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Peter Winch on 'Aristotelian' and 'Socratic' Reasoning

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Abstract

Peter Winch often returned to questions about the nature of logic. In the context of his work on Wittgenstein and political philosophy in the 1990s, Winch described a contrast between 'Aristotelian' and 'Socratic' reasoning. Aristotelian conceptions of reasoning, attributed to Frege and Russell, would see logic as a formal science and rationality as consistency with pre-existent rules of inference. The Socratic conception, attributed to Wittgenstein, understands rational argument as a form of socially embedded dialogue that involves moral relationships and a dimension of depth. Rational persuasion may also involve use of persuasive images and examples.

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In the 1980s and '90s, Peter Winch repeatedly addressed issues concerning the nature of rational persuasion. Such questions are taken up in his published work as well as in his lectures and manuscripts of the time.[1] This was connected to the fact that Winch was preparing an extended work on the concept of political authority. He found it necessary also to consider the role of authority in general in the formation of rational belief. And this led him to consider the relation between reason and persuasion even in other contexts. But in fact he was just developing a point that he had already made in 1958, in *The Idea of a Social Science*. Even his work in general is shot through with reflections on how to understand terms that connect with reasoning – such as 'logic', 'contradiction', 'argument', 'belief' or 'truth'.

A key to his take on these questions lies in his idea of the internality of social relations. Relations between people are expressive of their understanding of meaningful conceptual

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[1] Notably, Peter Winch (1992), 'Persuasion', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 17, 123-137; Peter Winch (MS, 1991), 'Persuasion and Reason', Peter Winch, ed. Campbell (MS, 2016), 'The Green Book'; Peter Winch (MS, 1993), 'The Authority of Reason'; Olli Lagerspetz / Peter Winch (MS, 2017), 'Peter Winch's Lectures on Moral Philosophy, Fall Term 1990', Olli Lagerspetz/ Peter Winch (MS, 1990), 'Peter Winch's Seminars on Authority', Olli Lagerspetz/ Peter Winch (MS, 1993), 'Peter Winch's Seminars on Authority at Åbo'.

relations. The reverse side of this is that relations between concepts do not exist independently of the lives of people who use them – as expressed in Winch's remark 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'[2]. Here one might expect the natural response that any way of living or mode of social life must already imply basic logical ideas, such as a principle of contradiction.[3] Winch would have agreed – considering the fact that he developed that same idea in his essay 'Nature and Convention'.[4] His point, however, was that applying '*criteria* of logic' involves judgements about, for instance, what in a given context would count as contradiction. Those criteria cannot be implemented from the outside; logic, viewed outside a human context, would 'lose its significance *as* logic'.[5]

Logic as Science

In his written work and in teaching, Peter Winch often returned to the story of 'Achilles and the Tortoise' by Lewis Carroll. It was discussed in a central passage of *The Idea of a Social Science* in 1958, and again repeatedly in the 1990s.[6]

In the story, which is a travesty of Zeno's Paradox, Achilles sets out to prove to Tortoise that he must accept a certain proposition, called Z. It is said that proposition Z follows logically if propositions A and B are true. Tortoise accepts A and B and he also accepts the statement, 'if A and B be true, Z must be true' (or: A&B=>Z). This statement is abbreviated as C. But Tortoise says he still doesn't *have to* accept Z. Achilles replies that he must, because he has already accepted C. If A, B and C are true, Z must be true. *This* statement is called D (or: (A&B) & (A&B=>Z) =>Z).

[2] Peter Winch ([1958] 1990), *The Idea of a Social Science*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 100.
[3] As pointed out by a referee for this journal.
[4] Peter Winch (1972), *Ethics and Action*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 50-72.
[5] Winch, *Ethics and Action*, p. 56.
[6] Winch, *ISS*, pp. 55-57. 'Persuasion and Reason', pp. 7-8; 'The Authority of Reason', p. 3; 'The Green Book', p. 100.

Thus: A

               B
               C: A&B=>Z
               ___
               Z

and further: A
               B
               C: A&B => Z
               D: (A&B) & (A&B=>Z) =>Z
               ___
               Z

Tortoise now says he accepts A, B, C and D, but still says he doesn't have to accept Z – unless he is made first to accept the statement E: 'if A and B and C and D are true, Z must be true', or E: (((A&B=>Z) & (A&B)) =>Z) & (A&B) => Z). And so on *ad infinitum*. As in the original Zeno's paradox, Tortoise is forever one step ahead of Achilles. There always seems to remain one more premise to be stated and accepted before one can proceed to Z.

