coin a phrase, humans become "the rule-following animals." In as much as Winch conflates rule following with the use of language,[13] he may be seen as belonging to the venerable tradition for which speech is the definitively human capacity.

Regardless of the importance of the communicative aspect of human behavior, Winch's problem in accommodating instrumental action to his system leaves his notion of the "intrinsically human" out of step with general anthropological opinion.[14] It should be recalled that use of tools stands beside use of language as a defining aspect of human behavior. If language is typical of human communication, the use of tools is equally typical of practical human interaction with the environment. The uniquely human aspects of instrumental action must be given their due by any comprehensive vision of the social sciences. In the words of Roy Bhaksar:

> Winch misconstrues the *explanada* of social science. Social science ... is concerned with actions which are practical, not just symbolic: with making (*poesis*), not just doing (*praxis*), or rather with doing which is not, or not only saying (signifying or expressing).
>
> Bahksar 1979: 180–1

All in all, Winch's vision of the social sciences suffers from his inability to find a place for naturalist elements in the study of human action and

society. While Winch practically defines *homo sapiens* as the rule-following animal, he is unwilling to put up with the scientific study of the cognitive and biological foundations of our ability to follow rules, and how those foundations help to shape the rules, institutions, and forms of life that lend meaning to our lives. His unwillingness to confront the formative role that the natural environment has on the development of instrumental practices, worsened by his adoption of instrumental monism, forces him to turn his back on the study of the technological aspects of culture. Despite these shortcomings, the central message of Winch's philosophy, which insists that we attend to the self-understanding of the people whom we study, will no doubt always remain an important principle for the social sciences.

Appendix: Winch and the Sahlins/Obeyesekere controversy[1]

The Sahlins/Obeyesekere controversy is probably the most publicized anthropological debate of the past decade. On the one hand, we have Marshall Sahlins, Charles F. Grey Distinguished Service Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, a man widely regarded as one of the leading anthropologists of our day. Sahlins studies Polynesian societies and has been working at the seemingly paradoxical task of developing structuralist accounts of historical change.[2] Gananath Obeyesekere is a professor in Princeton's Department of Anthropology and studies the cultures of India and his native Sri Lanka. Obeyesekere tries to apply psychoanalytic insights to his anthropological work.

   The bone of contention between these two scholars involves the proper interpretation of the events surrounding Captain James Cook's encounter with the Hawaiians and eventual death at their hands. In a number of publications, Sahlins (1985) has offered scholarly support for the popular notion that the native Hawaiians identified Cook as the deity Lono, and that his death was necessitated by the logic of indigenous Hawaiian religion. Obeyesekere (1992) devoted an entire book, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific*, to a critique of Sahlins. Obeyesekere claims that Sahlins did not merely misunderstand the Hawaiians' attitude towards Cook but that Sahlins' thinking has been distorted by typical Western prejudices. These are, in particular, the assumption that non-European indigenous peoples are relatively bereft of pragmatic rational thought, and the myth that Europeans are so spectacularly impressive to such indigenous peoples that they will be often mistaken by them for gods. According to Obeyesekere, the Hawaiians had no difficulty identifying Cook as a fellow human being. They treated him as they would any other great chief, and even tried to factor him into their local political calculations. Later, when Cook became uncontrollably aggressive and violent, they killed him. Obeyesekere's book was well received by the academic community, winning him the Luis Gottschalk prize for eighteenth-century studies. Sahlins (1995) replied with his own book-length rebuttal, *How Natives Think: About Captain Cook, for Example*. Besides scoring many scholarly points, Sahlins launched a political

counterattack: according to Sahlins, Obeyesekere is the one blinded by Eurocentrism. Why else would he be so offended by the suggestion that the actions of some indigenous peoples do not fulfill the expectations of bourgeois Western rationality? And each could accuse the other of usurping the Hawaiian's "voice." Sahlins reduced Hawaiian discourse to a quaintly incomprehensible mythology, while Obeyesekere shackled it to the Procrustean bed of a shallow Western utilitarianism. The rest, as they say, is history: major reviews by Clifford Geertz (1995) and Ian Hacking (1999: 206–23), a comprehensive symposium in the journal *Contemporary Anthropology* (Borofsky *et al.* 1997), etc., etc.

Before connecting all of this to Peter Winch, I would like to make a number of general observations. True to my philosophical calling, I will avoid saying much about the most admirable aspect of the Sahlins/Obeyesekere debate. I am referring to the refreshing fact that both parties to the controversy clearly accept the principle that questions of historical and cultural interpretation are best addressed through a consideration of relevant evidence. Sahlins is often said to know the ethnographic and documentary materials relating to Cook's Hawaiian visit better than anyone else on the planet, and Obeyesekere has obviously also taken great pains to master the relevant literature. Quite appropriately, they debate irredeemably boring questions such as the relative reliability of the various officers' logs describing Cook's adventures. Such issues lie completely outside my own range of competence and interest, and, having saluted the scholarship of both our disputants, I shall say nothing more about these crucial details.

I would also like to make a few not entirely original comments about the impressive quantity of quasi-political heat generated by the Sahlins/Obeyesekere debate. A careful reading of Sahlins and Obeyesekere reveals that their seemingly antithetical positions are repeatedly softened by subtle qualifiers, conceptual sophistication, and the occasional shameless waffle. The actual extent of their disagreement is not so great, certainly nothing like, say, the earlier disagreement between Edmund Leach (1966) and Melford Spiro (1966; 1968) regarding the question of whether or not the Australian Aborigines were aware of the connection between sex and reproduction.

Basically, Sahlins says that the Hawaiians considered Cook a god during his life, while Obeyesekere claims that deification occurred only after his death. Furthermore, everyone agrees that the Hawaiian concept of a god (or rather the Hawaiian concept translated by the English word "god") carries with it few of the grave metaphysical implications associated with the notion of deity native to the monotheistic West. I am reminded of a conversation I once had with a psychiatrist who had tended many patients suffering from a malady known as the "Jerusalem syndrome," which is defined as a psychotic episode involving delusions of a religious nature afflicting tourists visiting Jerusalem. The psychiatrist told me that if a patient claims to be the Messiah, it is important to establish whether he or

she identifies with the Christian or Jewish faith. In Judaism, the Messiah is a mere human being, while in Christianity he is also a person of the Trinity. A Christian with delusions of being the Messiah is likely to be more seriously ill than a Jew suffering from a nominally identical condition. The analogy to the Hawaiian case should be clear. All parties to the dispute agree that to call someone a god by eighteenth-century Hawaiian standards involves making a much more modest claim than identifying that person with the European Creator of Heaven and Earth. The stakes for Hawaiian rationality in the Sahlins/Obeyesekere debate are not quite so high as one might think.

Finally, I would like to point out how remarkably unprecedented an event Cook's visit was for the Hawaiians. For the first time in their history, the Hawaiians met people who looked, spoke, dressed, behaved, and possessed technology quite unlike anyone they had seen before. I hope no one will accuse me of believing in a monolithic human nature if I point out that everyone gets flustered by radically new situations. Even if one were to claim that the Hawaiian response to Cook's visit was less then perfectly rational, it would be quite unfair to say that this reflects poorly on the general quality of Hawaiian thought and behavior. Clearly, the alleged Australian ignorance of biological fatherhood is much more troubling. If the Hawaiian reception of Cook might seem quaint or bizarre, if it may seem to involve some kind of category error, I shudder to think how paradigmatically rational Europeans would behave under similarly perplexing circumstances – perhaps greeting their first extraterrestrial visitors?

Finally to Winch. Since the Sahlins/Obeyesekere controversy is largely concerned with a point of intercultural interpretation, it is a natural candidate for the application of Winchian insights. Stephen Lukes (2000) has already begun to make the Winch connection in his recent article in *History of the Human Sciences*, entitled "Different cultures, different rationalities?" Lukes makes a noble effort to nail down the essential point of dispute between Obeyesekere and Sahlins without losing sight of the more subtle aspects of their relative positions. He suggests that the issues they debate are largely the same as those that concerned Winch in UPS. To put matters rather crudely, Lukes identifies Sahlins as occupying the Winchian position in the debate. After all, was it not Winch who believed in the motto that forms the title of Luke's paper – "different cultures, different rationalities?" And didn't Winch, in UPS, warn against the dangers of applying the standards of Western science to the interpretation and judgment of non-Western practices? Since Sahlins is the one who insists on attributing to the Hawaiians a mode of thought different from that of Europeans, he would seem to be Winch's natural ally.

I find the notion that Winch and Sahlins share a common viewpoint somewhat troubling. Let me spell out what happens when we try to set up the analogy between the Hawaiian case and Winch's Zande example. At first blush, Lukes seems to be on track. Obeyesekere says that the

Hawaiians had the common sense (a common sense shared with Westerners) to realize that Cook was human, while Sahlins understands their reaction to Cook in terms of concepts peculiar to Hawaiian religion. In UPS, Evans-Pritchard is accused of having judged the mystical beliefs and practices of the Sudanese Azande by Western scientific standards, while Winch held that Zande mysticism may only be judged on its own terms. Sahlins complains that Obeyesekere does not respect the otherness of Hawaiian thought, while Winch complains that Evans-Pritchard does not respect the otherness of Zande thought. So far, so good. The odd thing is that while both Obeyesekere and Evans-Pritchard are accused of judging the actions of non-Europeans by European standards, the substance of their judgments is quite dissimilar. Evans-Pritchard judged the effectiveness of Zande magic by Western empirical standards and found it wanting. He was sure that "There is no objective nexus between the behavior and the event it is intended to cause" (*Witchcraft*: 12). In contrast, Obeyesekere claims that the Hawaiians' behavior toward Captain Cook was entirely reasonable. As he reads history, Cook simply was never deified during his lifetime, so there is nothing left to explain. The Hawaiian reception of Cook was pure Polynesian *realpolitik*. True to his anti-colonial leanings, Obeyesekere thinks that Cook's death was well deserved. We are in no need of arcane religious explanations as to why the Hawaiian's killed Cook; they treated him as befits any arrogant and violent intruder. If Evans-Pritchard felt obliged to offer an explanation of how the Azande, an otherwise astute and practical people, could believe in ineffective magic, perhaps Obeyesekere owes us an explanation of the Hawaiian's super-human pragmatism in the face of such extraordinary circumstances.

Where does this leave Winch in the equation so far? Even if it were correct to say that Winch and Sahlins both fly the standard of "different cultures, different rationalities," Winch does so in order to make the Azande seem more reasonable to Europeans, while Sahlins's insistence on the "otherness" of Hawaiian thought makes their behavior all the more mystifying. I think this points to deeper differences between Winch's and Sahlins's intellectual tendencies.

