

Making Sense of Winch

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In this thesis, I will examine Peter Winch's contribution to the debate about how to depict human action in social theory. This debate is about how and in what terms may we best describe or interpret the activities of human beings. For example, is man a helpless character in the grand scheme of structures and institutions, his actions an effect of a series of external, causal factors? Or ought we to portray him as an agent, who, rather, is the author of these structures, whose actions we should interpret in terms of motives, purposes and intentions? These are two options that have been put forward in philosophical debate, and, here, I wish not to defend any particular position, but, rather, I would like to inquire into the presuppositions that underlie different strands in social theory. In particular, I want to examine how these presuppositions are present in Winch's contribution on this matter.

As a frame of reference, then, there seem to be two general options with regard to the presuppositions that inform separate currents of social theory. Firstly, we let human action dictate our methods by way of how it really *is*. It is then the social theorists job to represent it as accurately as possible on his ontological views. Representation here constitutes the link between the subject and the object of social theorising, and it is the object that is continually the criterion of correctness for a truthful representation. Thus, we could call this view representationalism. Or, secondly, there is no such independent object against which we can test our theories and interpretations. Rather, the subject matter of social theory is such that its nature is dependent on our relation to it and we cannot step outside it to represent it at a distance.

These two general options will now serve as a guideline as to how to interpret Winch's effort in his *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*. My aim is to show that Winch, notwithstanding his criticism of positivism, still remains typically representationalist. Showing this would constitute no critique on its own, but I believe that in arguing for his position, Winch employs a transcendental argument, a type of argument that is inconsistent with a representationalist stance.

I will argue this point by, first, presenting an outline of positivism and elucidating how this fits neatly with our conception of representationalism (I). Subsequently, I will examine Winch's critique of positivism and his positive theses on social theory as put forward in his *Idea of a Social Science* (II). After a brief discussion of our philosophical cravings (III), I will continue my discussion of Winch's work. In his *Idea of a Social Science*, he bases himself on the work of the later Wittgenstein. I will, however, try to illustrate that and why his theses are at odds with Wittgenstein's philosophy. I will do so by drawing our attention to two reifications that are present in his work and that are in conflict with a Wittgensteinian position. The first reification will concern epistemology and the notion of a form of life (IV), while the second relates to his remarks on rule-following (V). After that, I will attempt to reconstruct Winch's argument as a transcendental argument, which I believe to be the type of argument that Winch employs (VI). The limitations of the transcendental argument consist in the fact that the argument tells us something about our experience, but that it cannot tell us anything about the *ding an sich*. This is why Winch cannot consistently be a representationalist, because the representationalist needs the thing in itself as the criterion of correctness. I will, however, try to demonstrate that Winch does not pay proper heed these limitations and thus illegitimately crosses the boundaries of his argument (VII). Finally, I will hint at an interpretation of Winch that is consistent with the transcendental argument, that is, an interpretation of him as a hermeneutic rather than a representationalist (VIII).

The chief conclusion of this essay will be that not only does Winch misuse the transcendental argument, his theses concerning the nature of social action are fundamentally at odds with Wittgenstein's later notes. This is because Winch, it is my conviction, commits one of the gravest mistakes in philosophy, one that, ironically, Wittgenstein believed he had made himself and one that

he attempted to point out at great length in the *Philosophical Investigations*: ‘One predicates of a thing what lies in the mode of representation.’ (§104)

I. The idea of a social science

In this section, I want to examine the presuppositions of positivism, a particularly influential strand of thought in the philosophy of science. Specifically, I will attempt to indicate why positivism is a distinct species of representationalism.

The term ‘positivism’ was coined by Auguste Comte, the founder of sociology (a discipline he tellingly called ‘social physics’). In light of the successes of the natural sciences, positivists have attempted to apply the methods of the natural sciences to the social world in order to establish a true social *science*. Positivists have, in other words, attempted to spell out the scientific method and their relevancy for social theory. Far from being a univocal movement, however, positivism is a very broad current of thought that has had many exponents over the years. In the following, I will limit myself here to describing some of its most important features.

A first key element of positivism is its empiricism: knowledge of the natural world needs to be based on experience and observation. Only concepts, theories and objects that are capable of being empirically verified may enter into scientific explanations. This entails that phenomena must be conceptualised so that they can be measured, thus supplying the theorist with raw data to base his theories on. In this way, the empirical nature of an idea enables it to be verified or falsified. The linguistic turn in early analytical philosophy, however, shifted the emphasis from consciousness to language: not ideas are true or false, but propositions are. This inspired a movement called logical empiricism, which holds that only propositions that can be examined through direct observation are meaningful. For Charles Taylor, this movement signifies the summation of rationalism and empiricism, for it added to the ‘armory of traditional empiricism’ - the method of induction - ‘the whole domain of logical and mathematical inference which had been central to the rationalist position.’¹

Secondly, positivism holds that the primary aim of science is to offer causal explanations by referring to natural (or social) laws. The existence of these laws provides the ground for prediction, as they are typically thought to hold universally. Thus, if we know all the factors and variables, we should in principle be able to predict what will happen. In the case of social science, one way to advance such a causal explanation is to argue that human beings are part of nature and are therefore governed by the same laws that govern nature. Attempts at this kind of explanation have, for instance, recently been made by cognitive science. Another way to offer social laws is to ground them in simplified assumptions about human nature. In rational choice theory, for example, human beings are pictured as rational utility-maximisers. This kind of theory relies on a strictly instrumental picture of reason, that is, a form of means-ends reasoning that Max Weber called ‘*Zweckrational*’. In this view, because human beings always choose the most effective means to their ends, we may predict how they will act. Moreover, their collective action will exemplify patterns of behaviour that have a law-like character.

Thirdly, positivists generally support value-neutrality.² It is the scientist’s task only to describe and explain phenomena, not to evaluate them. In other words, positivists subscribe to a strict fact-value distinction. The observer may report the votes cast in a ballot, but he may not attach to them the values or meanings that he holds about them. In this case, the votes constitute the raw empirical data for the scientist to describe - they are objective facts. Meaning, on the other hand, is traditionally viewed as being ascribed only by subjects to these meaningless facts or objects - it is

¹ Charles Taylor, ‘Interpretation and the Sciences of Man’ in *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (sep., 1971), url: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20125928>> (accessed: 11/04/2012), p. 8.