In this race, both Achilles and Tortoise come across as deluded about the status of formal logic. Tortoise believes – or professes to believe – that the *form* of the argument (*modus ponens*) is one of its premises. Tortoise's position is one version of the idea that also Achilles believes in: namely, that *if* an argument is to be valid, its formal features must by themselves guarantee its validity. Achilles believes that, once an argument has been stated in (what in the formal system counts as) the correct way, 'Logic [will] take you by the throat, and *force* you' to accept the conclusion. Tortoise in a way also accepts that there is such a thing as 'logic taking you by the throat'; only that it has not yet happened. What neither of them can see is that, as Winch puts it, 'the actual process of drawing an inference, which is after all the heart of logic, is something which cannot be represented as a logical formula; [...] Learning to infer is not just a matter of being taught about explicit logical relations between propositions; it is learning *to do* something'.[7]

Winch believed that the idea of logic that was the butt of Carroll's irony was extremely influential in philosophy both past and present. It is the idea that logic is a *system* of rules *applied* or *implemented* to thinking. According to Winch's summary, the 'Aristotelian' conception of logic has 'two aspects':

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[7] Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, p. 57.

(1) A conversion of what we say into "canonical form" – which is supposed to express the *real* form of our thought, a form which is supposed to take its authority from its mirroring the structure of reality;

    (2) The idea that this structure exercises a special sort of *constraint* on our thinking. (This is the aspect picked up by Lewis Carroll's Achilles and exposed as hollow by the Tortoise.).[8]

Going more into detail, this conception involves the following features:

(i) *Ready-made structure.* The argumentative structure exists in the form of 'rails'[9] along which reasoning will proceed.[10] If true premises are fed into the machinery, true conclusions unfailingly result in the other end. In a sense the argument is always already 'there', waiting to be put in motion as soon as a concrete instance of reasoning is entered.

(ii) *Non-contingency.* Formal systems of this kind constitute 'laws of thought' in two senses: they reproduce the outline of how thinking normally proceeds; and, more importantly, they are to be used for *checking* against confusion – e.g. category mistakes – and undue influences like emotional hang-ups and bullying. Thus the system serves to keep everything merely psychological, social and cultural outside proper reasoning.

(iii) *The role of contradiction.* The crucial critical tool consists in spotting self-contradiction and avoiding it. The principle of non-contradiction (formulated as ~(p & ~p)) is the final touchstone.

(iv) *Connection with Realism.* The principle of non-contradiction is also a link that supposedly connects logic with versions of metaphysical Realism. In the essay, 'Im Anfang war die Tat', Winch traces the connection roughly this way.[11] Contradiction is a relation that obtains between two competing *truth claims* – thus the ideas of contradiction and truth are connected. In order for two statements to contradict each other, both must stand in generally the same kind of relation to an object, some part of reality – *that, in virtue of which they are true or false*. Thus

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[8] Winch, 'The Authority of Reason', p. 4; 'The Green Book', p. 102.
[9] Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953), *Philosophical Investigations,* Oxford: Blackwell, I § 218.
[10] Winch, 'The Authority of Reason', pp. 2, 3.
[11] Peter Winch, *"Im Anfang war die Tat,"* in Peter Winch (1987), *Trying to Make Sense*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 33–53, at pp. 41-42.

the method to detect whether a disagreement is real or apparent is to trace the relevant propositions down to some statement about shared reality, the one statement asserting it and the other denying it. Getting past all psychological, cultural, social, temperamental and similarly contingent issues, either it turns out that actual disagreement about reality lies at the bottom, or the appearance of disagreement was illusory to start with. Conversely, any denial of this final, uniform and checkable link with reality exposes us to relativism and Idealism.

This, in sum, was an idea of Logic as science.[12] Winch was opposed to it. He also argued that Wittgenstein, early and late, did the same, and he took himself to be explicating Wittgenstein's view.

Objections to Logic as Science

Looking more closely at the four points just mentioned:

(i) As to the first point: There is usually, in the debate, some ambiguity about the notion of 'logical form', or about what is meant by 'formal features' of an argument. The calculus notion that was just described implies that you can re-create the form of any argument in a symbolism – and that you can do this even without knowledge of what all the words in it would mean. For instance, two signs for negation ($\sim \sim$) take each other out; you don't need to know *what* is negated.[13] 'Form' in this case is literally a physical form of symbols on paper.

