

Style -
compact sentences
& paragraphs

Comments ②

SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE SERIES, PAPER 1, 4TH DRAFT.

- (1) What sort of relativism.
(2) What is relativism.

WINCH WITHOUT METAPHYSICS

SHARROCK, HUGHES AND ANDERSON

MARCH 1987

up front list of points?

- (1) . . . Which + Witt not ref. language/reality.
(2) . . . Which + Witt not about

Relativism is a continuing preoccupation in the philosophy of the social sciences and a central issue in arguments about the possibility of a sociology of knowledge and science. Though there was a time when the tide ran quite strongly for relativism it is now running against it. Realism is currently in favour. This should not, however, be taken as any less a passing fad than many of the other enthusiasms that have swept through the social sciences. It certainly should not be regarded as an indication that the problems of relativism have been thoroughly aired, let alone resolved. In this and succeeding papers we will go over the issues involved in relativism yet again, though (we hope) from a reasonably fresh point of view. We will begin with an examination of the way Wittgenstein's philosophy might be applied to the social sciences and in subsequent papers look, from the point of view sketched out in the first one, at recent discussions of the sociology of knowledge and science. The main aim of our argument is to undermine relativism, but not in a way that favours realism or any of the other positions that put themselves forward as defences against relativism. We take the view, which we find in Wittgenstein's late philosophy, that the trouble with positions like realism, relativism, absolutism, empiricism, idealism and all the

→ would it not be fairer to say that it was a disregarding of W. Wittg. because it was presumed he was a relativist?

other philosophical ists and isms is not that they are wrong but that they are superfluous.

Though this series of papers originated in an attempt to find some way through the jungle of claims which are made on behalf of the so-called 'strong programme in the sociology of science' we found that the only way to work through them was to go back to some of the root suppositions of arguments in epistemology and philosophy of science, especially to the assumption that Wittgenstein's philosophy - at least in the form in which it was applied to the social sciences by Peter Winch - gives direct and strong support to relativism. This is a view which both critics and defenders of Wittgenstein and Winch are apt to take, but it is not one that we find can convincingly be ascribed to them. It is notable that though Wittgenstein and Winch have received a lot of attention in the philosophy of social science this has been given on the supposition that it is quite easy to see what they are getting at, and just as easy to see what is right or wrong with that. Wittgenstein's philosophy is notoriously opaque and we have never found the course of Winch's argument easy to follow, nor - as will be seen - do we find it straightforward to say just how, and how far, Winch's writings provide a translation of Wittgenstein's thoughts into remarks on the social sciences. We take it that Winch does, though not necessarily either clearly or consistently, nor in the most suitable way, express some of the implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy for the social sciences but, insofar as he does so, then he does not say the things that he has pretty much universally been accepted as saying. We do not

Need to disentangle 2 things

→ (a) what Winch is actually saying Page 2
as opposed to what it is alleged he says

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(b) How far what Winch says does
express the implications of Wittg.
in Soc. Sci

essential point is that Wittg. might have failed to be consistent & so have inadvertently ended up supporting relativism, what cannot be claimed is that he eschewed theories and then deliberately supported relativism. No-one would claim he is always consistent etc but his objective was + is clear enough.

think that Winch either puts the arguments or draws the conclusions regularly attributed to him. Given that this series of papers is about relativism we develop the discussion of Winch around the central claim that neither Wittgenstein nor Winch are relativists. Given that they are generally understood to be relativists, and rather obviously so, it is an interesting challenge to make our claim stand up.

The case is, in essence, a simple one, though it is necessarily complicated in presentation. Simply, we say that relativism is a philosophical theory and that Wittgenstein eschewed the making of philosophical theories. If his early work was designed to provide the culmination of the main tradition of philosophy, then his later writings were meant to make a complete break with the early ones and with the tradition that they had apparently fulfilled. Wittgenstein sought to put an end to philosophy. The later Wittgenstein, on the strength of his own arguments, could not have been a relativist any more than he could have taken up any other standard philosophical position. Insofar as Winch does follow Wittgenstein's line then he cannot, either, take it in a relativist direction. This is only apparent, though, if one reads Wittgenstein and Winch as working against metaphysics rather than working within it.