² This is not to say that scientific theories should not be evaluated themselves in terms of, e.g., simplicity, repeatability, correctness, etc., but that they should remain value-neutral with regard to the object of their representation.

how subjects ‘colour’ the world. To be able to incorporate meaning and values, however, sociologists like Max Weber have argued that it is necessary to proffer an account of the values that the voters hold, to describe these meanings, so to speak, as objects of their minds.³ In this fashion, the political scientist may give an account of the value of the votes, the votes themselves and how the values in question affected the votes.

These elements fit together like clockwork and display a number of presuppositions at the bottom of the positivist position thus sketched. For instance, the emphasis on instrumental reason corresponds neatly to the fact-value distinction. Deliberation about ends requires evaluation, but using instrumental reason to map the most efficient means to a pre-established end may be done value-free. It is an evaluative choice, e.g., to keep the government budget deficit at 3%, but the most efficient means to attain that end may (at least in principle) be described in terms of the efficient causal workings of how economic phenomena in fact, in reality are. And, lastly, the epistemological doctrine to access these phenomena, these raw data, is empiricism. But this epistemological principle is closely intertwined with an ontological picture.

The ontological picture is a typically modern one, which distinguishes between subject and object. The object in the case of positivism in the social sciences is the social phenomenon and the subject is the neutral, detached scientist. The scientist merely observes the phenomena under study independently, it is given to him literally as data. Positivism thus stands in a long tradition of modern thought. The subject perceives merely ideas which then either correspond to the object of which it is an idea or not - they are strictly separate. The truth of an idea is determined by its agreement with its object and it is consequently the task of the scientist to simply represent objects as accurately as possible.⁴ The criterion of accurate representation is each time the objects themselves as data - they are the final court of appeal.

The subject, however, is also a particular kind of agent, one that Taylor calls the ‘punctual self’.⁵ This is a view of the self that regards it as ‘ideally disengaged’ from the natural and social world and ready to treat these worlds instrumentally. After all, the agent may apply the instrumental knowledge generated by the social sciences to influence his surroundings. In our example, the government can use the economist’s mapping of the most efficient means to the desired budget deficit to interfere in the social world. Thus, not only is positivism typically modern because of its subscription to the spectator-view just described, but also because it is conducive to a notion of autonomy.⁶

Positivism hence commits us to a strict ontological picture of social reality. It claims not that social science gives us just an account of the social world and of human beings, it claims that their account describes how they actually *are*. To access the ontological structure of the social world, we need empirical data - data that are the building blocks of our social scientific theories. This is how the ontological picture dictates our epistemological methods: the scientist’s task description is to represent the ontological make-up of the social world as accurately as possible and the object, i.e., the data, is continually the criterion of correctness. Positivism, therefore, fits exactly into the description of representationalism that I gave in the introduction.

³ Max Weber supported the fact/value distinction. However, it is here not my intention to denote him as a positivist also.

⁴ This is exactly what representation is. The subject re-presents the object, it makes it present again as idea or proposition. (Also, in the case of a proposition, think about what the Tractarian Wittgenstein said about the picturing relation. One might say Wittgenstein here substitutes ideas for propositions).

⁵ Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (London: Harvard UP, 1995), p. 7.

⁶ It may be noted here that the ontological picture of the social world as governed by universal laws and the notion of an autonomous agent that is able to somehow interfere in this social world are directly at odds with each other. Along with the subject/object dualism this may be considered one of the typically modern dualisms - one that, for example, preoccupied Kant in his Critique of Judgement.

II. Winch and a critique of positivism

Due to advances in the natural sciences, positivism has received a lot of criticism from philosophers of science. Especially regarding theoretical entities like quarks, positivism is troubled by its fundamental inability to account for their existence. And, since we cannot observe these entities directly, according to the logical empiricist doctrine, we cannot even make meaningful statements about them. But also concerning the social sciences, philosophers have developed a number of critiques. I will now examine Peter Winch's criticism of positivism and his alternative as advocated in his *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (1958).

Winch's major argument consists in his extension of Wittgenstein's notes on rule-following from language-use to meaningful behaviour. According to Winch, Wittgenstein's remarks show us how the rule governing a word commits us to a specific future use of that word, a use that is in accordance with the rule and thus with its past usage. Because rules are necessarily public, i.e., are always part of a social context, we, as members of a linguistic community, are able to say both whether someone applied a rule correctly or incorrectly and whether the rule followed was the same one that he followed before.⁷ The rules governing language-use, in other words, determine the correct usage of a word and thus give it its meaning. This is how, according to Winch's interpretation of Wittgenstein, the meaning of a word and the following of a rule are inextricably bound up.

Winch then makes the analogy of the meaningful words with meaningful behaviour, or 'action with a sense, i.e. action that is symbolic. This is behaviour that *commits* the actor in a loose sense to a certain kind of behaviour in the future, exactly like the definition of a word commits a language-user to a certain use of that word. It follows, says Winch, that one can only be committed to a future action by the performance of a present action if the latter is the application of a rule. This analysis of symbolic action leads to Winch's dictum that 'all behaviour which is meaningful (therefore all specifically human behaviour) is *ipso facto* rule-governed.'⁸

Winch's epistemology is also rather different in form than the empiricism of positivism. According to Winch, the task of epistemology is not elucidate some criteria of understanding, but 'to describe the conditions which must be satisfied if there are to *be* any criteria of understanding at all.'⁹ For reasons we shall see presently, Winch's account of meaningful behaviour should be regarded as a contribution to this epistemological project.

The criteria of understanding that Winch is aiming at are the criteria of sameness that are bound up with the following of a rule - the criteria that discern whether it is in fact the same rule that is followed. These criteria of sameness only have sense in a social context or a form of life. Winch regards Wittgenstein's account of 'the peculiar kind of interpersonal agreement' as a contribution to the project of the elucidation of the notion of a form of life.¹⁰ With the idea of 'interpersonal agreement', Winch is signifying the social or shared nature of the rules that govern language and meaningful behaviour. This agreement is therefore 'interpersonal' in the sense that is not purely subjective, nor does it lie in the world as an independent object awaiting experiential discovery. Rather, our shared ways of acting and talking *constitute* this interpersonal agreement and

⁷ If the rules are not public, and thus no-one is in principle able to discover the rule that someone is following, one cannot 'intelligibly be said to follow a rule at all', as is the case with the 'berserk lunatic' that just makes up rules wherever he goes. (Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, Routledge Classics, second edition (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), p. 28).

⁸ Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, Routledge Classics, second edition (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), p. 48.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20. See also p. 39 for a similar statement.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

consequently make it possible for the rules that govern meaningful behaviour to be intelligible to us. What Winch needs, in other words, for meaning to be intelligible, is a form of intersubjectivity.