One major difference involves how each of them goes about cutting up social reality. There are various ways of doing this. At one extreme, a given society may be thought of as possessing a single underlying meta-physics or world view that conceptually grounds all of that society's activities. At the other extreme, members of a given society may be seen as engaged in a variety of autonomous practices, which do not share a significant common foundation. My own feeling is, amazingly, that there are probably some cultures whose practices are more conceptually uniform, while the practices of other cultures are more conceptually differentiated. And then, of course, it all depends on which practices we are talking about, how they are interrelated, and so on. One rather well-known historical thesis has it that early European culture was more homogeneous,

while the different departments of modern European life (i.e. science, religion, art, etc.) are more clearly differentiated. In his studies of Hawaiian culture, Sahlins tends towards a "totalizing" perspective that tries to make sense of all action in terms of a single underlying Hawaiian world view or taxonomic structure. And so, in regard to Cook's alleged deification, Sahlins can write: "It is not a simple sensory epistemology but a total cultural cosmology that is precipitated in Hawaiian empirical judgements of divinity" (Sahlins 1995: 169).

At a superficial level, it might seem that Winch viewed the Azande as possessing a similarly monolithic culture. After all, he did write about "Understanding a 'primitive' society," which may create the impression that he had taken a primitive society in its entirety as his object of interest, as if he meant to discuss the "total cultural cosmology" of the Azande. As I have tried to explain in this book, Winch's views and intellectual tendencies regarding these issues are more complicated. In ISS, he mentions what he calls different "modes of social life," including business and magic (ISS: 99) as well as science and religion (ISS: 100), which can exist simultaneously in a single society. It would be incorrect to equate Winch's "modes of social life" directly with the now ubiquitous term "social practices." Rather, a "mode" is a category of social practices, which may include members drawn from various different cultures. In fact, one might say that Winch's central positive message regarding cross-cultural understanding is that such understanding depends on the felicitous identification of the modes involved.

In short, Winch held cross-cultural interpretation to be a messy yet not impossible affair. Carefully chosen comparisons between different practices may serve as bridges between cultures, while ill-chosen or misapplied comparisons are stumbling blocks to understanding. Of course, the whole trick is knowing which comparisons work and how to work with them. My own feeling is that in the best of circumstances, such comparisons will be inspired by first-hand experience of the practices in question. Winch's other writings, and I am thinking especially of his essay "Language, belief and relativism" (1987d), seem to agree. And I might add, parenthetically, that this leaves Winch *circa* UPS in quite a precarious position. In as much as he may be said to have disagreed with Evans-Pritchard's interpretation of Zande culture, Winch had entered a dangerously mismatched scuffle with a veritable patron saint of anthropological fieldwork who was intimately acquainted with every aspect of Zande life.

Well, I began this whole detour about modes and practices in order to build up to the rather obvious suggestion that Winch was quite open to the possibility that relatively autonomous practices, belonging to different modes of social life, may coexist within the life of a single culture. I am careful to say "relatively autonomous" in order to avoid at least some brickbats from those quarters that stress the importance of Winch's later qualifications and self-criticisms of his earlier work. Winch was absolutely

right to point out in the preface to the second edition of ISS that different practices can be interrelated in various ways. Scientific research may be introduced as evidence in a legal proceeding. Or, to mention an example close to my own experience, the opinion of a scientifically trained gentile physician may determine whether an Orthodox Jew is fit to fast on Yom Kippur. And practices may be interrelated in more subtle and interesting ways. However, regardless of these later considerations, Winch clearly never gave up on the deep reciprocal autonomy of, for instance, science and religion.

So Winch was willing to entertain the notion of relatively autonomous practices coexisting in a single society. I think that he was describing such a situation in UPS. He writes: "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" (UPS: 26). Yet he immediately qualifies this statement with the footnote: "Notice that I have not said that Azande conceptions of witchcraft have nothing to do with understanding the world at all. The point is that a different form of the concept of understanding is involved here."

I think it is clear that the "different form of the concept of understanding" at work in Zande witchcraft and magic is not meant to be different only from non-Zande, Western science. Winch also holds it to be distinct from the practical, empirical thought of the Azande themselves.

To sum up my reading of UPS, I understand Winch as finding in Zande culture at least two rather independent "modes of social life," the magical and the practical. While Zande magic is best understood in comparison to religious practices, their practical or instrumental practices are not radically different from our own, Western, technologies. I have coined a new terminological barbarism to refer to the general principle that all human societies share essentially the same way of dealing with practical matters. I call this "instrumental monism." In as much as Winch's interpretation of the Azande reflects his more general intellectual tendencies, one might label Winch an "instrumental monist."

I hope that the extent of the disanalogy between Sahlins's understanding of the Hawaiians and Winch's interpretation of Zande culture is beginning to become clear. While Sahlins views all aspects of Hawaiian culture in terms of its unique "total cultural cosmology," Winch isolates the logic of the Azande's magic from the logic of their more practical activities. And if Winch may be called an "instrumental monist," then Sahlins would be proud to bear the standard of instrumental pluralism. For Sahlins, the reach of the Hawaiian "total cultural cosmology" does not stop short before the instrumental realm. In fact, he would probably say that the very designation of particular activities as "instrumental" smacks of a false application of specifically Western categories.

What I call Sahlins's instrumental pluralism is far from peripheral to his life's work.[3] In fact, Sahlins devoted much of one of his most celebrated

books, *Culture and Practical Reason* (1976), to an exposition and defense of the principle that societies vary widely in their approaches toward even the most practical aspects of life. In that book, Sahlins grapples with a common complaint against instrumental pluralism, and one that may have been important to Winch. That is the claim that the practical activities of all human societies are dictated by objective natural conditions and unavoidable human needs. Sahlins admits that

> In one sense, of course, nature is forever supreme. No society can live on miracles, thinking to exist by playing her false. None can fail to provide for the biological continuity of the population in determining it culturally – can neglect to provide shelter in producing houses, or nourishment in distinguishing the edible from the inedible. Yet men do not merely "survive." They survive in a definite way.
>   Within these limits, any group has the possibility of a great range of "rational" economic intentions, not even to mention the options of production strategy that can be conceived from the diversity of existing techniques, the example of neighboring societies, or the negation of either.
>
> Sahlins 1976: 168

> a "limit of viability" is a negative determination, stipulating only what cannot be done, but licensing indiscriminately (selecting for) anything that is possible.
>
> *ibid.*: 209

The application to the Zande case should be clear: it is true that magic cannot be depended on in a way that endangers the very survival of society, but as long as survival has been assured through other means, there is no selective pressure to stop people trying to use magic to further improve their lot.

So where does all of this leave the alleged Winch/Sahlins alliance? While Winch tries to acquit the Azande of the charge of irrationality by isolating their rituals from the other, transparently reasonable, aspects of their culture, Sahlins makes the Hawaiian behavior seem yet *more* esoteric by explaining their political moves in terms of an exotic and mythic world view. On the other hand, I think Winch should have no trouble affirming Obeyesekere's claim that all peoples apply essentially similar styles of thought toward directing their practical activities.

And what of Evans-Pritchard? I would say that he further subdivided the categories of social practices in play. While magic is performed in order to produce practical results, Evans-Pritchard would claim that its effectiveness is determined by criteria somewhat different from those applied by the Azande to other instrumental techniques. This is similar to the Western tendency to excuse the inefficiency of certain techniques with the

explanation that "it is an art, not an exact science." Yes, we do apply techniques belonging to everything from medicine to shoe repair with the hope that they will be effective, but we are fully aware that a good outcome is far from being guaranteed. Yet we do not deny that the point of such activities is to produce practical, beneficial effects. Perhaps an even better example might be taken from the field of commercial advertising. It is sometimes claimed that well-known products continue to be advertised just in case this might help to ensure their continued sales. It appears that the advertising business may operate under a particularly weak criterion of instrumental rationality. Similarly, Evans-Pritchard says of Zande magic that it "is only made to produce events which are likely in any case," and that "not too much is claimed for magic. ... It is not claimed that without the aid of magic a man must fail" (*Witchcraft*: 476). One might say that much of the point of Evans-Pritchard's book is to explain how radically different criteria of instrumental rationality manage to operate simultaneously within a single society.

Notes

Introduction

1   The pendulum of intellectual fashion has again swung toward favoring natural-istic explanations in the human sciences. I certainly am sympathetic to the need for criticism of current trends. The more extreme genetic determinists and peddlers of evolutionary "just-so" stories should be pulled down a peg. However, as shall become clear, I am not convinced that Winch offers a firm foundation for such a critique.

2   I am indebted to Rupert Read for impressing upon me the importance of taking a stand on questions of the relationship between Winch's earlier and later writings, and of whether Winch was a systematic or therapeutic philosopher.

3   There is a further general consideration that must be taken into account by anyone who sets off to grapple seriously with Winch's writings. Winch's style of writing is superficially straightforward and clear. The structure of his sentences is immediately comprehensible, and he eschews the use of unneces-sary technical terms. But this clarity is sometimes the mere illusion of clarity. Sometimes Winch uses everyday words such as "grammar," "rules," and "meaning" in ways that make them seem no less bewildering than the more openly esoteric terms of the philosopher's art. It may be difficult to specify exactly what theses and arguments are being presented. Margaret Gilbert feels compelled to explain that she cannot claim that her interpretation of ISS is uniquely valid, since "Winch's own discussion is often obscure" (Gilbert 1989: 65). Readers of Winch's work should be prepared for the possibility of incoher-ence. For a rather brutal attack on the intelligibility of Winch's style, see Popper (1974).

Chapter 1

1   I do find Winch's search for wisdom in other cultures preferable to the attitude of contemporary "cultural studies," which never seek enlightenment in humanity's vast spiritual and intellectual legacy but rather treat even the greatest of past accomplishments as mere grist to the mill of reductivist and ideological theories of society.

2   In fairness to Winch, I should mention one very important statement that he made regarding the practical limitations of the social sciences, that a "'socio-logical law' may be helpful in calling one's attention to features of historical situations which one might otherwise have overlooked and in suggesting useful analogies" (ISS: 135). Perhaps one might extend this idea to the problem of prediction and suggest that the value of social scientific laws for policy makers

is to serve as reminders of the kinds of problem that the future is likely to bring.

Chapter 2

1   Wittgenstein's treatment of rule-following behavior has become an important subject of philosophical interest only in the past two decades. In 1982, Saul Kripke, whose book *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, together with Holtzman and Leitch's (1981) collection *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule*, was largely responsible for drawing attention to the issue of rule following, could write that "Looking through some of the most distinguished commentaries on Wittgenstein of the last ten or fifteen years, I find some that still treat the discussion of rules cursorily, virtually not at all, as if it were a minor topic" (Kripke 1982: 2, footnote 1). Winch deserves credit for stressing the importance of this topic twenty years earlier in ISS.

   Although the concept of following a rule is central to Winch's philosophy, he does not really offer much explanation of what he means by rules themselves. This is especially unfortunate because Winch does not use the word in an entirely standard fashion. In everyday speech, a rule is an imperative sentence describing the regulation of some activity. Winch, however, is willing to entertain the notion of rules that cannot be formulated in language: he mentions the case of someone who "is applying a criterion in what he does even though he does not, and perhaps cannot, formulate that criterion" (ISS: 58). As we shall see, some of Winch's opponents challenge the ontological status that he seems to attribute to rules.

2   The prominence afforded by Winch to rule-governed behavior gave rise to much criticism. In the preface to the second edition of ISS, Winch expresses his discontent with his early treatment of rule-governed behavior. He does not really articulate an alternative to his earlier account, although he does make important corrections of emphasis to his discussion of modes of social life.