But the meaningfulness of *this* exercise depends on its being connected with the logical forms of propositions in another sense. Our ability to see a physical form as a representation of logical form connects with our ability to discern relations between meaningful elements in what is being said; which further requires us to recognise the assertion in question as (to some extent) an intelligible thing for someone to say in the situation as we understand it. When I discern the logical form of what you have told me I *attribute sense* to something you say; I, so to speak, consent to a certain understanding of the point you are making. I am not forced to do so, but on the other hand if I refuse to accept what everyone else would recognise as an argument I have, in effect, placed myself outside the discussion as it is conducted.[14]

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[12] What about developments after Wittgenstein's time – for instance, the subsequent development of many-valued logic? The target of Wittgenstein's and Winch's criticism was not formal logic as such, but a certain conception of the relation between logic and thinking, or of the relationship between form and substance in an argument. In this sense the description is an ideal type. Readers are invited to compare the ideal type with existing instances philosophical reasoning, both formal and informal, and to judge for themselves to what extent the ideal type is applicable in the given case.

[13] In 'Persuasion' (pp. 125-126) Winch discusses Wittgenstein's treatment of the double negation. – In the standard formalism, iterated negation equals assertion, while it in speech usually reinforces the negation.

[14] Winch, 'Persuasion', p. 135; 'Persuasion and Reason', p. 18.

Attributing sense to an argument in this way is part of the activity of *persuading* – one of making a point of view available and/or attractive.[15] Generally, when philosophers discuss persuasion, most of the time the emphasis is laid on its doubtful aspects. Persuasion is seen as an alternative, and a bad one at that, to rational argument.[16] But Winch emphasised that persuasion is an integral part of any argument, for it establishes the framework of the debate where arguments are deployed. We might go as far as to say that no argument ever consists in just showing that A logically leads to B. Appreciating an argument presupposes that we see the point, the relevance, of the issues addressed in it. This is done in various ways, for instance, by producing examples, analogies (objects of comparison) or persuasive descriptions of a life informed by the conviction that is being proposed to us. There are no definite rules about how this is done, however. The differences between good argument and manipulative persuasion, or between positive argument and *reductio ad absurdum* are not something included in a Logic book.

(ii) This highlights the question of what kind of research activity formal logic is. It is not an empirical study, treating thought and language as natural phenomena – as, for instance, when Woyzeck, in Büchner's play and in Alban Berg's opera, is made to live on a diet of peas in order to see how it might influence his thinking.[17] Logic is, rather, about 'correct' thought as a concept. Standards of logic are not something we discover, but (the discipline of formal) logic is, as Wittgenstein cites F. P. Ramsey saying, conceived of as 'a normative science'. This quote comes from §81 of *Philosophical Investigations*, a passage that Winch called 'pivotal' in the whole of the book.[18] In that paragraph Wittgenstein objects to the idea that 'if anyone utters a sentence and *means* or *understands* it he is operating a calculus according to definite rules.' Instead, Wittgenstein says,

> ... in philosophy we often *compare* the use of words with games and calculi which have fixed rules, but cannot say that someone who is using language *must* be playing such a game. [...] [T]he most that can be said is that we *construct* ideal languages. But here the

[15] See in particular, Winch, 'Persuasion'.

[16] This is the aspect of persuasion perhaps highlighted in the remark, 'at the end of reason comes persuasion' in *On Certainty*. See Ludwig Wittgenstein (1972), *On Certainty*, New York: Harper & Row, § 612.

[17] Lagerspetz / Winch, 'Peter Winch's Seminars on Authority', no date. Cf. Georg Büchner, *Woyzeck*; Alban Berg, *Wozzeck*; this seems to be a caricature of actual nutrition experiments on German soldiers by Justus von Liebig. See Otto Krätz (2009), '"… ja die Erbsen, meine Herren …". Friedrich Johann Woyzeck, Georg Büchner, Justus Liebig und Alban Berg'. *Kultur & Technik* 04/2009, pp. 34-39.

[18] Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953), *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell, § 81.

word "ideal" is liable to mislead, for it sounds as if these languages were better, more perfect, than our everyday language; and as if it took the logician to shew people at last what a proper sentence looked like.