Charles Taylor espouses a similar approach in his 'Interpretation and the Sciences of Man', where he speaks of 'intersubjective meanings'. These meanings are to be found in the practices in the social world themselves. For this notion, Taylor relies on a distinction made by John Searle between constitutive rules and regulative rules: constitutive rules are rules that constitute a practice, make it possible, whereas regulative rules regulate it further. Constitutive rules are 'such that the behaviour they govern could not exist without them', e.g., the rule that the Queen in chess can only move so-and-so governs a chess players behaviour so that without it, he could not be said to be playing chess.¹¹ These constitutive rules thus make intersubjective meanings possible.¹²

I will take an example from Winch to elucidate this further. At some point, Winch compares natural events with human acts, and he takes a clap of thunder and an act of obedience as examples.¹³ The point he makes is that a clap of thunder exists independently from the concepts that we have of it, whereas in the case of an act of obedience, it would make no sense to say that it took place before human beings ever formed the concept of command and obedience. Or, to make the point differently, obedience, and many other human acts, are instituted by constitutive rules and thus contain intersubjective meaning. Both Winch and Taylor argue that positivism, if it is consistent, cannot account for these meanings; and both believe that these meanings comprise precisely the subject matter of social theory.

To return our focus to Winch again, he argues that the task of social theory is not to contribute to scientific knowledge in the positivist sense, but to increase our *understanding* of social life: 'grasping the *point* or *meaning* of what is being done or said'.¹⁴ And before we may grasp or understand that point or meaning in particular cases, we need a general discussion of what understanding consists in. So what we need for the epistemologist to figure out, is 'the nature of social phenomena in general', so that it may indicate what form our understanding will have to assume. Winch, in extending Wittgenstein's remarks on meaningful language-use, contributes to this epistemological program. The nature of social phenomena, i.e., meaningful behaviour, is that it is rule-governed, and in order for us to understand this behaviour, we require a kind of interpersonal agreement or a form of life. Winch therefore equates the question of the nature of social phenomena in general with the elucidation of 'what is involved in the notion of a form of life as such'.¹⁵ Because Winch equates the latter objective with the task of epistemology, Winch's account of meaningful behaviour as rule-governed is an epistemological endeavour.

This thesis about meaningful behaviour now leads to important implications for social theory. First, according to Winch, social theorising should not be an empirical, but a conceptual or philosophical enterprise in two ways. What has to be included in any sociology is a discussion of the main question of epistemology: what is the nature of social phenomena in general?¹⁶ According

¹¹ Charles Taylor, 'Interpretation', p. 25. See also: John Searle, *Speech Acts: an Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge UP, 1976), pp. 33-42 for a more elaborate discussion.

¹² At another point, in a chapter on transcendental arguments in *Philosophical Arguments*, Taylor says, moreover, that 'You can't be playing chess without some grasp of the rules.' (p. 29) So here too, we need an insider's perspective to make sense of the rules and the meaning that is bound up with them.

¹³ Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 116-117.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39-40.

¹⁶ The question of the nature of social phenomena in general does not sound like an epistemological question, that is to say, a question regarding a theory of *knowledge*. It sounds, rather, like an ontological question, i.e., a question regarding a theory of *being*. At a later stage, I will return to this issue.

to Winch, this is not a question that experience can answer, but a conceptual puzzle that only philosophy can solve a priori. Winch's philosophical exposé on rule-following is an example of this kind of approach.

Moreover, the study of particular social phenomena (as opposed to social phenomena in general) is also a conceptual enterprise, in the sense of attempting to grasp what concepts are appropriate to a particular action, trying to reveal 'what it makes sense to say' of it.¹⁷ It may be observed by experience that someone is filling a circle with a red pencil, but the inquiry into the nature of the rule that is followed in that specific context is philosophical or conceptual - and in this case we must describe it as, or apply the concept of, voting.

Second, because the criteria of understanding, i.e., the criteria of sameness only have their sense *within* a social setting, we must familiarise ourselves with that setting and the rules that are actually applied in that context. In other words, because the criterion of sameness is inextricably bound up with the actual application of the rules, we need an insider's perspective to be able to understand whether one action is indeed the same as another, whether the same rule is being followed. This means that we cannot proffer explanations of actions in terms of which the agents themselves have no notion (like causal laws), but must always include in our explanation the concepts of the agents themselves.¹⁸

Third, it follows in yet another way that social life is not amenable to causal-nomological explanation. There are no strict causal laws to discover, for there are none; rather, human action exemplifies regularities because of the rule-following nature of individuals' meaningful behaviour. But the rules in question do not cause a person to act, nor do they univocally force someone to act in a certain way; rather, they *guide* in virtue of a convention, custom or social institution: 'A rule stands there like a signpost.' (*PI*, §85)¹⁹

A rule leaves room for deviation, that is to say, deviation need not entail that the person following the rule is making a mistake. Just as one may choose not to follow a signpost, one may break a promise, the breaking of a commitment to the rule of keeping it. We should note here that this presents a break with the picture of instrumental reason that we have discussed. Even if the signpost would display the shortest route (means) to a desired destination (end), it does not cause a person to follow its directions nor does disregarding it constitute unreason. The following of the signpost merely produces a regularity that is compatible with exceptions. That does not mean that anyone can act meaningfully without regard for the rules, but it means that if someone were to take the opposite direction, it would require a special explanation (maybe he did make a mistake after all, or he just wanted to take an alternative route for once). The important point here is that it is part of the nature of human behaviour that one may act differently with respect to rules that are 'rational' for a person to follow. In this way, it is impossible to predict social action *scientifically*. A wrongly predicted outcome need not imply a false observation, calculation or theory on the part of the scientist, as is the case in the natural sciences, but is perfectly consistent with normal human behaviour.

¹⁷ Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 67.

¹⁸ Winch is ambiguous about whether it is allowed to offer explanations in concepts which are alien to the actors, but which may be translated into concepts with which they are familiar.

¹⁹ References to Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* will be made in-text. They will refer to Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, transl. Anscombe, Hacker and Schulte (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2009).

III. Philosophical cravings

It is my conviction that Winch, in spite of his critique of positivism, remains typically a representationalist himself. In itself, this presents no trouble for Winch, but I believe this stance is incompatible with a transcendental argument. We will go into this issue in sections VI and VII. First, however, I want to show why Winch's work is a form of representationalism.