3   Winch introduces the importance of mistakes for rule following, which I call fallibility, on page 32 of ISS.

4   See ISS, pp. 65 and 91.

5   See ISS, pp. 62–4. Flatham (2000: 8) offers textual evidence that Wittgenstein did not really share Winch's insistence on the role of reflective thought for rule following.

6   Bloor (unpublished) suggests "that there is a significant, and highly un-Wittgensteinian, strand of individualism to be found in *The Idea of a Social Science.*"

7   Leading experts on Wittgenstein are divided on which of these theses were actually held by him (as well as the often equivalent issue of which of the theses are actually true). For instance, Norman Malcolm (1986; 1989), who argued that Wittgenstein held both theses 1 and 3 (and sometimes appears close to accepting thesis 2) debated with Baker and Hacker (1986; 1990), who argue that Wittgenstein supported only thesis 1.

8   ISS 29–30 contains an odd quasi-argument for SNORF. Winch asks us to consider a case in which person B is trying to learn the mathematical rule by which person A is generating a particular series of numbers. B must demonstrate that he has discovered the rule by correctly announcing the next number in the series, but A always rejects B's answers as wrong. Winch writes:

   There would undoubtedly come a point at which B, with perfect justification, would say that A was not following a *mathematical* rule at all, even though all the continuations he had made to date *could* be brought within

the scope of some formula ... this ... suggests that one has to take account not only of the actions of the person whose behavior is in question as a candidate for rule-following, but also the reactions of other people to what he does. More specifically, it is only in a situation in which it makes sense to suppose that somebody else could in principle discover the rule which I am following that I can intelligibly be said to follow a rule at all.

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There are at least two odd things about this passage. First, Winch is arguing from a case in which no *mathematical* rule can be discerned to a conclusion regarding the question of whether *any* rule is being followed. Worse yet, Winch argues from B's pragmatically reasonable conclusion that A is not following a mathematical rule to apoditic conclusions regarding the necessary conditions of rule following. And this when Winch explicitly admits that A's series *may in fact be generated by some formula unknown to B*! Winch is saying that since we quite reasonably take the fact that people have difficulty uncovering a rule as evidence against its existence, a rule *must* be discoverable *in principle* by other people. Consider another argument of the same form: generally speaking, it is perfectly reasonable to reject the accuracy of observations that contradict currently accepted physical laws. Does this suggest that, *in principle*, accurate observational reports will *always* concur with currently accepted physical laws?

9 Ayer (1966) offers this very strong interpretation as a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* of the Wittgensteinian analysis of rule following.

10 Winch has made clear statements regarding the limitations on membership in a community of rule followers. For instance, in his essay on Karl Popper he writes of someone involved in a branch of scientific investigation: "If his conception of what is to count as a fact is eccentric beyond certain limits (though these may not be easy to specify), that will at least count against saying he really is engaged in that sort of enquiry" (Winch 1974: 893). It is not clear here whether Winch's "eccentric" breaks the rules more often than most people or rather tends to interpret the rules in an idiosyncratic fashion.

11 But not always. For instance, if I had to sort a large number of papers according to whether they were written in Hebrew or English, I could teach an illiterate to recognize the letter "e" and place all the papers in which it occurs into one pile. The rule for recognizing "e" would be learned and applied outside its broader context.

12 Some writers identify Winch's "modes of social life" with Wittgenstein's concept of language games. For instance, Harris describes how "It is at this point that Winch introduces his now well-known use of Wittgenstein's notion of language games" (Harris 1992: 99). H.O. Mounce, in his article "Understanding a primitive society," goes so far as to criticize Winch for having misunderstood what Wittgenstein meant by the expression "language game":

The assumption [made by Winch] that one cannot raise doubts about the sense of a practice which has a fundamental place in a society is based not on the notion of a language game but on a particular interpretation of that notion. The interpretation is that a language game consists of an independent practice or set of practices. This leads to the assumption that where one finds such a practice one also finds a language game and that the sense of this practice cannot be questioned.

Mounce 1973: 350–1

Mounce goes on to say that, properly understood, the term "language games" refers to sets of concepts so fundamental to human life (i.e. giving and receiving orders, identifying colors) that they can hardly be identified with anything as complex as a full-blown social practice such as Azande magic or Western science.

I do not think it is really fair to charge Winch with this confusion. A careful examination of his writings reveals that he very rarely makes mention of "language games," and he never uses the term to refer to anything as extensive as a religion or other "mode of social life." If we must find a Wittgensteinian equivalent to Winch's "modes of social life," I would suggest the expression "forms of life" (see Wittgenstein 1968: 88e, 226e).

It is also worth emphasizing that by "modes of life" Winch was not referring to monolithic cultural systems but rather to particular departments of human culture. Thus Winch could write that "the very nature" "of a human society" "is to consist of different and competing ways of life, each offering a different account of the intelligibility of things" (ISS: 103). Note that Winch is describing the plurality of ways of life in "a [single] human society."

13 Paul Roth (1987) points out that Winch's discussion of the autonomy of modes of social life is strikingly reminiscent of Carnap's work on "linguistic frameworks." Carnap himself (1956: 215) traces the history of his own views back through the Vienna Circle to the earlier Wittgenstein. This lends his ideas a common intellectual ancestry with those of Winch, especially given the latter's tendency to play down the differences between Wittgenstein's earlier and later thought.

Carnap, like Winch, claims that we can only talk about the existence of entities within the context of a linguistic framework that contains rules for discussing the entities involved. All legitimate ontological issues are what Carnap calls "internal questions," questions that may only be posed and answered "inside" the linguistic framework. For instance, there is no point to seeking a non-mathematical answer to the question of whether numbers exist. When asked, the mathematician can confidently answer "of course they do, in fact, I can define as many *infinitely* populous classes of numbers as you please." But when philosophers ask the *external* question whether numbers exist in some absolute sense, beyond the bounds of any particular linguistic framework, *strictly speaking* we have no idea how to begin to answer them. However, we might understand them as meaning to ask the legitimate question of whether it does us any good to talk in terms of numbers and mathematics to begin with: "perhaps they have in mind not a theoretical question, as their formulation seems to suggest, but rather a practical question, a matter of a practical decision concerning the structure of our language" (*ibid.*: 207).

While Carnap need not be troubled by the notion of making a "practical decision concerning the structure of our language" (his concern being the status of abstract entities in highly formalized mathematical and scientific systems), Winch can ill afford to speak of "practical decisions" in a naive and uncritical fashion. Winch is dealing not only with set theory and quantum mechanics but with all aspects of human social life. This certainly must include the very criteria of rationality that Carnap tacitly assumes we apply toward making a "practical decision concerning the structure of our language." Furthermore, such a "meta-criterion" for the usefulness of various social practices or linguistic frameworks would itself be specific to a certain culture and would develop in symbiosis with the practices/linguistic frameworks peculiar to that culture.

Chapter 3

1 Winch's equation "specifically human behavior = meaningful behavior = rule-following behavior" is complicated by the ambiguous role he assigns to language. Often, as in his account of the correct use of the expression "Mount Everest" (ISS: 24–8), Winch will bring an example of a linguistic rule in order to make a point about rules in general. This creates the impression that the notion of rule following is conceptually prior to the notion of language, language merely being a particularly important set of rule-following behaviors. Searle (1983: 5) suggests that a similar relationship holds between his notion of "intentionality" and language: "Language is derived from intentionality and not conversely." He even tells a story of how beings endowed with intentionality achieve language (*ibid.*: 178–9). However, while Winch rejects the notion of non-human animals performing meaningful acts or following rules, Searle claims that it is impossible to make sense of a dog's behavior unless we assume that it is capable of intentionality (*ibid.*: 5). On the other hand, as I have mentioned above, Winch requires that for behavior to involve rule following, the possibility must exist that the actor reflect on how he has applied the rule (ISS: 63). If such "reflection" requires discursive thought, Winch is very close to saying that a person cannot follow a rule without knowing a language, which implies that meaningful, and thus implicitly human, behavior is possible only for language users. Toward the end of ISS, Winch seems to make such a claim explicitly: "It is because the use of language is so intimately, so explicitly bound up with the other, non-linguistic, activities which men perform, that it is possible to speak of their non-linguistic behavior also as expressing discursive ideas" (ISS: 128).

On this interpretation, Winch takes a roundabout route to reach the classical definition of humans as the speaking animals (see Sorabji 1993). In his provocative book *Against Liberation* (1991), Michael Leahy presents a Wittgensteinian defense of the traditional categorical chasm between human beings and other animals. Leahy holds that linguistic communication itself is definitively human and does not even discuss the broader category of rule following in general. He argues that the mental life of speaking beings is incomparably richer than that of dumb animals. The fact that human beings possess the linguistic resources to express the meaning of their behavior is itself constitutive of the meaningfulness of their behavior.

Norman Malcolm's (1986) account of rule following makes a similar impression. Arguing against McGinn's (1984: 196–7) suggestion that a hypothetical solitary individual named "Romulus" could invent signposts for his own use, Malcolm writes:

> McGinn imagines that Romulus "hits upon the idea" of employing directional signs to guide him. Now how are we to conceive of what went on when this "idea" occurred to Romulus? Did he say to himself, "In order to avoid the marsh I need signs to guide me?" But presumably Romulus has no language. So did he have thought without words?
>
> Malcolm 1986: 176

Malcolm appears to imply that any invention of a rule involves the use of language.

2 In his earlier essay, "Social science," Winch more openly admits a role of meaningless or non-rule-following behavior. For instance, he offers the example of a "blind habit" that a person "might acquire of always putting on his left shoe

before his right" (Winch 1956: 22). Later in that essay, he goes so far as to write that:

> Not all behaviors which are studied in the social sciences can be brought directly under the concept of rule following. It is said, for instance, that Japanese men are attracted to the backs of women's necks rather than by their faces. Such facts abound in works of sociology and social anthropology, and they can be established by simple observation subject to controls very similar to those found in the natural sciences.
>
> *ibid.*: 24

"Social science" reads very much like a detailed preliminary sketch for ISS. The fact that Winch did not decide to include the example of Japanese men in ISS may indicate that he became unhappy with its giving too much ground to positivist sociology. The twin facts that Winch never mentions "Social science" in ISS and did not include it in his later collections of essays may indicate that he came to see it as needlessly over-qualifying his position. If someone were to treat "Social science" as indicative of Winch's "canonical" position, it would have important consequences for the interpretation of ISS. I am indebted to Chaim Marantz for pointing out to me the need to address "Social science" in my analysis of Winch.

3   Mention should be made of the ontological implications of Winch's views on meaningful behavior. If we accept Winch's view that the meaningfulness of behavior derives from the rules that structure it, two possible understandings of the project of social investigation present themselves: the meaning realist (the term is Paul Roth's (1987)) sociologist seeks to discover the actual rules that guide observed behavior, while the meaning non-realist sociologist tries to invent a set of rules that successfully accounts for observed behaviors in terms of imputed meanings. Meaning non-realism does not require the sociologist to make any commitment regarding the ontological status of the rules in question; rules may figure merely as theoretical constructs that she uses (or chooses not to use) to order her data. Meaning realism commits the sociologist to a belief in the actual existence (somehow in the minds of people) of the rules that lend meaningfulness to behavior. I agree with Roth that Winch belongs to the meaning-realist camp: he "hypostasizes social rules and talks of them (and their 'criteria of application') as if they were an independent object of study" (Roth 1987: 134).