The response of many social scientists to Winch's argument has confirmed one of his central contentions, that they are engrossed in metaphysics and epistemology rather than science. He maintains that sociologists, under the impression that they are transforming them from philosophical into scientific problems, take

up many of the classic problems and suppositions of philosophy, retain the preoccupations of metaphysics and epistemology. Since they think metaphysically, they are apt to understand Wittgenstein's and Winch's arguments as being pitched at the same level as their own and meant to disagree with them directly. So, for example, if they want, as many of them do, to take a 'materialist' stance they want to insist that reality is (ultimately) material, and correctly perceive that Winch does not go along with this. Mistakenly, they assume that if he does not accept that reality is (ultimately) material, then he must want to insist that reality is something-other-than-material. But what could this be? One of the standard philosophical alternatives to materialism is, of course, idealism, and therefore if Winch is saying that reality is not material then he could well be wanting to insist that it consists in ideas - and that supposition is quite consistent with one way of reading many of the things that Winch

says. *is that part of a standard reading strategy, of picking up what writers leave to say, or another side rather than looking to see what if anything distinguishes them*

However, as so often in the deliberations of social science, alternative possibilities do not get canvassed. That Winch can be read as an idealist is taken as sufficient reason to interpret him that way, and the question of whether he has to be read as one is not usually taken very far. For once, though, we aim to explore this alternative possibility fully.

It is routine for The Idea of a Social Science to be read as a discussion of the 'nature of social reality' which is the problem which would ostensibly interest social scientists since they do - as Winch says they do - identify as the central thematic

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of their discipline. And, in a sense, it is true that this topic is the one which Winch's book discusses. However, the argument is actually focussed much more upon the question of what kind of a problem 'the nature of social reality' represents, as part of an argument about the nature of philosophy. The issue of 'the nature of social reality' serve to instantiate this main theme.

The opening reflections of the book are explicitly about the nature of the philosophy, and it is here that the potential for some serious confusion is generated. Winch's arguments, we accept, owe much to Wittgenstein, but the way in which the former's claims about the nature of philosophy relate to the latter's is anything but clear and straightforward. Indeed, there are many respects in which the conception avowed by Winch seems very like that which Wittgenstein disowned.

Wittgenstein, in his later writings, thought that the crucial thing in philosophy was methodology. The solution to problems was not to be found in developing new and better philosophical theories but in changing the entire way in which philosophy is done. This involves giving up philosophical theorising altogether. The necessity for such doctrines as materialism, idealism etc. to answer the questions of philosophy is only ^{not real} apparent, the various doctrines serving ^{only} to perpetuate confusions, not to clear them up. The way to dispose of the problems of philosophy is to reconsider them altogether, to refrain from joining the argument on its own terms and to avoid being forced into taking sides in philosophy. If you find yourself with, apparently, nothing left to do but to choose one or

→ Why do they hold on to this absolutist conception (vs essentialist conception) when with the other components of the trial - goodness + beauty - it has been let go?

the other of some pair of philosophical alternatives then you can be sure - or, so Wittgenstein ^{says} - that something has already gone badly wrong, and the one way to ensure that it will get worse is to pick one of the two.

The sort of thing that goes wrong in philosophy - or, so Wittgenstein - is that philosophers take words from our ordinary language - words such as knowledge, mind, truth, reality, certainty - and attempt to give them a special metaphysical use, such that (for example) we want to talk of The Truth with capitals, as though there were something more than and superlative to the ordinary truths of which we might speak in the courtroom, classroom and other places of our practical lives. In trying to institute these metaphysical ways of speaking philosophers can it sound as though, because they are questing for The Ultimate and Final Truth rather than just the right answer to the question of who won the 4.30 at Wincanton, they are on a much deeper and more profound quest than the rest of us but - or, so Wittgenstein - they are seeking chimeras, born of their misunderstanding of the way we use the ordinary words like 'truth', 'mind', 'reality' etc, and nurtured on confusions that grow out of those misunderstandings. Another things that goes wrong - or, so again Wittgenstein - is that philosophers are often misdirected by grammatical resemblances, led into treating sayings which have very different natures as if they were very much alike because they have a certain superficial likeness. This is encouraged by the tendency of consider sentences in isolation, without relating them to the circumstances in which they might be used, rather as if we were to try to see

what levers might do by comparing them with each other and thinking that because they look very much alike they must play the same sort of role, an impression we should have to revise if we saw the way in which they fitted into the very different machineries into which they can be incorporated.