The logician constructs 'ideal' languages; one might say models or prototypes. This does not, however, imply that ordinary reasoning really or at bottom is a kind of calculus but simply that a calculus model is one possible thing that language may be compared with.

But then, if the work of the philosopher is deflated to merely *constructing* ideal languages and offering a body of formal rules as an object of comparison – a prototype – how does it help us see that one comparison is better than another?[19] *If* logic is a formal system of rules, implemented in thinking, the natural question is indeed: Why precisely this system and not something else?

Winch raised this question several times. However, as it seems to me, it should not really be a question that ought to have bothered him in the first place, because it presupposes precisely the kind of formalist understanding of logic which he believed to be mistaken. He would rather maintain that meaningful thinking and communication are what comes first. In your subsequent formalisations you will *find* that the categories of formal logic are, for some purposes, helpful in capturing what goes on. Logical laws 'as such' are not *implemented* to thinking and hence no question should arise about whether it is *right* that we should do so. What moves me in my appreciation of the force of an argument is my insight about what the argument means. This is of course dependent of the substance of the discussion itself and of my perspective on it. There is the question how I can engage with my interlocutors; and there is the question what I can honestly go along with.[20]

Those who desire purity might be inclined to dismiss anything beyond abstract logical form 'as such' as digression; as mere social and psychological trappings of logic. On the other hand, what I take Winch to be saying is that we should not assume a fixed thing which is 'the logical form as such'.[21]

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[19] Lagerspetz / Winch, 'Peter Winch's Seminars on Authority'.
[20] Winch, 'Persuasion and Reason', pp. 18-19. Winch distinguishes here between 'external' and 'internal' constraints (roughly: (1) having to do with the people with whom I wish to speak; (2) things like candour and keeping one's word).
[21] See Winch, 'Persuasion', p. 126; 'Persuasion', p. 132: '[O]ne may well be disposed to think that logic must have another, more fundamental, part which sets limits to what is and what is not a possible, or at least acceptable, language game. [...] I believe [Wittgenstein's] treatment of this issue contains the most radical part of his thinking'.

(iii) Someone might now object that there certainly is one 'pure' logical principle that binds us regardless of any particular practices that happen presently to engage us; namely, the principle of non-contradiction. Winch agreed that the idea of avoiding contradiction is inherent in any meaningful communication.[22] To make a claim is to commit one's future claims and actions to what one has just said – or, sometimes, it is to commit oneself to characteristic ways of acknowledging later that one has to relinquish the original claim. So in one sense it is true that the rule of non-contradiction is universal. However, the crucial question here is: how do we recognise contradiction when we see it? For instance, the statement, 'It is raining and not raining' might be framed as a contradiction, but it could also be a perfect description of the weather last night at 11 o'clock.

The assumed timelessness and universality of logical inferences is contrasted with the observation that in real debates, we don't necessarily know whether two views *do* contradict each other until we know how their proponents would accommodate the other view or fail to do so. Winch discussed several such cases, including apparent contradictions between religion and science and between magical practices and various views of causal agency.[23] When formalisations are employed in covering new areas of debate – perhaps in order to clarify the debates – this is itself a creative exercise. Or a destructive one, if you like: it closes off certain possibilities of dealing with the apparent contradiction. It is not only a 'mechanical exercise' for which a blueprint as it were already exists in the realm of Logic.[24]

(iv) Finally, there is the issue concerning Realism. Contradiction is a relation that may obtain between two alternative claims about reality. But Winch pointed out that the idea of 'claims about reality' is context sensitive. Not only is thinking *influenced* by context, but the very intelligibility of *raising questions* about what we 'know', 'believe', 'assert' or 'must conclude' presupposes specific practices that give content to our questions.

Winch presents an example in the essay, 'Im Anfang war die Tat'. He goes for a walk with you; he then suddenly points to an ordinary-looking building, saying, 'That house is made of *papier-mâché*'.[25] He does not provide anything that would be normally accepted as a reason. You go to the house together and knock at the walls, which are completely solid and normal,

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[22] Winch, *Ethics and Action*, pp. 50-72.
[23] Peter Winch (1987), 'Darwin, *Genesis* and Contradiction', in Peter Winch (1987), *Trying to Make Sense*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp. 132-139; Peter Winch (1972), 'Understanding a Primitive Society', in *Ethics and Action*, pp. 8-49; Peter Winch (1987), 'Language, Belief and Relativism', in *Trying to Make Sense*, pp. 194-207.
[24] Winch, 'Darwin, *Genesis* and Contradiction'. See also Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* §§193-194.
[25] Winch, "*Im Anfang war die Tat"*, pp. 40-41.