I will attempt to do so by zooming in on what I wish to call two reifications that are present in Winch's work. What I mean by a reification is the turning of an idea into flesh, of a concept into a thing.²⁰ It is the move that makes a concept into an entity that has a separate existence, rather than leaving it in its relation to ourselves. The concept becomes an object in itself, distinct from us, and thus allowing it to be represented by a detached subject. It is consequently by effecting two reifications that I believe Winch's philosophical framework ultimately remains representationalist.

A typical example of a reification is turning our quest for definitions into a search for autonomous essences. We feel we are not just describing our word-use, but that we are carving the world at its joints. Subsequently, to answer to this feeling, we are inclined to explain what exactly we are describing, so we theorise about, e.g., entities in a Platonic heaven. What Wittgenstein attempts to do time and again is to combat just such an inclination: '[Philosophy] neither explains nor deduces anything' (*PI*, §126) and 'so it can in the end only describe [the actual use of language].' (*PI*, §124)²¹ In combating this tendency, he discusses essentialism and the quest for definitions as well. His notion of a language-game (*PI*, §§65-66) serves to show us just how mundane our concepts actually are. Upon being asked what a chair is, pointing to one is not an elliptic definition or something inferior to one, but a perfectly clear and normal example of the way we explain to others what a word means. To know what a word means is not to grasp its essence, but to know your way about (see *PI* §125 and §203).

Wittgenstein's approach is therapeutic in that it attempts to show us at what point we have gone wrong, at which stage our inclinations have lead us to go astray. Wittgenstein never actually produces a solution to a philosophical problem or debate, but attempts to show us how this problem has come up in the first place, 'to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle' (*PI*, §309). Many a time, he does this by illuminating our philosophical cravings. For example, when he illustrates our craving for unity and essentialism in his discussion of the concept of a game; we have the feeling that there *must* be a common element to all games (but he instructs us: 'don't think, but look!' *PI*, §66). Baker and Hacker list six of such inclinations, when they discuss the sources of philosophical problems: a craving for generality, unity, definitions or essences, explanation, metaphysical necessities and myth-building.²²

These cravings lie in our nature and thus they force themselves upon us every time we do philosophy. Moreover, because these inclinations are so habitual, they usually escape notice altogether: '(The decisive movement in the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one that seemed to us quite innocent.)' (*PI*, §308)

It now seems to me that the effects of such inclinations have slipped into the work of Winch in the form of two reifications. In the next sections, I will attempt to elucidate these two reifications: the first is regarding his viewpoint on the philosopher's epistemological task in the social studies

²⁰ Etymologically too, 'to reify' means the 'making' (-fy, facere) into a thing (re-, res).

²¹ According to Baker and Hacker, Wittgenstein identified our temptation to model philosophical explanation on scientific ones as a source of philosophical confusion. When we analyse concepts, we feel we are discovering what a concept really, in reality, means, because "'analysis' in science betokens new discoveries: namely, information about the hidden constitution of things." G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning, Vol. 1, Part I, second edition* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 281. This is a way in which we tend to reify our concepts when doing philosophy. According to Wittgenstein, however, in philosophy, everything we need already lies open to view (*PI*, §126).

²² G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning, Vol. 1, Part I*, pp. 282-83.

(IV), whereas the second is with respect to his views on rule-following (V). Because Winch follows Wittgenstein so explicitly, it was probably not his intention to make these reifications, nor did he perhaps know of their existence. As they are difficult to notice, the evidence for them is usually quite subtle: all that we have to find traces of philosophical cravings are Winch's formulations. In the following sections, I will collect some textual indications for these reifications, and they will consist in the formulations he uses at key points of his argument. There is plenty of additional textual evidence for this reifying move scattered across his book, but it is difficult to pull it out of its context to show that the passages in question are indeed evidence for reifications.

If I am correct in identifying these reifications, I hope to point out that Winch's philosophical presuppositions are in conflict with the employment of the transcendental argument. Moreover, I believe these reifications are in conflict with Wittgenstein's later remarks, so the next sections will also constitute an 'immanent' critique.

IV. The reifications: Epistemology

We will begin here with Winch's conception of philosophy. I should emphasise that it is not a minor part of his book, but Winch himself says that it is 'an *essential* part of the argument of this book.'²³ The argument is formulated against a certain conception of philosophy, that is to say, the Lockean 'underlabourer conception'. According to the underlabourer conception, the philosopher's task is a preparative one, of 'clearing the ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge.'²⁴ In other words, the philosopher's job description is a merely negative one, rather than positively increasing our understanding of social life. It consists, for example, in eliminating conceptual confusion so that empirical research may be more fruitful, but it is only empirical science that may further our understanding of the world.

Winch names two outstanding features of the underlabourer conception. First, philosophy and the sciences are not distinct in their subject matter, but in their methods.²⁵ Whereas the sciences are empirical, philosophy is concerned with a priori reasoning. But it seems now that if we want to acquire knowledge about matters of facts, about things in nature, only science is permitted to speak about them. Philosophy gets called onto the battlefield only when science needs help, when it is troubled by the concepts it uses. This leads us to the second feature, which is that philosophical problems come from without rather than from within philosophy itself: the puzzles of the philosophy of science, for example, come from science, the difficulties of the philosophy of art from art, etc.²⁶ But, says Winch, now it becomes necessary to the defender of the underlabourer conception that he appoint a special role to epistemology and metaphysics. For from where do its questions arise if not from within philosophy? So either they do arise from within philosophy, in which case 'the underlabourer conception collapses as an exhaustive account of the nature of philosophy', or they somehow derive from other disciplines. According to Winch, defenders of the underlabourer view tend to argue that epistemology is either a misleading pursuit or a philosophy of psychology in disguise.²⁷

Winch himself, on the contrary, argues that the philosophies of science, art, society, etc., must always be related to epistemology and metaphysics if they are to retain their philosophical nature.²⁸

²³ Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 3.

²⁴ John Locke, in Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 4.

²⁵ Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 4.

²⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 4: 'On this view philosophy is parasitic on other disciplines; it has no problems of its own (...).'