One of the consequences of these things goes wrong was - or, so Wittgenstein - that philosophers come to think that theories are needed when they are not. For example, they think it is incumbent on them to give a general account of 'the nature of knowledge', to say what it is that people can and do know, and how it is possible for them to know these things. In truth, their is neither need for nor realistic possibility of such theories.

We can say here something which we should repeat a numerous points in the argument, which is that whether Wittgenstein is credible in his claims is not here the issue. The immediate question is which views may most adequately and usefully be assigned to Wittgenstein and Winch and how these may best be understood. On each and every point, it must be emphasised, we are aware that Wittgenstein's views are neither easily believed nor obviously right, for Wittgenstein himself argued intricately, painstakingly and in numerous different ways for points which, here, we advance in a line or two. We constantly fly across continents of complication, as we do now, to ask: how does Wittgenstein propose to obviate the problems of philosophy, enabling us to lose our craving for philosophical theories?

By removing the capitals, is one part of the answer, and the

'decap, Italitāim' ?

one which is particularly cogent here. He aims to discourage the attempt to give words from our ordinary language any special metaphysical meaning, doing this by bringing them back into their homely contexts of their routine use, thereby reminding us that they are as humble and workaday as any other word - 'reality' is no more important a word than 'table lamp'. Of course, many readers will think it must be, but that is just the reaction for which Wittgenstein's work is intended as therapy.

Whether Wittgenstein really stuck to his own strategy, whether he could possibly have done so, and whether - if it was possible - this strategy could have the results envisaged for it are all open questions, but what cannot be doubted is that Wittgenstein's method was meant to work by erosion rather than refutation, digging up the foundations rather than storming the walls. The whole way of working involved the dismantling, not the building up, of theories and doctrines, obviating the desire for 'theories of knowledge', removing the capitals from words like 'reality' and taking away the project of epistemology.

Be very wary about how you set your questions, he advised. Metaphysics gets much of its hold on us because we appear to be asking questions about 'how Reality is', ones which can only be satisfied if we say what Reality in general is, but these questions only look like they ask for a theory. In reality, they are, says Wittgenstein, questions of the sort he calls 'grammatical'.

We can ask a question like 'what is the nature of the genetic code?' and be given a lot of information about the findings of biochemistry, about chemicals like DNA and RNA, about their roles as

messengers, triggers and so forth. A question like 'what is the nature of knowledge?' appears very like this, and if it is like it, no doubt also deserves an informative answer which will tell us about the things that people know, how they come to know these things etc. However, if the second question does look very like the first, in fact, or, so Wittgenstein, it isn't. Though it might look like we need a theory of knowledge to answer the question we don't need anything like this, but should - instead - look at the way in which the word 'knowledge' operates in the language.

This is the point at which Wittgenstein sells philosophy short, or, so many critics. He is, they say, asking us to give up inquiry into the Nature of Reality into something far less considerable, namely the meaning of (mere) words. It is, surely, a delusion on his part that we could ever get from saying something about the meaning of words to saying anything about the Nature of Reality. However, it is Wittgenstein's point that the illusion that there is anything to be said about the Nature of Reality is generated by confusion about the ways in which words like 'knowledge', 'reality' and others work in the language and that there is nothing else to be asked about (in philosophy) than about the use of words. Whether they believe it or not, whether they like it or not those who ask for a Theory of Knowledge really want, need and can only have an account of the role that the word 'knowledge' (and cognate terms) have in the language.

Wittgenstein appreciated only too well how stubborn the conviction that there is a project for metaphysics can be and that overcoming it would be an immense, protracted and continuing

winch2
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downright: the time is the concepts + reality one. Witt's critics want to say that there is some way to get from C to R. Witt says there is not sense in R, just the way we use C.

Central that this point is underscored

task,so we do not suppose that asserting that the question 'how is the word "knowledge" used?' is likely to convince doubters that it is the effective equivalent of 'what is the Nature of Knowledge?' Though the two questions are (we say) equivalent,the former is to be preferred insofar as it makes more perspicuous what it asks,whilst the latter may be taken for asking about something other than 'the mere meaning of words' though it does not and cannot. The point is not,though,to justify the case for claiming this equivalence,but to put us in a position to match Winch's conception of philosophy against Wittgenstein's.