but Winch persists. In his essay, Winch raises the question whether, in this imaginary situation, he would be making a recognisable assertion at all.[26] It is not only that you wouldn't understand *why* Winch utters the sentence, 'that house is made of *papier-mâché*', but the very status of the utterance *as assertion* is blurred out. The intelligibility of expressing the belief that something is made of *papier-mâché* depends on an argumentative context where such claims are made and disputed or tested.[27] The question is whether, in the situation described, one could make sense of the description of Winch as claiming or believing anything at all.

Here – as Winch notes – one might protest that we would at any rate go to the building with Winch and knock at the walls. Isn't this precisely to test a statement we have heard and understood? Here, however, it would be more to the point to say we are testing *Winch*, his reactions and what he might mean.

The 'Realist' theory of what it means to advance a factual claim would, instead, imply this: Regardless of what motivates Winch to *say* that the house is made of *papier-mâché* or how he would go about testing it – regardless of all this, nevertheless the assertion 'as such' has a definite content, because you can try to match it with a piece of reality, namely, the house. – But Winch's claim is that, in the situation he has described, we would not be able to match the utterance with anything at all. The sentence he has uttered does not (at least yet, with the information that was given) amount to anything one would recognise as a claim and so we would not know what to make of it.

Thus we will not find out whether two propositions conflict by using a neutral technique of comparing each with reality. In order to carry out the comparisons, we must have an idea of *the ways in which* the propositions are 'about' reality. Philosophical Realism assumes that *that* question has already been solved, whereas Winch saw it as one of the chief questions facing the philosopher.

Aristotle and Socrates

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[26] Cf. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 468: 'Someone says irrelevantly "That's a tree". He might say this sentence because he remembers having heard it in a similar situation; or he was suddenly struck by the tree's beauty and the sentence was an exclamation; or he was pronouncing the sentence to himself as a grammatical example; etc., etc. And now I ask him "How did you mean that?" and he replies "It was a piece of information directed at you". Shouldn't I be at liberty to assume that he doesn't know what he is saying, if he is insane enough to want to give me this information?' – His friend's utterance should be understood as a response to some relevant issue. Otherwise we do not know what kinds of possible complication he is setting straight, and so we don't know what, if anything, he is asserting. See also the discussion in Elizabeth Wolgast (1977), *Paradoxes of Knowledge,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 155 and *passim*.
[27] Winch (1987), "*Im Anfang war die Tat"*, p. 42.

In the 1990s, Winch summed up the two conflicting approaches to logic in the form of a contrast between 'Aristotelian' and 'Socratic' logic. It was not specifically about *Aristotle* and his *Organon*. 'Aristotelian logic', in this context, is simply the predominant tradition of logic in Western philosophy, including the modern forms of logic developed from the 1800s onwards. It was the idea of logic as the science dealing with formal relations between propositions.[28] Crucially, Winch pointed out that "Wittgenstein, so Rhees says, used the term 'Aristotelian logic' (with which he contrasted his own way of treating logic) to *include Frege and Russell!*"[29] In his *Begriffschrift*, Frege had tried to devise a logical language that yields unambiguous results – thus, results that stand outside any kind of contingency.[30] Winch contrasts this with 'Socratic' thinking where, says Winch, 'the subject matter only exists in the (honest) labours of its practitioners'[31]. His favoured example was Plato's dialogue *Gorgias*.[32] The subject matter of *Gorgias* is rational argument and ethics in two kinds of sense. Those are the themes *discussed* in the dialogue and, secondly, Socrates' own attitude is held up as the supreme *example* of a rational and ethical perspective on life.

Winch devoted a large part of his lecture course in moral philosophy in 1990 to the conflicts between Socrates and his interlocutors as depicted in that dialogue.[33] Socrates wants to distinguish between persuasion through rhetoric and persuasion by means of rational argument.[34] For Socrates, the hallmark of rationality, however, does not consist in formal features or in higher standards of rigour, but in the *attitude* of the speaker vis-à-vis the subject matter – which also implies differences in the speaker's attitude to his or her listeners. For instance, the speaker should not present the subject under discussion as easier than it actually is. The speaker should try to say what he or she really thinks and encourage the others to do the same.