Meaning non-realists, who, like Roth, base their rejection of meaning realism on their acceptance of Quine's (1960) thesis of the indeterminacy of translation, will accuse meaning realists such as Winch of seeking definitive answers to questions of meaning about which there simply are not any "facts of the matter." Of course, a meaning non-realist could reject the indeterminacy thesis and claim that there is some "fact of the matter" as to which single set of imputed rules best accounts for the observed behavior *qua* meaningful behavior while refusing to grant the uniquely best-fitting set of rules any special ontological status. Dennett's (1987) "intentional stance" seems close to this last position, although he tries to avoid the ontological issue altogether by pragmatically imputing intentionality to anything whatsoever as long as the assumption of intentionality successfully explains and predicts the thing's behavior.

4   Okrent refers to Winch's identification of meaningful behavior as specifically human behavior as the "transcendental or ontological identification of the basic characteristic of which human being is to be characterized" (Okrent 1984: 31).

5   In light of Andy Clark's (1997) recent writings, one might want to extend the social division of linguistic labor (and of cognitive labor in general) to include

not only humans but also the artifacts and environments that people depend on to help them to think. It is reasonable to assume, for instance, that no single person or group of persons can reconstruct from memory alone the list of financial transactions contained on the hard disk of the computer of a modestly sized grocery store.

6   This view is attributed to those structuralists who are said to claim that "Not man, but structures are decisive! Man is nothing!" (Descombes 1980: 105).

7   "Processes or conditions, whether they are animate or inanimate, human or non-human, are in the present sense devoid of meaning in so far as they cannot be related to an intended purpose" (Weber 1964: 93).

8   Unlike Winch, Weber was not coy about the importance of "meaningless" elements in human behavior. Weber is careful to point out that "In all the sciences of human action, account must be taken of processes and phenomena which are devoid of meaning" (*ibid.*: 93). The assumption that human behavior is meaningful is important for the development of an "ideal-type" explanation, which is the principal explanatory tool of Weber's sociology. Nonetheless, Weber himself remained well aware that the assumption of meaningfulness is merely an idealization of actual human life. "In most cases," he wrote, the action of an individual "is governed by impulse or habit" (*ibid.*: 112).

9   A comparison of Winch with Weber would be useful here. Weber contrasts the "ideal type" (or "pure type") of meaning with what I have been calling "psychological" meaning (which Weber calls "actual existing meaning"):

> "Meaning" may be of two kinds. The term may first refer to the actual existing meaning in the given concrete case of a particular actor, or to the average or approximate meaning attributable to a given plurality of actors; or secondly to the theoretically conceived pure type of subjective meaning attributed to the hypothetical actor or actors in a given type of action.
>
> Weber 1964: 89

Such ideal-typical explanations find a natural home in economics, which tries to explain events in the real world in terms of the behavior that would be predicted of perfectly rational economic agents. Weber extends explanations based on ideal-typical meanings to encompass historical movements and periods as well:

> Those "ideas" which govern the behavior of a population of a certain epoch, i.e. which are concretely influential in determining their conduct, can, if a somewhat complicated construct is involved, be formulated precisely only in the form of an ideal type, since empirically it exists in the minds of an indefinite and constantly changing mass of individuals and assumes in their minds the most multifarious nuances of form and content, clarity and meaning. Those elements of spiritual life of the individuals living in a certain epoch of the Middle Ages, for example, which we designate as the "Christianity" of those individuals, would, if they could be completely portrayed, naturally constitute a chaos of indefinitely differentiated and highly contradictory complexes of ideas and feelings.
>
> Weber 1949: 95–6

What is remarkable here is that Weber is perfectly aware that ideal-typical meanings are largely artifacts of the historian's and sociologist's crafts. Raymond Aron has written that Weber's notion of Protestantism "transcends

individual consciousness; it was never lived in this way by any individual; it appears as the formalization and elucidation of more or less obscure or implicit thoughts of historical agents" (quoted in Outhwaite 1975: 54). One might say that Winch's mistake was to assume that the members of a society actually share the ideal-typical constructs by which their thinking is conveniently averaged and summarized.

10 Here Winch's self-critical "Preface" is no more coherent than the original argument of ISS. He writes:

> Things become worse ... [when] I claimed that "all behavior which is meaningful (therefore all specifically human behavior) is *ipso facto* rule-governed" (p. 52). I did, it is true, attempt to qualify this later in the Section by distinguishing different kinds of rules, but I do not now think this is enough to put things right.
>
> ISS: xiv

Winch then goes on to cite a passage from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, which offers "one of the best statements of the truth of the matter." Unfortunately, Winch never explains what bearing the passage has on the identification of meaningfulness with rule-governed behavior. Instead, he moves on to an entirely different issue:

> Had I paid proper heed to these remarks (and others in similar vein) I 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.
>
> ISS: xv

Eventually, Winch substantially retracts his earlier dismissal of the identification of behavior that commits a person for the future with rule-governed behavior: "The kinds of relevance past experience has to current behavior can be brought out only in so far as that behavior exemplifies rules or is, in relevant respects, analogous to behavior which exemplifies rules" (ISS: xvii).

11 See, for instance, Bell's (1967: 119) lucid presentation; also Bhaksar (1979: 181).

12 These issues are given a more complete treatment in my discussion of instrumental pluralism.

13 The example is Bahksar's (1979: 182).

14 This is essentially Margaret Gilbert's (1989) reading of Winch:

> Now it is natural to construe "X means to be doing A" as entailing something like "X sees himself as doing A" or "X thinks he is doing A." The last two phrases indicate that a certain thought about or conceptualization of what is going on is involved. It seems reasonable, then, to sharpen things with the following assumption: meaning to be doing A involves the use of and hence the possession of the concept of doing A.
>
> Gilbert 1989: 67–8

15 Roth's (unpublished) most dangerous attack strikes at the very foundation of ISS, i.e. it denies the connection between rule following and the identification

of mistakes. He claims that while it does always make sense to talk about the possibility of detecting errors in rule-governed activities, it is also possible to detect mistakes in activities that do not involve any kind of set rules. For example, we might wince at a young man's clearly mistaken attempts to attract a young woman, although we are applying nothing remotely resembling a "rule" to the judgment of his behavior.

16 Winch thinks that these arguments disprove Popper's (1957) doctrine of "methodological individualism." As Pettit (2000: 73) has recently pointed out, Winch was simply wrong to think that, for Popper, institutions exist solely as theoretical entities in models posited by social scientists. Popper was perfectly aware that ideas about social institutions are important for the thinking of the social actors themselves. See Popper's (1974) scathing reply to Winch (1974) on this and other points that Winch thought he could score against Popper.

17 It is remarkable how often people forget just how weak a conclusion Winch argues for in his deployment of Wittgenstein's arguments against private rules. Even the philosopher best informed about Winch, D.Z. Phillips, could write: "It has been argued that Wittgenstein held that concepts had to be simply shareable [emphasis in original], not actually shared. Winch disagreed" (Phillips 2000: 35).

18 Margaret Gilbert (1989: 65) is, on this particular point, more charitable than I am towards Winch. She suggests that Winch understands Weber's definition of the phrase "social action," and he is simply recommending a different and better use than that adopted by Weber. Similarly, Benton (1977: 120), contrasting Winch's idea of social action with that of Weber, writes: "It might be well argued, however, that Winch's broader notion of social action better represents the scope of sociology's interest." Other difficulties in Winch's understanding of the *Critique of Stammler* are mentioned by Hekman (1983: 197, footnote 8).

Chapter 4

1 Obviously, I am alluding to Carl Hempel's so-called "covering law model" of scientific explanation as applied to the social sciences. Much work in the philosophy of science in the past few decades has been devoted to the critique and rejection of Hempel's model, but it was certainly the reigning orthodoxy at the time of the composition of ISS. For example, Von Wright (1971: chapter 1) accepts Hempel's doctrine as paradigmatic for explanatory social science.

The dethroning of Hempel's theory poses some questions for Winch's attempt to sever the social sciences from the natural sciences. If Hempel's theory (and the whole Humean tradition from which it sprang) is inadequate to the task of describing explanation even in the physical sciences, we should hardly be surprised when Winch shows us that it does not jibe with the social sciences either. Hempel's critics insist that the Humean definition of causality as constant conjunction must be supplemented by a description of mechanism if it is to truly *explain*. Might not Winch's notion of meaning be a sociological sub-species of mechanism? Lyas reports a rumor that Winch had come to believe that "a major weakness of the book [ISS] was its inadequate conception of natural science" (Lyas 1999: 52). Using the work of the scientific realists Keat and Urry (1975) as his foil, Lyas argues convincingly that Winch's commitment to human metaphysical freedom would never allow him to accept the possi-bility of a predictive social science, even if it were based upon a non-Hempelian theory of scientific explanation.

2   For lack of an uncontroversial universal law of human behavior, my example is one of probabilistic explanation rather than of genuinely "deductive-nomological" explanation.

3   It is worth emphasizing that the procedures of the radically explanatory sociology take place entirely in the language of the scientist (N). The program N uses describes human behavior in terms of a universally applicable mechanistic framework.

4   Searle (1984) makes this point in regard to a covering law explanation of voting patterns. Even if someone's voting for the Tories was perfectly in keeping with some exceptionless universal generalization (i.e. a covering law of the form "people with such-and-such characteristics vote Tory"), we would "not accept ... [the] ... generalization as explaining our own or anybody else's behavior" (*ibid.*: 72).

5   If membership in categories such as "joke" and "violence" turn out to be open-ended and indeterminate *in principle*, then it will become impossible to use them in the formulation of general laws.

6   My use of the term "hermeneutic meaning" is explained in the discussion beginning on page 31. On ideal types, see page 139 note 9 above.

7   Winch does not indicate how such an argument might be formulated against the use of statistical laws for the explanation of behavior.

8   I see no reason to think that people cannot become aware of even their blind habitual behaviors and take steps to change these. Winch must hold that meaningful behavior is especially susceptible to change through conscious decision or the whole habit/rule-following distinction would collapse.

9   Some very prominent philosophers are not to be counted among the "we" of this sentence, most notably Frankfurt (1971), who claims that one may be morally responsible for actions taken even when no alternative action was possible.