That Winch devotes what he expects will appear a 'disproportionately large portion of this book' (p.2) to reflection on the nature of philosophy is regularly frequently disregarded,no doubt on the understandable assumption that those who are involved in the social sciences want to get to the discussion of those,without having to be long detained by the philosophical 'preliminaries'. If one does pay attention to those then one will be long detained,for they do not make the understanding of the book any easier. Taken seriously,they make matters more difficult - at the end of the discussion of philosophy one may be clear as to what Winch has rejected but much less clear as to what is to take its place. If one is not clear on that,though,one cannot be confident that one understands what is going on in the later parts of the book and certainly cannot construe the arguments there with the firmness so many readers do. Winch does invoke Wittgenstein's work at important points,but not in a way which systematically relates his conception of philosophy

to Wittgenstein's.

Winch's conception of philosophy is stated, very much, negatively. It is opposed to two other conceptions, both of which may acquire their relevance because they conceive philosophy essentially in relation to science, the differentiation of science from philosophy being the whole theme of the book. One, the 'master scientist' view is that in which 'philosophy is in direct competition with science and aims at constructing or refuting scientific theories by purely apriori reasoning' (p.7). The other, the 'underlabourer' view makes philosophy 'parasitic on other disciplines; it has not problems of its own but is a technique for solving problems thrown up in the course of non-philosophical investigations' (p.4).

Against these, Winch offers a philosophy which is autonomous from science and which may be said to conduct inquiries into reality by apriori means and yet does not rival science. The great difficulty in carrying this point home is in effecting the thorough dissociation between philosophy and science that is required. The difficulty arises because of an (illegitimate) supposition that the inquiries of science are the primary, if not sole, exemplars of 'investigations into the nature of reality' such that if one says that philosophy, too, 'investigates the nature of reality' one will be understood to be saying that it does something very much like what science does. Winch wants to say that philosophy is no less entitled than natural science to describe itself as inquiring into 'the nature of reality' though what it does is wholly unlike what the sciences do and without any

special relationship to that. Science is one kind of exercise to which 'inquiring into the nature of reality' can be applied, but it is only one of a quite heterogenous variety of such exercises.

Because of the illegitimate tendency to suppose that because science holds such an elevated place in our lives philosophy must be defined relative to science, the effort to dissociate philosophy from science altogether will nonetheless frequently be attempted through a contrast of philosophy and science, and this is what Winch attempts, in two ways: 1) science is concerned with understanding the nature, causes and effects of particular real things and processes, but the philosopher is concerned with 'the nature of reality as such and in general' (p.8) and/or 2) the scientist makes empirical inquiries whilst the philosopher makes conceptual ones - the former tells us facts about reality whilst the latter elucidates the concept of reality. Rather than standing on the same level, then, philosophy and science are on quite different ones. Philosophy being a reflective exercise which examines the whole range of assorted activities (including itself) which can be collected under that hospitable heading 'inquiring into the nature of reality' must of course pay attention to science but does not thereby have any exceptional relationship to it any more than it does to other forms of inquiry into 'the nature of reality' such as religion or poetry. All are grist to the philosophical mill.

It would be a bold, even rash, person who would think they could easily see just how the demarcation Winch is trying to make works out. One thing is clear, though. His account is intended to

→ This is extremely dense. (It wants to be stepped) w/ a little.

do what alternatives cannot, which is provide other than a residual place for metaphysics and epistemology within philosophy. The underlabourer conception cannot do this because it licenses only the claim that 'the problems of the philosophy of science, the philosophy of religion, the philosophy of art and so on are set for philosophy by science, religion, art etc' (p.) and that gives rise to the puzzle of what sets the problems for the general programmes of inquiry, epistemology and metaphysics. Winch, by contrast, gives these two projects a subject matter, namely the general topic of the intelligibility of reality as this is instantiated in such specific forms of inquiry as poetry, religion, science etc.