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[28] R.G. Collingwood describes 'Aristotelian logic' in a rather similar way as the doctrine that 'a person who has studied the nature of inference – let us call him a logician – can correctly judge the validity of an inference purely by attending to its form, although he has no special knowledge of its subject-matter'. Robin George Collingwood (1946), *The Idea of History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 253. *The Idea of a Social Science* shows that Winch studied Collingwood closely, but I have no information about whether Wittgenstein's and Collingwood's descriptions of 'Aristotelian logic' had a common source.

[29] Winch, 'The Authority of Reason', p. 3.

[30] 'Peter Winch's Lectures on Moral Philosophy', 30 August 1990.

[31] 'Peter Winch's Lectures on Moral Philosophy', 30 August 1990.

[32] Plato (1952), 'Gorgias', in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., pp. 252-294. Winch wrote, 'In *Gorgias* the *authority* carried by Socrates's arguments is *the authority of Socrates, the man*. And this is emphasized in the dramatic structure of the dialogue. Or rather, it is *the authority carried by the spectacle of a certain type of life, which Socrates both exemplifies and describes*'. – Winch, 'The Authority of Reason', p. 4; cf. 'Peter Winch's Lectures on Moral Philosophy', 30 August 1990.

[33] An important part of these discussions also found their way to 'Persuasion and Reason' with which he was then working.

[34] Whether this is a good portrayal of the Sophistic movement as a whole is a separate issue.

Gorgias, Polus and Callicles think of persuading as a neutral technique, like a martial art, which can be used for any purpose, good or bad. Socrates wants instead to effect a moral change in his listeners, resulting in a more honest and unclouded view of the goals they really want to pursue. They must develop a clearer idea of what it *is* to 'want' something in the first place. Winch pointed out that Socrates, at crucial junctures, made his interlocutors feel *ashamed* of what they believed they had committed themselves to. For instance, Callicles believed that the superior kind of person that he wanted to see himself as is one who gives free rein to all his desires. On the other hand, Callicles also had an implicit conception of *dignity* which, as he was made to see, was incompatible with the life of someone who makes no distinction between worthy and shameful pleasures. Socrates makes him understand, at least implicitly, that he would be embarrassed to be such a person. This is not emotional blackmail but an exercise in self-knowledge. Such changes of perspective cannot be forced, for they require the honest cooperation of the partners in discussion – a tough requirement, which is dramatically brought out in the eventual breakdown of the dialogue.

As part of his persuading effort, Socrates makes use of a myth concerning the future judgement of the soul in the netherworld. The message is that our lives will be judged, and that they will be judged in an absolutely just way.[35] Winch now points out that the myth has several strange features. Above all, why should someone like *Socrates*, who generally refuses to accept anything without argument, now completely abandon his critical stance and rely on a *myth*? – Winch's answer is that the judgement and punishment of the soul are not to be treated as a 'holy equivalent to torments inflicted by courts of justice'. This is not to say that the myth is symbolic and not meant to be 'literally true'; these classifications are 'readymade pigeonholes'[36]. The question is rather what 'true' is expected to mean in this context. The focus is on 'truth' as *truthfulness*; as the speaker's relation to what he or she wants to say. The Myth is an object of comparison, used in analogy with geometrical diagrams for judging concrete instances. Like geometry and unlike earthly justice, divine justice has no 'margin of error'. The Myth establishes a perspective of absolute justice where one's life is seen as 'a limited whole' (cf. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, 6.45).[37]

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[35] See also Plato's 'Theaetetus', in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., pp. 512-550. The ethical aspect of persuasion is discussed in the part known as the 'digression' in 172c-177c; as pointed out in Winch, 'Persuasion and Reason', p. 4.
[36] 'Peter Winch's Lectures on Moral Philosophy', 27 September 1990. See further in Peter Winch (1987), 'Wittgenstein, Picture and Representation', in *Trying to Make Sense*, pp. 64-80.
[37] 'Peter Winch's Lectures on Moral Philosophy', p. 39.