10 To be more precise, Winch does hold that rules offer some limited grounds for prediction: "The rule here does not specify any determinate outcome to the situation, though it does limit the range of possible alternatives" (ISS: 92). Here, Winch finds an echo in H.L.A. Hart's *The Concept of Law* (1961). Regarding the prediction of court decisions, Hart writes:

> The basis for such prediction is the knowledge that the courts regard legal rules not as predictions but as standards to be followed in decision, determinate enough, in spite of their open texture, to limit, though not to exclude, their discretion.

ibid.: 143

Ironically, Winch chooses precisely the wrong legal scholars as advocates of his rule-based approach to human behavior. In ISS (p. 61), he cites the legal scholar Otto Kahn-Freund as testifying that legal thought develops through the application of rules. He thinks that this upholds his view that all human behavior, of which jurisprudence is but one example, must be understood in terms of people applying rules. In fact, Kahn-Freund holds that the interpretation of judicial precedents in terms of the application of rules does not accurately reflect the actual process by which judges make precedent-setting decisions. Rather, it is a pragmatically necessary fiction. Winch quotes Kahn-Freund as writing: "One cannot dispense with a principle which links one decision with another, which raises the judicial act beyond the realm of sheer expediency." But here is the quotation as it appears in context:

However much one may be aware that the application of the legal norm is, in many cases, a policy-making process, one cannot dispense with a principle which links one decision with another, which raises the judicial act beyond the realm of sheer expediency. Without such a principle the practical lawyer cannot operate, without it the law cannot command the respect of the public. The fiction of logical consistency, however threadbare it may look to the critical eyes of our generation, did once provide this unifying principle. It still does – up to a point – and it does so both on the Continent and in the common-law jurisdictions of the British Empire and of the United States.

Kahn-Freund 1949: 9

Far from supporting the universal validity of the rule-following paradigm for explaining human behavior, Kahn-Freund sees it as a politically useful fiction, necessary for both the practice of law and its acceptance by the public.

11 On Quine and Davidson, see van Brakel (unpublished and 1999).
12 A thorough critique of Winch's treatment of Pareto may be found in Baker (1960).
13 Those familiar with Victor Turner's meaning-oriented symbolic anthropology should be interested to know that he has also endorsed the importance of biologically oriented cognitive neuroscience for the social sciences. See his "Body, brain, and culture" (1983).
14 Winch offers another argument against the physiological explanation of human motivation that is so misconceived that I shall devote only this note to its dismissal. Winch writes:

There is in fact a very simple, but nonetheless cogent, argument against the physiological interpretation of motives. To discover the motives of a puzzling action is to increase our understanding of that action; that is what "understanding" means as applied to human behavior. But this is something we in fact discover without any significant knowledge about people's physiological states; therefore our accounts of their motives can have nothing to do with their physiological states.

ISS: 78

Here, Winch talks about the discovery of the motives of an action as increasing our understanding of that action. Furthermore, we are able to ascertain people's motives without knowing anything of their physiology. But why should the fact that we can successfully identify motives imply that nothing else remains to be learned about them? At the risk of blatant positivism, I suggest the following analogy: the behavior of a spring might be explained in terms of the affect of temperature on the elasticity of steel. But this is something we can discover without knowing anything about molecular motion. Therefore (as Winch might have it), our account of the temperature of metals can have nothing to do with the motion of their molecules!

Chapter 5

1 It is difficult to cite this section of Winch's book without making some mention of his gross misinterpretations of Mill. For instance, he devotes page 79 of ISS to the consideration of a toothache as a motive for behavior. However, it is clear from Mill's own discussion in Book VI, Chapter ii, Section 4 of the

System of Logic (1974: 842) that, at its most primitive, a motive may be "the anticipation of a pleasure or pain" but certainly not the sensation of pain, such as a toothache, itself. After misrepresenting Mill's idea of a motive, Winch can go on to discuss a deliberately silly example in which someone's experience of a certain type of headache is always followed by an attack of migraine. He wonders if according to Mill's theory the headache be called the motive or merely the cause of the migraine? But even the second possibility would be rejected by Mill. Both the headache and the migraine are episodes of certain sensations. According to Mill, one sensation should not be thought of as causing another; rather, "With regard to those states of mind which are called sensations, all are agreed that these have for their immediate antecedents, states of body" (*ibid.*: 850; *Logic*, Book VI, Chapter iv, Section 2).

2   See Grunbaum's (1984) classic attack on the hermeneutic school of Freudian scholarship.

3   R.S. Peters, whose book *The Concept of Motivation* (1958) is largely in agreement with Winch about the primacy of rule-following explanations in the social and behavioral sciences, does single out Freud's theory of psychopathology as an instance of valid causal (non-rule-oriented) explanation of behavior. This, however, is merely one example from many where Peters avoids the more extreme positions typical of Winch's doctrinaire attitude.

Chapter 6

1   In some circles, it seems perfectly natural to ascribe to Winch a concern with interpretative charity, e.g. Matustik (1989).

2   Henderson (1993) lists seven contemporary philosophers who support what he calls "the standard version of charity in interpretation," i.e. that "we are bound by a fundamental methodological constraint to find people rational" (*ibid.*: 33).

3   I deal with P.J.J. Phillips's (1997) especially subtle complaint about Winch's relativistic tendencies in my "Winch and instrumental pluralism: a response to my critics" (1998). Phillips is willing to accept that different systems of belief may be incommensurable. However, when there is no way to demonstrate the superiority of one system over another, neither is there a way to prove different systems to be equally valid. Phillips is troubled by the idea that Winch makes this further, ultra-relativistic, claim. But does Winch actually ever say that different systems are equally valid? Phillips's own use of quotation is enlightening in this regard. He writes:

> As Winch puts it, "Evans-Pritchard is not content with elucidating the differences in the two concepts of reality involved; he wants to go further and say: our concept of reality is the correct one, the Azande are mistaken. But it is difficult to see what 'correct' and 'mistaken' can mean in this context." According to Winch, no one system is "better" or "superior" to any other. For all systems are equally valid and governed by their own internal logic and criteria of correctness.
>
> Phillips 1997: 90

Note that there is nothing in Phillips's long quotation from Winch with which he disagrees. Phillips must state the unacceptably relativistic position that he attributes to Winch ("all systems are equally valid") in his (Phillips's) own words. I simply do not find Winch putting forward such a claim in "Understanding a primitive society."

4 David K. Henderson has preceded me with his own formulation of a version of Winchian charity. In his article "Winch and the constraints on interpretation: versions of the principle of charity" (Henderson 1987), he defines what he considers to be Winch's two principles of charity, the "special version" and the "general version." He formulates the "general version" (which is much stronger than the "special version" and would reject all "translation manuals" or other systems of interpretation rejected by the "special version") as follows:

> Whatever we construe our subjects as doing (proto-science, business, witchcraft, whatever), if we construe their way of life as incorporating ineffective means to their ends, then we have misconstrued their way of life.

> Henderson 1987: 158

Henderson's logical reconstruction of Winch's argument can be summarized as follows:

1 "In order to identify the meaning of an expression or action, the investigator must describe the rules for that expression or action, and identify its use within its home way of life" (*ibid.*: 158).
2 "[Human activities] when done according to the rules of a way of life instantiating the relevant form of life, 'play a role' and serve a set of considerations ['characteristic points']" (*ibid.*: 157).
3 "Failures to serve the relevant considerations" are always to be classified as "mistakes."
4 "Mistakes [are] defined ... as failures to follow the relevant rules."
5 Given (3) and (4), the only possible explanation for failure to serve the relevant considerations is failure to follow the relevant rules.
6 Therefore, when the relevant rules are followed properly (i.e., there is no "failure to follow the relevant rules"), success in serving the relevant considerations is sure to follow (there will be no "failure to serve the relevant considerations"); "what is in accordance with the rules of a way of life does serve the considerations." In other words, the societal rules of a way of life must be effective (unfailing) means to the ends of that way of life.
7 Recalling (1), this implies that "we must identify the meaning of the expressions and actions within a way of life in a manner that leads us to see them as effective means to the ends (or points) of that way of life; if we do not do this, then we are mistaken" (*ibid.*: 158).

According to Henderson, (3) and (4) constitute the weak links in Winch's reasoning. He complains that Winch "never makes clear" why a failure to follow the relevant rules is the only possible explanation of an action's ineffectiveness in serving the point of its way of life. (As we shall see, this problem is especially acute in the case of instrumental action.) In the same vein, it is not clear why, for Winch, a practice will not appear to be irrational or unintelligible in a systematic way when understood in terms of its peculiar criterion of intelligibility. Henderson suggests that Winch might believe that the rules of the way of life are themselves definitive of the point of that way of life; whatever result following the rules tends to bring about is, *ipso facto*, the point of following those rules. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that for Winch, the rules of a way of life and the point of that way of life develop together as an organic whole. Winch almost states this outright in ISS (p. 63):

> I do not mean by this that meaningful behavior is simply a putting into effect of pre-existing reflective principles; such principles arise in the course of conduct and are only intelligible in relation to the conduct out of which they arise. But equally, the nature of the conduct out of which they arise can only be grasped as an embodiment of those principles.

While my version of Winchian charity has obvious similarities to Henderson's (in fact, I owe the idea of restating Winch's ideas in terms of a principle of charity to Henderson's article), it has the advantage of being stated in terms lifted directly from Winch's writings. Where I use Winch's own rather nebulous notion of a "criterion of intelligibility," Henderson has introduced a means/ends schema. Although this schema adds clarity, it may seem biased toward the imposition of instrumental criteria of rationality. More crucially, it surreptitiously introduces the notion of ineffectiveness, which is certainly at least as culturally determined as that of intelligibility.

Chapter 7

1   Wendy James (who wrote her doctorate under Evans-Pritchard) has told me that the first mention of *Witchcraft* by a philosopher occurs in a short footnote on page 9 of R.G. Collingwood's *The Principles of Art* (1938). Winch is very appreciative of Collingwood's views; he cites *The Principles of Art* no less than four times in ISS (pp. 103, 113, 126 and 129), and always with enthusiasm. Polanyi (1958) contains a more sustained philosophical discussion of *Witchcraft*.

2   I should emphasize that I am writing in the timeless "anthropological present"; even by the time of Evans-Pritchard's study, such vengeance was itself executed through magical means.

3   Robin Horton (1970, 1982) has developed the comparison between the "hidden" realm of mystical causality in traditional African systems of thought and the theoretical entities of modern science, which are equally "hidden" from direct observation.

4   Evans-Pritchard (1934) comes close to formulating the question in this way when he asks: "Are primitive modes of thought so different from modes of thought current among educated Europeans that the need arises to define wherein the difference lies and to explain it?"(*ibid.*: 14).

5   My understanding of Winch's critique of Evans-Pritchard is controversial. In reference to Mounce's (1973) critique of UPS, Winch himself writes that "The philosophically important point here is not the correctness or otherwise of any particular suggested interpretation of Zande thought so much as the kind of reasoning needed to support an interpretation" (Winch 1987d: 203). More generally speaking, it might be claimed that Winch fully realizes that the inter-pretation of Zande mysticism is a task best left to field anthropologists, and he is using Evans-Pritchard's ethnographic text only as an illustration to serve the exposition of a more purely philosophical argument. A recent paper by Nigel Pleasants may serve as an example of this style of exegesis. He writes:

> Winch does not claim to provide a superior anthropological account of the Azande. Nor could he, given that he does not claim to know any more about Zande practices than what is reported in Evans-Pritchard's magisterial study. Nor does Winch question the basic validity of Evans-Pritchard's

> ethnographic observations. But he does question the critical/evaluative framework within which Evans-Pritchard presents his account of Zande life.
>
> Pleasants 2000b: 296

Although there is much to be admired in Pleasants's paper, the claim that the validity of Evans-Pritchard's anthropological account and observations can somehow remain unaffected by his "critical/evaluative framework" seems untenable, especially for Winch. It would be a small step to the conclusion that in actually writing about the Azande, Evans-Pritchard must have tacitly accepted Winch's evaluative framework, while his conscious use of an inferior "framework" is restricted to his more abstract theoretical conclusions. Later in his paper, Pleasants writes: "Winch suggests that Christian prayer, rather than scientific prediction and technological control, provides a more perspicacious analogy through which to think about Zande magical belief and practice" (*ibid*.: 298). From a Winchian standpoint, could there be any greater anthropological failure than to choose the wrong guiding analogy by which to understand another culture?