Winch's picture of philosophy appears rather different from Wittgenstein's, since Winch appears to retain as a central feature that exercise which - if we are right - Wittgenstein thinks is an empty one, viz, of inquiring into 'the nature of reality.' However, if these are the appearances they may be here, as elsewhere, misleading, for we have indicated that Wittgenstein's own philosophy could as well be described as 'inquiring into the nature of reality' or into 'our knowledge of the nature of reality' as not, so long as it is correctly understood how these headings are being used. They are being used in the tricky and potentially confusing way which allows us to say that Wittgenstein both is and is not doing philosophy. He is doing philosophy in the sense that his reflections originate in the problems and puzzles that have motivated much philosophical theorising, but he is not doing philosophy in that the nature of his exercise hardly

→ This is the methodological break.

seems to bear any resemblance to what other philosophers had taken to be the nature of their enterprise nor to offer the satisfactions that they had sought from it. In the same way, one might speak of Wittgenstein doing metaphysics and epistemology in the sense that he takes up questions traditionally raised under those headings, but instead of treating them as occasions for theorising, he makes them into exercises in 'grammatical' description.

Winch's conception of philosophy is not perhaps so far from Wittgenstein's as first sight might suggest. ^{then.} Winch may speak of philosophy as 'inquiry into the nature of reality' and as 'inquiry into the nature of our concepts' because for him, as for Wittgenstein, those are (in philosophy) the same thing. One can, therefore, read Winch's proposal as pointing toward philosophy as the kind of 'grammatical' inquiry for which Wittgenstein called, which would respond to calls for an account of 'the nature of reality' by giving a description of the role of the word 'reality.'

If this is right, then it will be just as misleading to read Winch as putting arguments which, in any traditional metaphysical sense, tell us about the Nature of Reality as it would to read Wittgenstein in this way. ^{but yet} ~~but~~ both are fairly persistently interpreted in this inappropriate fashion. Naturally enough, the outcome of such readings is to assign them to one or other of the traditional philosophical categories - idealist and relativist are popular choices. The favourite exercise is, then, to read Wittgenstein and Winch in order to extract their metaphysics, the

former's notable diffidence toward constructing any metaphysics being taken only as an inconvenience that makes locating his metaphysics that much harder. The option that is offered, of trying to read these things in a way that divests them of metaphysics and that contributes to the general erosion of the metaphysical inclination is seldom taken, which is all the more reason for it to be followed here, beginning with the refusal to treat 'conceptual investigation' as any form of metaphysical investigation.

We were careful to specify the equation between 'finding out about reality' and 'elucidating concepts' as claims which are to be understood as being made within philosophy and should perhaps add that we took some pains to do this in the hope of making it plain that these are best understood as claims about the nature of philosophy rather than as any kind of general claim about 'the nature of reality.' They are, that is, ways of saying that philosophical inquiries yield grammatical descriptions, but the qualified and complicated nature of such claims is usually discounted and they are usually understood to imply some flat out claim about 'the Nature of Reality' such as might be expected from a traditional metaphysics. Thus, there is plenty of precedent for reading Wittgenstein and Winch as telling us that the Nature of Reality is Conceptual or Linguistic - at least in part. It is in a great deal of philosophy seen as entirely legitimate to set things up in either/or terms. Either the nature of reality is independent of our concepts or the nature of reality is not independent of our concepts. Given it must be either one or the

other, then everyone must conform to either one opinion or the other. Consequently, Wittgenstein and Winch must too. Which side do they take? From everything that they say, however much they might disavow any desire to do it, they would appear to opt for the side which says reality is not independent of our concepts.

If, however, Wittgenstein and Winch object to the question being asked like that, it is hardly fair to translate their complaint against the question ~~into~~^{to} an answer to it. We might see this more clearly if we took their arguments as objecting to our classifying all questions as if they were of two kinds, 'questions about language' and 'questions about reality'. Giving ourselves only these alternatives we shall find that some questions will fit themselves comfortably into them, but that others will prove rather more problematic and we shall find that they do not easily go into either one. Since, though, we have constricted ourselves to a classification involving only two kinds of questions we will also have confined ourselves in respect of what we can say about the difficulties that we then encounter. Since there are questions which could as well go in either category, could for some reasons be called 'questions about reality' and for others termed 'questions about language' we might then be strongly tempted to say there is no difference between questions about language and questions about reality. From there, it is no great distance to saying that there is no difference between language and reality.