According to Winch, here the myth has much the same role as do pictures and 'world-pictures' in Wittgenstein's *on Certainty* – and also in Spengler's *Decline of the West*, according to Wittgenstein's reconstruction of it in *Culture and Value*.[38]

However – and this is a point I don't think Winch discussed in any detail – there is a difference between the myth of a Last Judgement and the kinds of world picture discussed in *On Certainty*, e.g. the ones that would underlie scientific work. The idea of a divine court of law – the soul, naked, facing Rhadamanthys and other judges of the netherworld – comes close to an actual picture. You might paint it or set it on stage. Not so with the 'picture' of, for instance, such a thing as 'laws of nature' – or with any world-picture that, as Wittgenstein says, constitutes 'the substratum of all my enquiring and asserting'.[39] On the other hand, the *application* is not, in *any* of these cases, something that might be set on stage. The picture is a guide to thought, but the application requires your own participation.

Surface and Depth

Socrates, like Spengler, Freud and Wittgenstein, presents images, patterns for comparison, which each serve to establish a certain perspective on things. The natural question is then, how do we tell good images, true images, from bad ones? I think it is inherent in the character of the issue that Winch does not have much general to say about this. You might say a good image is true to reality; or that it shows to us what is essential about something or other. But the task of the image is precisely to *establish* a way of thinking that in some way or other comes across as true or essential. Finally one might try to suggest that an image must at least be internally consistent. But one's use of the image establishes what, in the context, counts as consistency. The issue of consistency must be addressed along with the question how the image connects with one's other life activities.[40] Those activities are sometimes quite difficult to survey and we may not always be able to know whether an image is faithful to our thinking and acting.

Here is a case – not quite the same perhaps, but connected, because the story functions as a kind of image against which one is to judge one's understanding of a concept. Winch's discussion here concerns the question when we should say that two persons are doing the same thing – a central theme in *The Idea of a Social Science*. Winch takes up the Gospel story of the

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[38] 'Persuasion and Reason', pp. 15-16.
[39] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 162. – Hence, if we think of images as world pictures, which lie outside the explicit scope of your thinking, how can you take them up for discussion to decide whether they are good or bad?
[40] This question is addressed, for example, in Wittgenstein's thought experiment with wood sellers. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1983), *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics,* rev. ed. edited and translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 93–94

Pharisee and the Publican.[41] His discussion concerns the criteria of identity to be used in sociology in descriptions of religious action. The Pharisee stands conspicuously in the temple, saying, 'God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican'. The Publican stands in a corner, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner'. Are the Pharisee and the Publican doing the same thing? Are both praying? Are they praying in the same sense? The answer, says Winch, 'is given according to criteria which are not taken from sociology, but from religion itself'.

Someone might take the answer for a shorthand for, 'the Publican was really praying, the Pharisee not' – a conclusion that, I believe, comes naturally to readers of both the Gospel story and Winch's discussion of it. (And, as I remember Ieuan Lloyd remarking once, so we go home, thanking God that we are not like the Pharisee ... .) Isn't Winch telling us that there is one correct set of criteria for identifying prayer, and that those criteria are handed down to us by religious believers? That is how *The Idea of a Social Science* was frequently interpreted. Moreover, in that book, Winch's description of meaningful action as rule-governed behaviour (an emphasis he later regretted[42]) contributes to the impression that there is only one correct way to understand action. But, for at least two reasons, this would be a misleading interpretation both of the Gospel story and of Winch's book.

The first reason is that 'the same' and 'different' are to be understood in the light of one's *interest* in addressing the question at issue; so there will be no abstract 'same' or 'different'. For instance, if the societal role of religion is emphasised, both persons do the same thing – they frequent the house of worship, unlike those who either do not pray at all or do it at home in their 'closet'[43].

Secondly, and more importantly for the present discussion, the story is intelligible precisely because of ambiguities within the religious perspective itself. The concept of prayer is the nodal point of a huge mind-map, with threads going in all directions. The story highlights the fact that none of us has a neat concept of prayer, but on the contrary, conflicts about the nature of prayer are part of the concept, including conflicts within one's own thinking. Religious believers frequently have the experience that they are not saying their prayers in the

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[41] *The Idea of a Social Science*, p. 87; *Bible,* Luke 18: 9 – 14.
[42] See the 1990 Preface of *The Idea of Social Science.*
[43] *Bible*, Matthew, 6: 6: 'But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret'.

right spirit.[44] Thus the concept of prayer 'in itself' does not impose itself on us, but rather our application of the concept is tied up with more general questions of perspective.