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

He calls these philosophies ‘peripheral’ philosophical disciplines as opposed to epistemology itself, a discipline that fulfils a central role for Winch. As we have seen, according to Winch, every sociology should become philosophical in that sense that it should concern itself with the description of ‘the conditions which must be satisfied if there are to *be* any criteria of understanding at all.’²⁹

Connected with this task description is the idea that epistemology and philosophy should examine the concept of intelligibility. An account of the conditions of possibility for understanding will prepare an answer to the question of what it means to call reality intelligible. Now, Winch carefully formulates these aims, for he notes that the concept of intelligibility varies from language-game to language-game, that it differs between separate peripheral philosophical disciplines. Just as chess, tennis and black jack are not part of one supergame, the notions of intelligibility across the peripheral disciplines are not part of one superconcept of intelligibility.³⁰ He therefore emphasises that we need an account of the conditions of possibility and not an account of a single set of necessary and sufficient conditions for understanding or intelligibility.³¹ So far, these considerations sound quite Wittgensteinian, but he then goes on to make a move that his approach cannot warrant.

Winch summarises once again that it is epistemology that ought to describe the *general* conditions of possibility of understanding, whereas the peripheral philosophies study the different forms that this understanding assumes in their respective *particular* areas.³² He paraphrases in Wittgensteinian terms that the objective of the latter is the investigation of *peculiar* forms of life (art, society, politics, etc.), while the former is concerned with elucidating the notion of a form of life *as such*.³³ It seems then that the conditions of possibility that epistemology looks for are to be found in the concept of a form of life as such.

But how, after being so careful as to distinguish between different kinds of intelligibility, does Winch vindicate his use of notions like *general* conditions and a form of life *as such*? Where do these notions come from all of a sudden? Is not the whole notion of a form of life supposed to signal that everything we do and say has its sense in a particular context? How is this proposed degree of generality compatible with a notion that should so starkly emphasise particularity? And what would Wittgenstein have to say of such a general elucidation of a form of life?

It seems to me that we must realise once again that we are not dealing here with sufficient and necessary conditions of the notion of a form of life, but we should attempt to find conditions of possibility for understanding in the concept of a form of life - although we have a tendency to forget this point. It is in the form of life that the criteria of understanding and understanding itself have their life. I believe it not opposed to Wittgenstein’s methods to pursue such a strategy, to attempt to articulate the notion of a form of life.³⁴ But in doing so, we have to be very careful and stick to our task conscientiously so as not to fall back on defining the essence of a form of life but to articulate its *role* or its position in the world. Here, it becomes pressing to fight our urges or philosophical cravings, and it appears now that Winch is not able to do so fully, because here he makes a reifying move. According to him, what the elucidation of the notion of a form of life as such consists in is a

²⁹ Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19-20.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 39. See also, p. 8: ‘Whereas the scientist investigates the nature, causes and effects of *particular* real things and processes, the philosopher is concerned with the nature of reality as such and in general.’

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³⁴ Does not Wittgenstein do the same in showing how our language-use is embedded in diverse practices and language-games? See footnote 39 for an example.

discussion of ‘the *nature* of social phenomena in general’.³⁵ I believe that this identification is illegitimate, for how is the search for the nature of anything, let alone of social phenomena *in general*, to be equated with the elucidation of the notion of a form of life? Winch seems to think that a form of life is comprised of social phenomena and the rules that govern them, as will become more obvious in following sections. He thus reifies the notion of a form of life into a something that may be determined by the nature of social phenomena in general, that is to say, by rule-governed behaviour.

I will now attempt to show why this reification of the notion of a form of life is at odds with Wittgenstein’s conception of a form of life by examining his remarks in *On Certainty*. In section VI, moreover, we will see that there is a more principled objection to this reifying move, but that will require a different discussion so I will only go into it there.

The term ‘form of life’ (*Lebensform*) is only mentioned three times in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein says of it that ‘to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life’ (*PI*, §19), that ‘the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life’ (*PI*, §23) and that human beings agree in their language, that is to say in form of life (*PI*, §241). In each case, the term is used to denote some encompassing entity that we must be careful about not to designate as an entity. (Think about why Wittgenstein says so little about it). It is encompassing in the sense that speaking and acting must always be viewed in its light, or against it as a background. Ostensive definition, for example, only makes sense against the background of shared practices and the language-game of which it is a part. And, as we have seen in §241, it is a background in which we agree, one that we share. It rests, so to say, on our interpersonal agreement: it is *our* background, it is *our* form of life.

I do not attempt to characterise or define it in this way, but I wish to show what is involved in this notion, for otherwise I would be reifying it in the same way as Winch. But now that we have a sense of what the notion of a form of life means, I believe that we may locate the implicit use of the concept of a form of life quite clearly in Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty* (*OC*). My interpretation of the remarks found in this work agree with the interpretation of P. F. Strawson in *Skepticism and Naturalism* and P. M. S. Hacker in *Insight and Illusion*, although I have found no evidence that they expressly equate the terms used in *On Certainty* with the notion of a form of life.³⁶ However, as we shall see, the point that Wittgenstein is trying to get at involves those features that I have connected with the concept of a form of life above.

In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein speaks of propositions that are absolutely certain to us, like ‘my name is Jan Overwijk’, ‘I know that I have hands’, ‘the earth has existed for many years’, etc. Why are these propositions so certain? Well, says Wittgenstein, everything speaks for it and nothing against it: ‘wherever I look, I find no ground for doubting (...)’ (*OC*, §123)³⁷. What would a doubt here look like? In fact, doubting these propositions would not be doubting: ‘we might describe [t]his way of behaving as like the behaviour of doubt, but [t]his game would not be ours’ (*OC*, §255). It would be senseless to doubt our having hands, it would not be doubting, because ‘[t]he game of doubting itself presupposes certainty’ (*OC*, §115).

Wittgenstein is continually getting at the idea that we cannot doubt these propositions, nor does it make sense to satisfy ourselves of their correctness. Rather, ‘it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false.’ (*OC*, §94) According to Wittgenstein, all judging,

³⁵ Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 39-40. Italics mine. See, for example, p. 40: ‘But to understand the nature of social phenomena in general, to elucidate, that is, the concept of a ‘form of life’, has been shown to be precisely the aim of epistemology.’

³⁶ In the second edition of his book, Hacker revised it at some important points. Chiefly, he no longer maintains that Wittgenstein makes use of a transcendental argument.