Whilst there may well be philosophers who want to make these transitions, it is quite wrong to read Wittgenstein and Winch as doing so. The objection to putting up a classification of

questions as being of two kinds is not one designed to erode the difference between them such that one can say (for example) that there is no difference between questions of meaning and questions of fact. The objection is, rather, to proposing such a simplified and unnatural pair of alternatives as if they could appropriately, exhaustively categorise the great and varied range of different kinds of questions that we can ask each other. Why suppose that this counting all questions as either of these two kinds is any more useful than counting them as being either questions which ask about John Hughes or questions which do not? There are, of course, reasons for thinking that the pairing 'questions about language'/'questions about reality?' is a cogent way of classifying and these are reasons which originate in philosophy where the puzzlement about the relation of language to reality obtains but though philosophers may want to have all questions allocated to these alternatives, it does not follow that the suitability of such a classification has been at all considered relative to the things it is meant to contain, namely the questions that we ask one another. And this is the crucial point: Wittgenstein thinks that if we trouble to examine the ways of the language we speak we shall find (almost invariably) that the philosophically prepared schemes for the classification of our expressions are quite inappropriate to the task since they are worked up without any organised inspection of the range and diversity of expressions they are intended to capture.

Resistance to counting questions as being of these two kinds is not designed to erode the difference between them so that we

can say (with Quine) that there is no difference between questions of meaning and questions of fact. It is intended, rather, to cast suspicion on the way the situation has been set up, such that an unnatural, unclear and vastly simplified pair of options is presented as one within which positions must be taken, so much so that even the attempt to decline the offer of these options will be construed in their terms. Why suppose that all questions, or even very many of them, can usefully and effectively be classified as questions about reality and questions about language any more than they can be usefully classified into questions about John Hughes and questions about something other than John Hughes (and where would that question and this fit into such a scheme?)

There are, of course, good reasons for adopting the alternatives, reasons which originate in philosophy's tradition and which make it seem that questions must be of one sort or the other, but these are reasons which do not arise from the inspection of the vast diversity of things we call questions, to see if even those which perhaps do appear best fit the alternatives on offer, can really be counted as 'questions about language' or 'questions about reality'. If we carefully examine even a small but varied selection of questions then, Wittgenstein thinks, we will become intensely aware of the artificiality and inapplicability of the effort to allocate them into either of the two classes into which, allegedly, they must go. The effect of this, though, is not to force us into new conclusions about the relation of language to reality (like Quine's) but to get us to hold back on conclusions altogether, to reconsider the way in which philosophical method

throws up the confusions that it then struggles to resolve. It is the problem that is malformed, not just the candidate solutions to it.

The argument will twist and turn since we can never be confident that we have set any particular difficulty behind us, and there will be the need not just to make a particular point plain, but to keep it in sight throughout. The preceding observations should (albeit in a perfunctory manner) dispose of the problem of trying to relate our Concepts to Reality, but not by offering a solution to it, not by saying anything about how concepts do 'relate to reality'. Saying this, though, will not prevent many readers from trying to extract the kind of conclusions that we say cannot be drawn: 'So what you're saying is that reality is internal to language, that language constitutes reality?' *But not that it is not what it is, just.* At the most, what is being said is that 'language' and 'reality' are both words in our language and that some consideration of the part they play there is in order. If we undertake that then we shall be led away from wanting to ask 'what is the relationship of language to reality?' not brought closer to the answer to that question. Any effort to turn it back into an answer, into a positive statement about how language connects with reality, will distort the understanding of it fundamentally.

Wittgenstein adopts an elaborately indirect method of writing to achieve the desired effect of precluding positive philosophical contentions, but Winch writes in a much more direct manner and thus takes a much more risky and problematical approach to expressing this point of view. His way of writing much more directly invites

and allows metaphysical interpretation.