Chapter 8

1   Charles Taylor (1982) argues persuasively for a third option: that a society may not make the kind of clean break between the expressive and instrumental realms that is thought to be typical of the modern West. I have great sympathy with this suggestion, and I have found it useful for my understanding of pre-modern Western cultures. However, I will not develop it much here because (1) I would like to avoid straying too far from what seems to me to be Winch's way of categorizing practices; and (2) a great deal of additional ethnographic evidence would have to be brought to bear in order to demonstrate that Zande culture shares pre-modern Europe's tendency to mix expressive with instrumentalist elements.

2   The genealogy of the concept "instrumentalist" and its cognates reaches back to the "intellectualist" school of British anthropology (see below) and to Max Weber's notion of *Zweckrationlitat*. I am not aware of any evidence of Weber's direct influence on Wittgenstein, and Weber does not appear in Garth Hallett's (1977: 759–75) list of "Authors Wittgenstein knew or read." Winch, on the other hand, was greatly influenced by Weber, and much of ISS is devoted to the sympathetic exposition of Weber's doctrine. It is therefore likely that Winch's method of comparing different modes of rationality derives from Weber's (1964: 115) listing of types of social action, i.e. *Zweckrationalitat*, *Wertrationalitat*, affectual and traditional. Of course, Weber's main use of these distinctions was to describe the ascendancy of the *Zweckrational* mode in the West, while Winch is concerned with the problem of determining the category to which a particular social practice properly belongs.

3   See Evans-Pritchard 1933.

4   This last point is made forcefully in Horton (1970), especially pp. 137–9.

5   In his essay "Meaning and religious language" (1987a), Winch seems to try to avoid discussing this aspect of Western religion. I believe that if he were to undertake a comprehensive apology for Christianity, he would be forced to avail himself more forthrightly of the option of symbolic interpretation. Instead of discussing the notion of a personal God, Winch considers the importance of God's love (even to the extent of identifying God with love). It is much easier to avoid symbolic interpretations when analyzing a relatively philosophical

notion such as "love" than when explicating Christianity's more mythic elements such as Hell, the blood of Christ, etc.

6 Winch's reference to "Christian prayer" reflects his interest in the work of his close colleague D.Z. Phillips, whose book *The Concept of Prayer* (1981) first appeared soon after the publication of UPS. Later reprints of UPS cite *The Concept of Prayer* in a footnote (number 33). A passage from Phillips's book should offer a good indication of an expressivist interpretation of Christian prayer:

> My thesis is that prayer, being an act of devotion, the dependence on God it entails is best understood in terms of that devotion. The dependence involved is not logical or causal, but religious dependence. The point of praising God is in the prayer itself, since without prayer, that devotion is not expressed. Just as we reveal what we are in what we say to each other, so we reveal what we are in what we say to God. There is this difference: in the latter case, it is to ourselves we reveal it. Prayer expresses a state of being, a state of soul.

> Phillips 1981: 109

Here is how Phillips deals with specifically petitionary prayers, which are close to magic in that they are offered in relation to a desire of the worshipper/magician:

> What I say about petitionary prayers is analogous to what I say of prayers of confession. When deep religious believers pray for something, they are not so much asking God to bring this about, but in a way telling Him of the strength of their desires. They realize that things may not go as they wish, but they are asking to be able to go on living whatever happens. In prayers of confession and in prayers of petition, the believer is trying to find a meaning and a hope that will deliver him from the elements in his life which threaten to destroy it: in the first case, his guilt, and in the second case, his desires.

> *ibid.*: 121

Such "unsuperstitious" interpretations of Christian prayer sometimes seek historical justification in the writings of the early Church fathers. Paul Tillich once wrote:

> Without the presupposition that prayer changes the will of God in some respect, whether he hears or rejects the prayer, no prayer of supplication seems to be meaningful. But the early theologians, whose prayers underlie most of the Christian liturgies, emphasized the unchangeability of God against all paganism.

> Tillich 1955: 80–1

While it is true that the early Christian theologians adopted a rather philosophically sophisticated notion of God, it may be argued that this demonstrates their affinity with, rather than opposition to, pagan philosophers. In any case, it is unreasonable to assume that the theological doctrines that arose from the

ferment of the pagan/Christian debate correctly reflect the religious life of the Christian underclass. See Dodds (1965), especially chapter iv.

7   Evans-Pritchard acknowledges the existence of certain borderline cases that "may be classed as magic, or play, or simple expressions of a wish, according to the definitions we employ" (*Witchcraft* 464).

8   I find it remarkable that the "contradiction" involving the inheritance of witchcraft has created such a fuss. It demonstrates neither that the Azande possess some extraordinary non-Western logic (Da Costa and French, 1995), nor that their ideas about witchcraft are not systematic. Rather, as I gather from reading Evans-Pritchard, the Azande simply refuse to *attend* to this particular difficulty. The Azande certainly do not enjoy a monopoly on selective cultural attention. As a rule, Americans prize their high standard of living and are devoted, at least in principle, to universal economic equality among the nations of the world. No matter how many times it is pointed out to them, most Americans are simply incapable of *attending* to the fact that the Earth is unable to sustain the entire human population at American levels of consumption of energy and raw materials. To paraphrase Evans-Pritchard, one might say that "Americans see the sense of this argument, but they do not accept its conclusions, and it would involve the whole notion of the American dream in contradiction were they to do so."

Chapter 9

1   I.C. Jarvie and Joseph Agassi have pointed out a parochialism similar to that which I have found in Winch in the work of the anthropologist J.H.M. Beattie. They describe "the super-parochialism of his [Beattie's] assumption that science (equals no error, equals usable technology) is the mark of rationality" (Jarvie and Agassi 1970: 192). Their essay has had great impact on my own thinking, and the present chapter may be partially viewed as an effort to demonstrate that Winch (who is actually a more appropriate target for their criticisms than Beattie) could agree with Jarvie and Agassi's critique of the expressivist interpretation of magic and remain true to his own fundamental philosophical doctrines. On the other hand, Winch would never agree with their thesis that "the ritual actions of magic [unlike those of science] are (or can be) rational only in the weak sense," i.e. that such acts are goal-directed but are not based on rationally held beliefs, meaning beliefs that satisfy "some criterion of rationality which has been adopted, such as that it is based on good evidence" (*ibid.*: 173). To this, Winch could simply say that magical beliefs do satisfy some criterion of rationality, just not a criterion that Jarvie and Agassi would appreciate.

2   Evans-Pritchard claims that "Not being experimentally inclined, they [the Azande] do not test the efficacy of their medicines" (*Witchcraft*: 477). On the other hand, I should point out that, among the Azande, rainmaking is not "an art to which great importance is attached, because the rainfall is normally heavy and regular" (*ibid.*: 470).

3   Here, Winch's ambiguity (which so dismayed Henderson) comes into play. Recall that in Chapter 1 I mentioned that it is unclear whether Winch's expression "modes of social life" refers to broad categories of action such as "science" and "religion" or to particular cultural systems. In the first case, we should seek, for instance, general criteria of intelligibility that are applicable to anything answering to the name "religion." In the latter case, however, we must delineate special criteria appropriate to each separate community of faith. The practices of the Greek Orthodox Church must not be interpreted in the light of criteria native to American Southern Baptist sensibilities. Similarly, the

notion of a broadly intercultural instrumental "mode of social life" suggests instrumental monism, while the notion of more culture-specific (and technologically specific) modes of social life suggests instrumental pluralism.

4   Although Wittgenstein's remark on cooking and comments from his *Remarks on Frazer's the Golden Bough* clearly imply his allegiance to instrumental monism, other "proof texts" could be offered to demonstrate his pluralist tendencies. As is usual in such interpretative issues, Wittgenstein presents the reader with a moving target. It is difficult to know when conflicting texts must be harmonized and when they must simply be taken as representing different phases of Wittgenstein's philosophical development. It is indeed plausible that some of the posthumously published material reflects ideas that Wittgenstein was merely testing out on paper but never really embraced. Be that as it may, Wittgenstein's pre-eminence demands that we consider at least one possible example of his openness to instrumental pluralism. In his *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (1978), Wittgenstein discusses the example of how the timber market works in a hypothetical society:

> Very well; but what if they piled the timber in heaps of arbitrary, varying height and then sold it at a price proportionate to the area covered by the piles? And what if they justified this with the words: "Of course, if you buy more timber, you must pay more?"
>
> How could I show them that – as I should say – you don't really buy more wood if you buy a pile covering a bigger area? – I should, for instance, take a pile which was small by their ideas and, by laying the logs around, change it into a "big" one. This might convince them – but perhaps they would say: "Yes, now it's a lot of wood and costs more" – and that would be the end of the matter. – We should presumably say in this case: they simply do not mean the same by "a lot of wood" and "a little wood" as we do; and they have a quite different system of payment from us.

ibid.: I, paragraphs 149–50

As an aside, I should first mention that I have no problem understanding how such a timber market could operate in complete harmony with our notions of economic rationality. As in our economy, customers would try to buy at the lowest available price; i.e., they would first purchase the highest stacked piles of logs. Timber merchants would use the society's customs as a means of advertising their chosen selling price. Those who wished to sell off their wood cheaply at "dumping" prices would pile it high. Those who believed demand to be strong and supply weak might hold out for a higher price by building lower piles. I only mention this parenthetically, as Wittgenstein clearly had no such arrangement in mind.

What Wittgenstein did have in mind was to describe a commercial practice that blatantly offends against our notion of a rational market. It is possible to read his comments as supporting instrumental pluralism. The timber merchants are involved in an activity that can fairly be identified as a form of commerce, but one whose criterion of rationality differs from our own. When this section is read in context, it is equally arguable that Wittgenstein means to support instrumental monism. Just three paragraphs later, he compares another similarly paradoxical economic practice with "religious actions" and with a clearly ritual action, "the coronation of a King." As in the case of the rain ceremony, when a practice does not meet our standards of instrumental reason, Wittgenstein banishes it to the non-instrumental categories of human action.