³⁷ All the *On Certainty* references are made to Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. Anscombe and Von Wright, trns. Paul and Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975).

testing and confirmation of hypotheses takes place already within a *system*, the inherited background. This system is ‘the element in which arguments have their life.’ (*OC*, §105) That is the reason why we cannot doubt the key propositions that form an important part of our background, because a doubt here ‘would seem to drag everything with it and plunge it into chaos.’ (*OC*, §613)

Wittgenstein also terms this system or background a ‘picture’ (e.g., *OC*, §209). We could, moreover, identify it with what he calls a language-game: [the language-game] is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there - like our life.’ (*OC*, §559) As Strawson has remarked, Wittgenstein draws on many more metaphors: “he [Wittgenstein] speaks of propositions (...) which belong to our ‘*frame of reference*’ (§83); which ‘*stand fast or solid*’ (§151); which constitute the ‘*world-picture*’ which is ‘the scaffolding of our thoughts’ (§211) (...)”.³⁸ Whether we term it a background, a system, a frame of reference, substratum, scaffolding, the point that I believe Wittgenstein is getting at is that we need certainty in order to doubt, that we need a shared and basic way of ‘*acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game’ (*OC*, §204) in order to make sense of our acting and speaking at all. And those are exactly the features that we have connected with the notion of a form of life.

According to Wittgenstein, what we learn when we begin to believe anything is not a single proposition, but a whole system of propositions. So again, we do not learn bits of the world one at a time by ostensive definition, but to be able to learn something by defining it in this way involves learning a whole background of practices and customs. Of course, we do learn bits of the world by the use of ostensive definition, but to do so, we already need to presuppose this background: ‘Light dawns gradually over the whole.’ (*OC*, §141) We could also attempt to give an articulation of what ostensive definition involves, but then we would of necessity presuppose again different parts of that background.³⁹ We cannot step outside it to portray its nature, we cannot view it in isolation, and this is why Wittgenstein tells us: ‘Not that I could describe the system of these convictions. Yet my convictions do form a system, a structure’ (*OC*, §102)⁴⁰ We must, in other words, always operate from within a language-game, because, as we have seen, ‘the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life’.

We can now perhaps see more clearly why Winch cannot legitimately reify the notion of a form of life and, connectedly, the nature of social phenomena in general. For it is not a something that we may describe at a distance, it is not some distinct entity that we could attempt to represent as accurately as possible. In reifying the notion of a form of life and attempting to give an account of the nature of social phenomena in general, Winch is allowing himself a distance or detachment between him and the form of life that he cannot have. He forgets one of the most salient features connected with the notion of a form of life: ‘What has to be accepted, the given, is - one might say - *forms of life*.’ (*Philosophy of Psychology*, §345) Forms of life are not given to us as sense data are given to us, from the outside so to say, but, rather, in the sense of a background that we have

³⁸ P. F. Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some varieties* (London: Methuen, 1985) , p. 15.

³⁹ For example, if we take Wittgenstein to be articulating our form of life in the very first paragraph of the *Philosophical Investigations*, we can see quite clearly what we must presuppose. He treats the language-game of naming and uses it to see what is involved in this kind of language-game. A shopkeeper gets a list that says: ‘five red apples’. He now uses charts and colour samples to see what objects fit the names. Here we see how naming functions within the language game. But then Wittgenstein’s interlocutor asks: “‘But how does he know where and how he is to look up the word ‘red’ and what he is to do with the word ‘five’?’” Wittgenstein replies with what I take to be the presupposition of a form of life: ‘Well, I just assume that he *acts* as I have described. Explanations come to an end somewhere.’ (*PI*, §1)

⁴⁰ There is a difference between a system of convictions (propositions) and a system of practices. Styling to some extent, the first is the subject matter of *On Certainty*, whereas the second gets more attention in *Philosophical Investigations*. I believe, however, that both are important for the notion of a form of life. Here I would like to refer to §242 of *PI*, right after Wittgenstein speaks of agreement in form of life: ‘It is not only agreement in definitions, but also (odd as it may sound) agreement in judgements that is required for communication by means of language.’

discussed above, in the sense that it is there. We cannot step outside it, but must always move within it if we can be said to articulate it at all. Moreover, in reifying it, Winch does not articulate conditions of possibility but merely the necessary and sufficient conditions that he warns us against detailing.

There is, however, a much more pressing (Wittgensteinean and principled) objection against the reification of a form of life. We will discuss that in section VI. But first, it will be illuminating to see a related reifying move at work in Winch's account of rule-following, so that we may better understand in what way exactly this move is made.

V. The reifications: Rule-following

As we have seen, Winch extends Wittgenstein's analysis of rule-following from language to meaningful behaviour. Our behaviour is not governed by causal laws, but we should not want to say that it is not patterned or regulated at all. Thus, according to Winch, our actions with a meaning are governed by rules. These rules commit us to behaving in a certain way in the future, like the use of a word commits us to using it in more or less the same way in the future. To quote Winch: 'I can only be committed in the future by what I do now if my present act is the *application of a rule*.'⁴¹

In this formulation we immediately see the reification at work. Winch appears to believe that in behaving meaningfully, in acting, we continually apply rules. But surely, this is not what we do. Most of the times, I do not consider any rules at all when I act, but I just act. Winch agrees on this point, meaningful behaviour does not depend on a rule that is being consciously applied: 'I want to say that the test of whether a man's actions are the application of a rule is not whether he can *formulate it (...)*'.⁴²

It seems, then, that we must apply rules unconsciously most of the times. But how are we supposed to do this if we do not know what rules we are to apply or follow? Can we say that we actually *apply* rules in these cases? What we need in this case is some explanation as to how we are able to do such a thing, what we need is some theory of action - we might, for instance, refer to a concept like tacit knowledge. But this is a craving Wittgenstein warns us to act upon. Rather, this craving is an indication that the 'decisive movement in the conjuring trick has been made'. For what we have here is not a description of meaningful behaviour, but, rather, the stipulating of a picture. The picture is this: meaningful behaviour is rule-governed. But we do not consciously apply rules, so now it seems that we *must* apply them unconsciously. But how is this any different in form from the picture that our language *must* have a logical depth-structure that pictures the world. It is exactly against such a picture that Wittgenstein struggled in the *Philosophical Investigations*.⁴³

Nigel Pleasants points to a distinction made by Wittgenstein in *The Blue Book*, a distinction between 'a process being *in accordance with a rule*' and 'a process involving a rule'.⁴⁴ The latter signals the discursive following of an explicit rule, for example the obedience of the order 'write $2 + 2 = 4$ '. Explicit rules are the only kind of rule that can be actually said to be followed or applied. For how else are we to follow them, how are hidden rules to guide our behaviour? The only way to answer this question is by theoretically constructing (pseudo-)explanatory concepts, but we need not do this if we simply deconstruct the picture and thus let the fly out of the fly-bottle. We do this by saying that we sometimes explicitly follow rules, but most of the time do not follow rules at all

⁴¹ Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 47.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 54-55.