Thinking of a case like prayer, you will be naturally led into using philosophically loaded terms, for instance, speaking of the 'essence' of prayer. The idea that there are right and wrong ways to pray seems to be, not only allowed, but indeed necessary in a religious context. You will need such thinking when, for instance, *you* want to pray, or when you discuss the role of prayer in your life with someone. Such discussions fall outside the typical scope of philosophy because they concern your personal attitude to religion. But they do demonstrate one form that an argument may take: some of the force of an argument stems from the fact that you, in person, acknowledge that you stand in a certain place in the debate.

When Winch introduced the example in his book, it was simply an illustration of his general take on social and cultural analysis. It was enough for him then to ask when two things would count as the same or as different. But there is another question here, and Winch kept returning to issues of that kind. The question is what it is to see an instance of a human practice as superficial or deep. You don't get hold of this if you just say, 'either these two cases are the same or they are different', as if this was a matter of assorting things in boxes.[45] To introduce a distinction between 'shallow' and 'deep' is to give up the idea that the real philosophical task is to nail down the one thing (or if you prefer, the several things) that the word 'prayer' really means.

The point that concepts have depth also more generally applies to language. Considerations of this kind perhaps underlie Wittgenstein's well-known remark that he could not help looking at everything from a religious point of view. Still in the *Tractatus*, language had been presented as something essentially fixed, assumed by definition to exclude ethics and religion, which were placed outside language. Wittgenstein's later work demonstrates that you cannot nail down the meanings of expressions ance and for all. Also connected with this, Wittgenstein wrote in 1950, presumably with an eye on his own cancer diagnosis:

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[44] If one wanted to write on '*the* grammar of prayer' one would have to accommodate conflicting perspectives, including the very fact that they conflict. One's understanding of any single perspective would be informed by its connections with other perspectives. (Perhaps in the way Kierkegaard believed the path *he* had chosen could only be intelligible if presented alongside with other possible perspectives.)

[45] Thus this case seems different from the example Winch discusses in 'Persuasion', p. 135. There the question is whether 'Europe' includes Britain.

Someone may for instance say it's a very grave matter that such and such a man should have died before he could complete a certain piece of work; and yet, in another sense, this is not what matters. At this point one uses the words 'in a deeper sense'.[46]

The Achilles and Tortoise story also highlights these issues. If you insist that everything must be made explicit in the form of rules you will miss the element of understanding: what understanding is about 'in a deeper sense'. At the same time, there is no final verdict about what we ought to see as depth. What is deep and what is just wrong or banal depends on how various ideas make contact with one's life. It is possible that we cannot take in the dimension of depth but see only banality where someone else would see depth.[47]

Logic and Philosophy

The lesson we learn from this is that no rational argument ever applies itself. 'Logic' must be *logic in use*; we cannot disregard the relations that obtain between speakers, including their moral relationships, which constitute the element where logical arguments come into play. In line with his original argument in *The Idea of a Social Science*, Peter Winch questioned the idea that we are capable of legislating about the proper nature of thinking and knowledge as such, outside their contexts of socially relevant practices.

This discussion also has implications to the question what philosophy can do and what its end result should be. In one sense, it is perfectly correct to say that the task of philosophical inquiry is to make philosophical problems go away (as the task of *any* problem solving is to make some problem go away). But we should not start thinking that a problem that was solved never was a problem to start with. Something like that view is sometimes attributed to Wittgenstein on the basis of his specifically methodological remarks in *Philosophical Investigations* (especially I: § 133). But neither Wittgenstein nor Winch would have thought of philosophical problem solving as a matter of, for instance, simply reminding oneself of the real use of some word, if 'real use' is something like 'standard use'. Such ideas would lie too close to the kind of thing Winch dismissed as the 'underlabourer conception of philosophy'[48]. If our concepts always allow for deepening there is no such thing as finally pinning down their 'real' meanings and dismissing everything else as nonsense. It may be said that philosophical

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[46] Ludwig Wittgenstein (1980), *Culture and Value*, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 85e.
[47] Cf. Wittgenstein's ponderings about Bunyan's *Pilgrims's Progress* and about Predestination in *Culture and Value*, pp. 28, 29, 77 and 30, 32, 72, 77, 81, 86. See further Winch, 'Persuasion', p. 137 n19.
[48] Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, pp. 3-15.

clarity should make one's problem go away, but it can equally well be said that it should result in the creation or unearthing of new problems – the continuous exploration of dimensions of depth in the human forms of life that we share.[49]

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