5 Keita proposes a universal "disposition of all human cultures to embrace prac-
tical empirically based technologies whenever our cognitive faculties are
sufficiently reliable" (Keita 1997: 82), which would tell against the empirical
validity of instrumental pluralism. Sacrificing philosophical subtlety, let us say
that Keita is claiming that, by and large, anyone faced with a choice between
rival technologies will make the same decision as we (contemporary
Westerners) would. Even if true, Keita's hypothesis is not fatal for the deploy-
ment of instrumental pluralism as an interpretative assumption. In order to
avoid misapplying Keita's hypothesis, consider his own example of "the prefer-
ence that early humans expressed for tools made from iron over those made
from stone" (*ibid.*: 80). I am willing to entertain the premise that anyone who
uses Stone Age technology would adopt Iron Age technology once introduced
to it. This does not imply that the Stone Age technologist and the Iron Age
technologist share identical criteria of instrumental reason. It is perfectly
possible, for instance, that someone who has never lacked iron tools might not
even *consider* flint to be a possible choice of material for the production of ax
heads. Obviously, people living in a Stone Age culture would have no difficulty
using flint in that way; their thinking is not colored by the knowledge that a far
preferable alternative is available elsewhere. The Stone Age technologist may
be said to entertain systematically lower expectations from his technology than
does the Iron Age technologist from hers. It need not trouble me that the Stone
Age technologist would be able to recognize the superiority of iron tools if they
were suddenly imported into his culture. For my purposes, it is enough that he
considers the use of stone axes to constitute an intelligible technology.

In order to explain why I am happy with such a minimalist version of instru-
mental pluralism, I should recall that my analysis of instrumental reason was
set forth in connection with the problem of understanding magic. According to
Wittgenstein and Winch, magic must not be understood as an instrumental
practice, because it fails so horribly to produce useful results, i.e. it does not
fulfill the criteria of instrumental rationality. I argue, to put it bluntly, that for
people who are used to getting generally poor results from their technology,
magic may fall within the range of instrumental reason. In a pre-scientific
culture magic makes instrumental sense, just as in a non-metallurgical culture
stone axes make sense. Just as people are usually more than willing to give up
their stone tools for iron tools, it is not hard to find people who gave up their
magical beliefs and practices for modern science and technology. This serves
only to reinforce my point: magic is an instrumental practice and is therefore
replaceable by another instrumental practice.

6 This example is from Jarvie and Agassi:

> The African witch doctor is almost innocuous, at times harmful, and
> seldom of use, except in very special cases. The doctor of the Age of
> Reason, on current assessment, was a real killer. ... Current assessment is
> that only after Pasteur and Lister did doctors start doing more good than
> harm.

Jarvie and Agassi 1987: 389

7 Some readers may by now be exasperated by my willingness to use normative
expressions such as "our own, stricter, criteria" and the "poor results" of tradi-
tional technologies. How does this blatant assignment of rankings jibe with
Winch's famous unwillingness to compare different levels of rationality? It is
true that Winch denied the possibility of comparing the various criteria of
rationality associated with different social practices in terms of some ultimate

standard. Perhaps one reason why Winch espoused the doctrine of instrumental monism was precisely in order to avoid the more extreme relativistic consequences of this denial. By claiming that everyone just happens to share the same criteria of instrumental rationality, and that magic is not really a form of instrumental action (i.e. it is not intended to achieve practical benefits), Winch is spared the embarrassment of defending instrumental relativism. He is freed from the task of explaining why vaccination cannot be considered objectively and absolutely superior to witch hunting as a method for controlling disease. Speaking for myself, I am unconvinced by Winch's arguments against the possibility of ranking various criteria of rationality. Suppose that it is possible to establish some kind of ultimate scale of instrumental practices (perhaps based on something like Keita's hypothesis), and that instrumental Rationalism (with a capital "R") awaits discovery. Even so, we have no reason to make Keita's assumption that every society (or even our own society!) already organizes its practical life in accordance with this Ultimate Rationality. As an interpretative principle, instrumental pluralism merely tells me that when I wish to understand the behaviors and beliefs of people in other societies, I must be prepared to face the possibility that they do not share my criteria of instrumental rationality. It tells us nothing about the possibility or impossibility of normatively comparing those different criteria.

8   Evans-Pritchard's discussion of Zande "medicines" quoted above offers a good example of how techniques that fulfill our own, stricter, criteria of instrumental rationality combine with techniques that we would reject as superstition to form a single category of Zande culture. See the quote on page 71.

9   This might be seen as something of a concession to Keita's 1997 criticism of my paper "Winch and instrumental pluralism" (1995). Keita argued for a universal set of criteria of instrumental rationality, claiming that magic is always peripheral to genuine technological practices. While I would concede that Zande magic is not as fully integrated with Zande "empirical" technologies as I had previously implied, I do not think that such integration is an *a priori* impossibility. The level of integration of magical and "empirical" techniques in any particular culture may only be established by studying the particular culture in question.

10   For the record, it should be emphasized that Winch himself makes no mention of "instrumental pluralism" or "instrumental monism," or of any equivalent notions. In identifying Winch as an instrumental monist, I am pointing out an *unspoken* assumption or intellectual tendency in Winch's work.

11   The underlying cause of all this confusion is clear. Winch is guilty of what for Wittgenstein was the ultimate offense against language; he has uprooted perfectly sensible words from their native contexts and replanted them in the cursed soil of philosophical discourse. We all know how to apply the concept of reality in our everyday speech, as in the statement "a young child may have difficulty differentiating between fantasy and reality." Winch's range of application of "reality" (or "realities") becomes unrecognizably broad. John W. Cook writes:

> What is at issue between Winch and Evans-Pritchard is nothing that can properly be stated by talking of different domains of "reality." (Indeed the word "reality" is best left out of the matter altogether just because it invites a misleading philosophical picture.)
>
> Cook 1983: 26

While the word "reality" usually refers to the empirical world, Winch has stretched the use of the word to include what he claims to be the symbolic system of expressions that constitutes Azande magical discourse. Of course, Winch also over-extends the range of other concepts, for instance that of "reasoning." In his essay "Reasoning in a primitive society," Gilbert Fulmer complains that "Winch would have us believe that they [the Azande when involved with witchcraft] are none the less being rational – though in a way different from us" and concludes that in certain circumstances, "To say that they are reasoning, but in a different way, is meaningless" (Fulmer 1977: 170).

In the paper "Following a rule," Colwyn Williamson (1989b: 487–504) argues that Winch has stretched the range of application of the concept of a "rule" beyond recognition. Winch himself is not completely blind to his tendency to over-stretch meanings. In his discussion of the concept of intelligibility, he writes: "It does not follow from this that we are just punning when we speak of the activities of all these enquirers in terms of the notion of making things intelligible" (ISS: 19). He then tries to justify the wide range of his use of the term "intelligibility" by invoking Wittgenstein's celebrated meditation on the many applications of the concept of a game in *Philosophical Investigations* I: 66–71. Unfortunately for Winch, Wittgenstein was listing the accepted, ordinary applications of the concept, not stretching it to invent new and uniquely philosophical uses. (Although he did go on to create the novel expression "language game," Wittgenstein never claimed that his language games are just as much games as chess and poker).

12 As opposed to my interpretation, Horton treats Winch as a kind of bridgehead theorist for whom the triad of birth, sex, and death is meant to "form a kind of inter-cultural bridge that permits translation and so makes possible the completion of the process of understanding" (1976: 158). This forces him to wonder why Winch avoids mobilizing the usual candidates for bridges between cultures, such as "our everyday spatial notion of causality," our "everyday ... attitude to contradiction" and our everyday concepts of truth, falsity, and agreement with reality (*ibid.*: 160). I, of course, contend that Winch would be perfectly happy to accept these as bridgehead concepts, as long as they were applied only to the interpretation of instrumental practices. However, he is not really worried about establishing bridgeheads to enable the translation of everyday language.

13 Here, I distance myself from the views I expressed in Lerner 1995b: 189.

14 A.A. Derksen (1978) has suggested that after the publication of ISS, Winch underwent a not entirely conscious change of heart and accepted the reality of practical restraints on the variability of conceptual frameworks and their associated criteria of rationality.

Chapter 10

1 See page 148 note 6 for Phillips's views on prayer.

2 It is revealing that even Winch's remarks on mathematics, which I quote above, suffer from the same weakness as his ideas on religion, which they were meant to clarify through analogy. In themselves, Winch's views on mathematics are perfectly respectable. However, they are not necessarily indicative of what mathematics has meant historically to those who have actually been involved in its development. Indeed, the emergence of an appreciation of geometry as sophisticated as that advocated by Winch is of recent vintage. While even some ancients may have believed in the purely formal nature of mathematical entities such as a dimensionless point, Euclidean space itself was assumed, in spite of Winch, to be identical to the physical space of empirical phenomena. As E.A.

Burtt states in his classic work *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*:

> Our current conception of mathematics as an ideal science, of geometry in particular as dealing with an ideal space, rather than the actual space in which the universe is set, was a notion quite unformulated before Hobbes, and not taken seriously till the middle of the eighteenth century, though it was dimly felt after by a few Aristotelian opponents of Copernicus.

> Burtt 1955: 44

Winch claims that mathematics is descriptive neither of "empirical structures" nor of an "other realm of reality." I have already demonstrated that Winch's first claim would have been unacceptable to mathematicians during most of the history of geometry. His second claim, that mathematics does not deal with an "other realm of reality" remains unacceptable to many mathematicians to this day. Consider the following statement made by the great contemporary mathematician Roger Penrose:

> I imagine that whenever the mind perceives a mathematical idea, it makes contact with Plato's world of mathematical concepts. ... When mathematicians communicate, this is made possible by each one having a direct route to truth ... each is directly in contact with the same externally existing Platonic world!

> Penrose 1989: 428

Winch has every right to disagree with Penrose's Platonism, and as a good Wittgensteinian it is obvious that he would. But if Penrose and his colleagues claim that they are involved in the exploration of the mathematical realm, rather than in its construction, who is Winch to dictate to them their true intention, i.e. the construction of formal systems? Would we better understand the work of the ancient geometers as a social practice (after all, Winch is interested in the social sciences, not the exact sciences) if we were to assume that they really held a post-Einsteinian view of the relationship between geometrical and physical space?

It is not difficult to locate the source of Winch's difficulties in understanding the historical practice of mathematics. As in the case of his interpretation of instrumental practices, Winch is applying the principle of charity to the understanding of a social practice without first determining which criterion of intelligibility is native to that practice. When considering primitive technology, he tacitly assumes the universal applicability of Western standards of instrumental rationality. When considering mathematics, he assumes the universal applicability of a particular notion of conceptual clarity. This notion may be well suited to the rigors of debate among formalist, intuitions, and Platonist philosophers of mathematics without being able to account for the lived experience (the genuine concern of social science) of actual working mathematicians.

3   Sharrock and Anderson 1985a: 369. See my extensive discussion of their views below.

4   In fact, the dissonance between the plain meaning and ritual use of the *kol nidrei* has been a source of controversy, setting scholars against lay persons, who are less sensitive to the prayer's literal, legalistic meaning.