⁴³ Again: 'Don't think, but look!'

⁴⁴ Nigel Pleasants, *Wittgenstein and the Idea of a Critical Social Theory, a Critique of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 66.

but act *in accordance with* them.⁴⁵ That is to say, as Winch at one point formulates it correctly, ‘human actions exemplify rules’.⁴⁶ As we can see clearly now, the picture of our applying rules is at some points correct (for example, a mechanic closely following the steps in a construction-manual), but the picture is applied incorrectly if it is assumed that *all* our actions involve the following or application of rules (e.g., including a mechanic screwing a bolt).⁴⁷ At this point, Winch falls prey to the ‘craving for generality’.

We can thus see how Winch reifies the notion of a rule into an abstract entity that we somehow apply and that belongs to the structure of the social world. But what of his thesis that all human behaviour is rule-governed? With the gloss that that our actions are not applications of rules but exemplify or are in accordance with rules, we could still consistently maintain that our behaviour is regulated by rules in a weak sense. So it seems that Winch’s project is safe, because it is the task of the social student to articulate the rule that is acted in accordance with in a particular situation: ‘To investigate the type of regularity studied in a given kind of enquiry is to examine the nature of the rule according to which judgements of identity are made in that enquiry.’⁴⁸ The judgements of identity are important here, because what counts as the same rule differs from context to context. Only from within a specific context may we distinguish whether it is in fact the same rule that is at issue. We may thus conclude that the social student should really look for the rule that is being acted in accordance with.⁴⁹

However, the reification of the notion of a rule is reflected in the job description of the social student. How are we to find the rule by which someone proceeds? What would count as that rule? Would it be the rule that he gives us when we ask him? But what if he does not know it himself, for that was no requirement for Winch? The rule that satisfactorily describes his course of action? But, as Wittgenstein notes in *PI* §201: ‘every course of action can [on some interpretation] be brought into accord with the rule’, and that means that it can be brought into conflict with it as well. This paradox rests on the misunderstanding that a rule is in need of an interpretation, whereas the rule itself suffices for guidance. We have been trained in a particular way to responding to these rules: ‘That’s why ‘following a rule’ is a practice” (*PI*, §202). The reference to a practice is not an explanation to safeguard the notion of rule-following, as Kripke suggests. Rather, as Marie McGinn remarks: ‘The paradox refers to our initial sense of perplexity at the discovery that the idea of ‘logical compulsion’, which we want to use to describe the connection between a rule and its application cannot be given any content.’⁵⁰ We feel that we draw the next step in the following of a

⁴⁵ One may object here that ‘acting in accordance with rules’ is too externalistic, because we do have the feeling that we know what we are doing. And that is, of course, correct, we do intuitively know what is appropriate to say or do in particular circumstances, but that is not the same as to say that we are following rules. Most of the time, Wittgenstein would say, we *just act*. It is only when we try to understand our actions (whether as a social student or a human being) that it becomes pragmatically sensible to interpret them in terms of rules. But this is only a picture that guides us in our enquiry - it becomes problematic when one attempts to reify it, as Winch does. At that point, one has forgotten that it was only a picture, a metaphor.

⁴⁶ Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 58.

⁴⁷ We could, of course, attempt to articulate a set of rules that would explain step by step how screwing a bolt is done. But how does it follow that our mechanic *must* follow these rules? Here we have to follow Wittgenstein’s instruction from *PI* §66: ‘Don’t think, but look!’ In our bafflement that we cannot give our thinking any sense, it becomes clear that we are dealing with a picture, with something that lies in our method of representation rather than in the world.

⁴⁸ Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 78.

⁴⁹ This is how we arrive at Winch’s conviction that we must describe social phenomena, or the rules that regulate them, from the point of view of the actors involved in them.

⁵⁰ Marie McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), p. 103.

rule as a matter of course, it is as if the rule logically determined our action and we had no choice left in the matter. We therefore reify the notion of a rule to account for this sense of a logical must, we picture it as a ‘rails invisibly laid to infinity’ in a Platonic heaven or somewhere in a community of speakers (*PI*, §218). But the idea of a Platonic heaven is of no use here, it cannot play any role in our language-game. We cannot, for example, consult it when we are at a loss: it is merely a theoretical picture, a metaphor for our sense of compulsion, it describes or elucidates nothing.⁵¹

We arrive again at the point where we want to say that there is no clear rule here that we are following. Most of the times, we do not know it, nor can we discover it: ‘Once I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: “This is simply what I do.”’ (*PI*, §217)⁵² It seems, then, that we have also arrived again at the idea of a form of life. A form of life, as we have seen, cannot be characterised by an x amount of criteria, and in the same way it cannot be determined by a set of rules – a form of life does not consist of a structure of rules, but in it, rules have their life. This is how Winch’s first reification and the second relate to each other. Like the notion of a practice, the idea of a form of life is not the last explanation, it marks the end of explanations.

There is no determinate rule for the social student to find for there *are*⁵³ no rules in the social world.⁵⁴ Winch criticises positivism for attempting to describe human behaviour from an external point of view, but he seems to think that once we have found the concepts and rules according to which the actions under study are realised, once we have found the internal point of view, we may now represent those concepts and rules as accurately as possible.⁵⁵ Winch thus remains firmly within the representationalist framework. But this approach is at odds with Wittgenstein’s views on rule-following, for there are in fact, in reality, no rules or concepts awaiting discovery. It therefore becomes clear that Winch’s epistemological endeavour would be better termed an ontological one.⁵⁶ Meaningful behaviour *is* rule-governed, and those rules are only intelligible from within. That is why he claims that we may only know meaningful behaviour from an inside perspective, because of the way human behaviour *is* (and it is that move that is specifically un-Wittgensteinian).

Winch, it is true, comes to see some of his mistakes over the years, as he acknowledges in his preface to the second edition. He refers to §§81–82 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, in which

⁵¹ The postulating of a Platonic heaven or a rails to infinity is what we could designate as the effects of our proneness to myth-building that Hacker and Baker identified. As McGinn suggests, these notions are metaphors or mythologies to give sense to our feeling of logical compulsion. To show that it is just that, a mythology, Wittgenstein spends many remarks on problematising systematic thinking about rule-following.

⁵² See also *PI*, §211: “‘(...) how can he *know* how he is to continue it by himself?’ - Well, how do *I* know? -- If that means “have I reasons?”, the answer is: my reasons will soon give out. And then I shall act, without reasons.’”