Two words play a crucial role in Winch's discussion: 'concepts' and 'reality', the attempt to discuss these in close conjuncture naturally inviting characterisation of the discourse as one on the relationship of concepts to reality. As noted, saying something about concepts and reality will dispose many readers to look for a metaphysical summation of the argument, and they will find it — inevitably — to be idealist and relativist. If one says that there is no difference between our concepts and reality, because the latter cannot be independent of the former, then one will soon be saying that because different people have different concepts they must also have different realities. If reality is the same as people's ideas about it, but people's ideas about reality are not the same, then one person's reality cannot be the same as another. Putting arguments about the 'conceptually dependent' nature of reality does have the utility of going against more realist views of things. Realists, of course, want to hold that how things are is entirely independent of our beliefs about them. People's ideas and reality are quite separate though they can sometimes coincide, in the sense that some people can have the right idea about how reality is. But if people have different ideas, then only some of them can have ideas which do correspond with how reality is (if any of them do). The problem is, to tell which if any. The solution at one level is easy enough. We must compare different ideas with reality to see which ones (if any) do correspond with it. The tricky bit, though, is to find a way of doing this without letting

This is a
Realist-type
argument.

relativism in. After all, if we want to compare ideas with reality, it can be argued that what this comes to is, after all, only comparing one set of ideas with another, treating one set of ideas as if we could be sure, to start with, that they did correspond to reality; hence science is often taken as the set of ideas which do, correctly, tell us how reality is. And it is against this latter proclivity that Winch protests so vociferously, especially in the paper 'Understanding a Primitive Society.'

Let us go back some distance and review these matters from the vantage point we have tried to develop in the earlier part of this paper, one which does not try to turn Winch's discussion into a positive statement about The Nature of Reality and its Relation to Our Concepts, but which, instead, tries to understand it as a commentary on the way we formulate our problems. If Winch, in protest against the attempt to use 'science' as the yardstick of reality says 'You can't do that!' let us try to see just what it is about this that he is protesting against. Instead of jumping to the conclusion that he is denying that we can compare people's ideas with an independent reality, and thus denying that we can do such things as we ordinarily find ourselves able to do let us at least consider the possibility that he is resisting metaphysical ideas about 'relating Concepts to Reality.'

In line with all we have said, then, let us decline to read Winch as saying 'There is no Independent Reality' and thus putting forward his own metaphysical standpoint, viz. that Reality exists only In The Mind. Instead, let us follow his argument as providing objections to just that way of talking, a complaint about the

potential that this has to mislead. Thus, and it is a point to which we have already alluded, it is a mistake to talk about 'finding out about reality' as if it involves always the same sort of exercises, as if all those things we can (intelligibly) describe as 'finding out about reality' were attempting to find out about the same thing, viz The Nature of Reality.

If we do imagine that any people who are commonly describable as 'trying to find out about the nature of reality' are engaged in finding out about the same thing, then the alternative realist and relativist will loom before us. Either some ways of finding out about that thing must be acknowledged to be better than others and we must therefore aim to determine which is which or we must deny that any way of finding out is intrinsically better than any other, cannot ultimately be judged superior and that we must therefore accept that any way of finding out is as good as any other.

Against this though, it is essential to insist that the description 'finding out about reality' does not identify a collection of inquiries all of which are directed toward a common objective, but seeking it in their different ways. The various things that we call 'ways of finding out about reality' are not different ways of investigating the same things, but ways of investigating very different matters. We are prepared to describe them each as 'ways of finding out about reality' not because they all seek the same objective, but because their way in which they go about their activities exhibits a particular feature.

Many of Winch's critics object to his arguments because, they

think, it obliterates the difference between 'how we think/say things are' and 'how they really are, regardless of what we say or think' but they have overlooked what is central to Winch's characterisation of 'the concept "reality".' The general role of that concept, on Winch's account, is precisely to demarcate between that which is, say, mere supposing, and that which is actually the case, between how someone says things are and how they actually are and it is this which gives to the various exercises we can say 'find out about reality' their very character as inquiries, as pursuits disciplined by given conditions. Thus, one can grossly talk about science as an exercise in finding out about reality because it presumes that the constitution of matter, the movement of the heavenly bodies, the development of the animal species and numerous other phenomena are regulated by intrinsic principles, and one can talk about religion too, on the same gross level, in the same terms, because the will of God is something altogether other than human invention or preference. § something which may possibly be known by (though it may remain intractable to) human inquiries.

Much now depends on how 'the same concept' is taken. Again, it is useful to be reminded of Wittgenstein. He points out that words from the ordinary language are taken up in metaphysical argument, and one of those is 'same'. The expression 'the same' plays, generally, a comparative role, and it can be used in a multitude of comparisons. However, the specific role that it plays depends upon the particular comparison in which it is involved and the relevance and standards that that comparison invokes. For some purposes two things may count as 'the same', and for