5   This section draws broadly on my "Understanding a (secular) primitive society" (1995c).

6   I have made some efforts toward uncovering Evans-Pritchard's own opinion
    regarding Winch. According to the Oxford anthropologist Wendy James (in a
    private communication), he never commented on Winch in print. In a private
    communication, Steven Lukes wrote to me that "I sometimes tried to engage
    him in discussions about the relevance of Winch's arguments for anthropolo-
    gists, but I could never get beyond his ironic self-deprecation." Lukes also
    recounted a famous incident that occurred at a joint meeting of the
    Anthropologists' Society and the Socratic Club at Oxford in the late 1960s:

> At this meeting Alasdair McIntyre and Peter Winch gave talks about prim-
> itive societies making philosophical points the anthropologists present
> were supposed to comment upon. Both McIntyre and Winch made exten-
> sive references in their talks to Zande cattle. They were making points
> about the role of symbolism and suchlike in social life. At a certain point
> in the discussion the chairwoman (whose name was Stella Aldwinkle)
> called upon Professor Evans-Pritchard to comment upon the lively philo-
> sophical discussion that was taking place. He slowly rose to his feet and
> said the following: "Well, I don't know anything about philosophy, but
> there's one thing I do know. The Azande don't have any cattle." The
> whole meeting dissolved in laughter but the two philosophers were, so far
> as I could tell, unfazed.

Wendy James, who also mentions this incident, was willing to venture that
"Having known Evans-Pritchard myself (he was my supervisor) I would
suggest that while he was delighted and flattered that his ethnography was
taken seriously by philosophers, he would not have felt that Winch's argument
did it justice."

7   Michael Singleton (1972) has suggested that the non-theistic Azande world
    view may be usefully compared with contemporary Western "death of God"
    theologies. I cannot agree for two reasons: first, that "death of God theology"
    draws much of its pathos from the very fact that Western religion has tradition-
    ally been overwhelmingly theistic:

> The death of God radical theologians ... are men without God who do not
> anticipate his return. But it is not a simple not-having, for there is an expe-
> rience of loss. ... The loss is not of the idols, or of the God of theism, but
> of the God of the Christian tradition.

Hamilton 1966: 22

There is no evidence that the Azande have experienced a similar traumatic
break with a thriving theistic tradition. Second, the West's long adherence to
Christianity and Judaism has created the expectation of a certain kind of spiri-
tual depth that radical theologians still find themselves trying to satisfy. Zande
culture (unlike Nuer culture) never seems to have developed this kind of
conscious need for a religious attitude toward life.

8   MacIntyre makes the stronger claim that all such attempts to make religion
    appear reasonable to modern society have turned their backs on the most
    fundamental elements of traditional theism: "any presentation of theism which
    is able to secure a hearing from a secular audience has undergone a transforma-
    tion that has evacuated it entirely of its theistic content" (MacIntyre 1969: 26).

Chapter 11

1   The introduction to Malinowski (1922) contains his classic exposition of field-
    work technique.
2   In his editor's introduction, Freilich (1970) offers a romantic account of the
    significance of fieldwork experience for a novice graduate student of anthro-
    pology:

> The student knows that this is a challenge he will have to face, a major *rite
> de passage* that will provide him with the opportunity to prove his ability,
> courage and temperamental suitability for the profession. ... Basic anthro-
> pological concepts – culture, community, family, values – for which he
> previously demanded operational definitions will become "understood."
> By living in a strange cultural tradition he will somehow learn what
> culture "really means." ... By attempting to change his "raw" field notes
> into artistic and anthropologically meaningful essays, he will somehow
> learn to analyze and draw generalizations from ethnographic materials.

> Freilich 1970: 19

3   See, for instance, Evans-Pritchard 1933.
4   ISS: 71–2.
5   This must derive from Wittgenstein:

> The same savage who, apparently in order to kill an enemy, sticks his knife
> through a picture of him, really does build his hut of wood and cuts his
> arrow with skill and not in effigy.

> Wittgenstein 1979: 4

6   This example is clearly borrowed from Wittgenstein:

> I read, among many similar examples, of a rain-king in Africa to whom
> the people appeal for rain when the rainy season comes. But surely this
> means that they do not actually think he can make rain, otherwise they
> would do it in the dry periods when the land is "a parched and arid
> desert."

> *ibid.*: 12

7   Ironically, the very same arguments used by Sharrock and Anderson to prove
    that magic is not performed for instrumental purposes are used by Evans-
    Pritchard to explain why the Azande do not reject their magic as useless. The
    fact that "Magic is only made to produce events which are likely to happen in
    any case" (*Witchcraft*: 476) and that "Magic is seldom asked to produce a
    result by itself, but is associated with empirical action that does in fact produce
    it" (*ibid.*: 477) are both included in Evans-Pritchard's list of reasons why
    "Azande do not perceive the futility of their magic" (*ibid.*: 475).
8   Compare this with Winch's categorical claim that "a set of beliefs and practices
    cannot make sense insofar as they involve contradictions" (UPS: 19). In
    Sharrock and Anderson's defense, I should mention that some writers have seri-
    ously developed the idea that the Azande make use of a formalizable,
    three-valued logic that allows the truth value of inconsistencies to be regarded
    as indeterminate rather than false (Cooper 1975). For a review of the contro-
    versy surrounding such suggestions, see Da Costa and French (1995).

Chapter 12

1 The instrumental/communicative dichotomy has appeared under various guises
  in the history of the social sciences. My own treatment is perhaps closest to that of
  Habermas (1984). My quibble with him relates to his introduction of a third
  category, called *strategic* action: "We call an action oriented to success *strategic*
  when we consider it under the aspect of following rules of rational choice and
  assess the efficiency of influencing the decisions of a rational opponent" (*ibid.*:
  285), For my present purposes, strategic action might better be viewed as an
  intermediate case along the instrumental/communicative continuum.
2 Paradoxically, such a technician might utter some standard formulation such as
  "testing, testing, one, two three" whose purpose is to communicate the
  message that the utterance is not intended to be understood as a message.
3 Sorabji (1993) offers a comprehensive history of the tradition linking humanity
  to language use.
4 Benjamin Franklin has been credited with having formulated the definition of
  humans as tool-making animals. See Hewes (1993) for an overview of the
  concept's history.
5 Some philosophers of the social sciences have been more candid then Winch in
  their systematic disregard of instrumental behavior. Harre (1979: 206; as
  quoted in Ingold 1986: 395–6, footnote 3) explains bluntly that he "shall
  devote no space to a discussion of the practical activities of mankind since I
  believe that they bear tangentially on social life during most of human history."
  Ingold there retorts that "Such a preposterous assertion could only issue from
  the topmost turret of an ivory tower."

  Interestingly, there is one aspect of instrumental action missing from ISS
  whose absence Winch himself came to recognize. While we usually think of
  instrumental activities as directed toward the control of nature, similar action
  may be directed by one person toward another, usually with morally disastrous
  results. Obviously, if someone is interfering with my plans and I shoot him
  dead, I am not trying to *tell* him something. I am simply getting him out of my
  way, like a boulder that I pushed off the sidewalk. Unfortunately, relations
  between people that are founded on force rather than communication are not
  untypical of human life. Winch became sensitized to the role of such behavior
  by the work of Simone Weil (especially her celebrated essay "The Iliad or the
  poem of force") and eventually devoted an entire book (Winch 1989) to her
  ideas. This acknowledgment of the role of force in human relations led Winch
  to a moment of self-criticism in his preface to the second edition of ISS:

  > I had compared social relations to a conversational interchange. To take
  > the comparison seriously would be to ask such questions as: What role in
  > such an interchange of ideas is played by strategies of deceit, blackmail,
  > emotional bullying, punches on the nose, etc.

  ISS: xviii

6 Of course, my estimation as to whether my boulder-moving strategy will
  succeed depends on what constitutes an "obstruction." Presumably, this will
  depend on a societally based standard, which may be connected to related
  issues such as whether or not people use the sidewalk for cycling or pushing
  handcarts, etc.
7 I should point out that this quote represents Turner's earlier, Winchian
  thinking. Remarkably, Turner has so completely disengaged himself from
  Winch's influence that his *The Social Theory of Practices* (1994) makes only
  one fleeting reference to his work.

8 Turner's cigarette example is particularly troubling because it actually weakens the connection between communication and rule following. Does a rule exist in our society for upsetting one's spouse by lighting a cigarette when one is suffering from lung cancer? I could just as easily imagine Paul Roth (or today's Stephen Turner) citing this example as a demonstration that communication does *not* depend on the existence of socially recognized rules.

9 Donald Davidson, in his essay "The second person" (1992), develops an alternative to Wittgenstein's (or Winch's, for our purposes) argument from fallibility, which radically deflates the importance of the social nature of language (the rule-following activity *par excellence*) in a way congenial to my criticisms of Winch. Davidson is concerned with the relationship between a speaker and an interpreter who share a common interest in communication but lack a common language. How does linguistic error occur? The intention of the speaker to be interpreted in a certain way provides the norm; the speaker falls short of his intention if he fails to speak in such a way as to be understood as he intended (*ibid.*: 261). Here, the role of the interpreter is precisely analogous to that of the nail in the hammering example. I might write that the intention of the carpenter to drive in the nail in a certain way provides the norm; the carpenter falls short of his intention if he fails to strike the nail in such a way as to drive it in as he intended.

10 An interesting account of problems in the writings of Jürgen Habermas similar to those discussed in this section may be found in Giddens 1982.

11 See chapter 4 of Dreyfus (1991) for a lucid development of this line of thought. Although Heidegger stresses the role of instrumental action for humans (or better, for *Dasein*), he shares Winch's insistence on the necessarily social nature of truly human behavior. Dreyfus writes:

> Heidegger's basic point is that the background familiarity with significance that underlies all coping and all intentional states is an agreement in ways of acting and judging into which human beings, by the time they have *Dasein* in them, are "always already" socialized.
>
> *ibid.*: 144

12 The testimony of Temple Grandin, the celebrated autistic animal behaviorist, bears directly on the issue of non-social, non-linguistic cognition. Grandin (1996) claims that her thinking is almost purely visual, although she occasionally uses language to help to direct the general course of her thoughts (Grandin 2000). While Grandin believes that her lack of dependence on language offers her greater insight into animal cognition, her accomplishments in non-verbal tasks such as the design of installations and equipment for the handling of livestock obviously outstrip anything that we would attribute to mere animal intelligence.

13 See page 137 note 1.

14 Some anthropologists have begun to criticize openly the over-emphasis on language in the social sciences, which is also characteristic of Winch's program:

> It is no longer possible to claim that language mirrors reality and that language, consequently, is a privileged entry into any culture. It is one entry among others, and a wide-open one, but we should not let ourselves be deceived by the broad alley of words into society. If it seems to lead right to the heart of culture, this is largely an optical illusion based on the

folk model of Western logocentrism. Most social experience lies beyond words.

Hastrup and Hervik 1994b: 8

Appendix

1 This appendix is based upon my paper "Language goes on a Hawaiian holiday," which I presented at the conference on Peter Winch and the Idea of a Social Science, held at the University of Bristol in September 2000. It has been edited to avoid excessive repetition of material presented in earlier chapters.

2 Although I will emphasize below the differences between Sahlins and Winch, it would be fair to say that Sahlins's concern with how conceptual structures develop in response to the challenge of new circumstances may be fruitfully viewed as fleshing out Winch's own account of conceptual change.

3 I am indebted to Joseph Agassi for bringing to my attention Sahlins's relevance to the discussion of instrumental pluralism.

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