⁵³ I want to emphasise ‘are’ here, because I do not mean that, pragmatically speaking, it makes no sense to speak of the social world as regulated by rules. I merely wish to say that they are not there ontologically speaking – as Winch seems to do. For we must remember that Winch is talking about ‘the nature of social phenomena’ (p. 39), ‘the nature of reality’ (p. 8) and ‘the general nature of a human society’ (p. 21) and not about our understanding or viewing of them. It is exactly here that the reifying move is made.

⁵⁴ Again with the gloss that we can and do sometimes formulate rules according to which we proceed, but these are only a small amount of cases. It is at any rate not enough for the social student to go on.

⁵⁵ We can formulate this a little different too. The distance that Winch found in positivism is still present in his work. But now the distance is not present immediately, but it is applied only after coming closer. – It is the same distance he takes from the notion of a form of life.

⁵⁶ See Nigel Pleasants, *Wittgenstein and Critical Social Theory*, p. 39 for a similar point: ‘Winch does not actually use the term ‘ontology’, but an examination of his theoretical practice will show that his primary aim, just like that of critical social theorists, is to formulate a theory of social ontology – an account of the general features and conditions of possibility of meaningful social action.’

Wittgenstein touches upon the issue that we *must* be following fixed rules and the difficulty of tracing those rules. But Winch takes these notes to mean that he should have been more nuanced, that he has not ‘paid *proper* heed to these remarks’.⁵⁷ Specifically, he thinks that he had given the impression that social practices, traditions, etc., are more or less autonomous and self-contained. However, I believe Winch has here not realised just how un-Wittgensteinian his approach here has turned out. In section VII, I will attempt to show what the gravity of this mistake consists in. In order to do so, however, we first need a discussion of the transcendental argument and Winch’s use of it, to which we will turn now.

VI. The transcendental argument

In section II, I gave an account of Winch’s *Idea of a Social Science*. In this section, I will attempt to spell out his argument further in terms of a transcendental argument. In order to do so, I will first give a brief characterisation of this type of argument and then explicate how we find the described characteristics in Winch’s work.

In a nutshell, the transcendental argument is a regressive type of argument that moves from some indubitable feature of our experience to a stronger conclusion regarding the nature of the subject or its position in the world by showing how the contents of the stronger conclusion are necessary if the indubitable feature of our experience is to be possible. In formulating this type of argument, one is therefore concerned with spelling out conditions of possibility. We find the paradigmatic example of this type of argument in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which he poses the question of how experience is possible.

Charles Taylor provides three important facets of this type of argument, which are summed up in the following: ‘Transcendental arguments are chains of apodictic indispensability claims which concern experience and thus have an unchallengeable anchoring.’⁵⁸ Firstly, by indispensability claims, Taylor means claims that are indispensable for other premisses in the chain: A is the case, and B is indispensable for A, while C is in its turn indispensable for B. If A is to be possible, then, C (and B) has to be the case also. In this case, A is our starting point, a claim concerning our experience, and C is the stronger conclusion we want to move toward.

Secondly, these claims are apodictic, that is to say, they are established a priori. We do not, e.g., find the categories of the understanding through our experience. Once we have grasped these claims, they will seem absolutely certain, rather than merely probable. That is why Taylor suggests that they are self-evident. It is, for instance, self-evident that we are aware, or that we have experience. One may object that it is not as certain or clear that we cannot have coherent experience if the categories of the understanding, but one could reply that they are as certain as the starting point except that it just takes more explanation to appreciate it.

Thirdly, as we have already touched upon, these claims concern experience. This element gives the transcendental argument its significance, for it ‘anchors’, as Taylor has it, the argument in an unchallengeable point of departure: ‘For how can we formulate coherently the doubt that we have experience?’⁵⁹ Even the skeptic, who contents that it is possible to have our experience without it corresponding to some external reality, must agree that he at least has experience.

Now that we have these three features, I will attempt to reconstruct Winch’s argument in their light to see if Winch’s argument can be made sense of when spelled out as a transcendental argument.

Before we start reconstructing the argument, however, I will bring together a few textual indications that would suggest that Winch indeed entertained the intention to employ a

⁵⁷ Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. xv. Italics mine.

⁵⁸ Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 28.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

transcendental argument. As we have seen, Winch is quite explicit in the task description of the epistemologist: his job is ‘to describe the conditions which must be satisfied if there are to *be* any criteria of understanding at all.’⁶⁰ He is looking, in other words, for conditions of possibility or transcendental conditions. These conditions are indispensable for the being of the criteria of understanding. At another point, he formulates the same point slightly differently: ‘[Epistemology] concern[s] the general conditions under which it is possible to speak of understanding.’⁶¹ Moreover, he explicitly refers to Kant in using ‘a Kantian phrase (...): How is such an understanding (or indeed any understanding) possible?’⁶² What could have been a more conspicuous introduction into a transcendental argument?

It seems now that we have found our indubitable starting point as well: understanding. One might object here that surely the fact that we have understanding is not unchallengeable. Might not our understanding simply be wrong all the time? I think, however, what Winch means here is that we have an understanding of meaning. When we see words, their meaning immediately strikes us. We *experience* them as having meaning. In fact, it is very difficult to try and see these words as merely figures instead of meaningful signs. So too, we understand the meaning of actions, which is the particular subject matter of Winch’s investigation: meaningful behaviour. We experience actions as having a sense, as having some symbolic meaning, rather than just movements that occur for no apparent reason. Now how could we possibly deny that we understand meaning? Even the skeptic, so to say, would require an understanding of meaning to formulate his skeptical question.

Secondly, Winch’s epistemological project is claimed to be carried out in a fashion of ‘*a priori* philosophizing of a sort which is quite legitimate.’⁶³ He himself gives the example of the elucidation of the *concept* of social behaviour. This is a purely conceptual task and the elucidation is needed as an answer to the question of what constitutes that behaviour. Therefore, according to Winch, this is no question of ‘waiting to see’ what experience tells us, but, rather, ‘it is a matter of tracing the implications of the concepts we use.’⁶⁴

Finally, we need to reconstruct the indispensability claims that have to hold up if our point of departure, the understanding of meaning, is to be possible. In Winch’s words, we have to find the answer to the question of which conditions must be satisfied if there are to *be* any criteria of understanding at all.

I feel that the first indispensability claim remains implicit in Winch’s work. It is this: in order for actions to have meaning, they must be more or less regular. Just as words are able to acquire meaning if they are used in approximately the same way, actions or behaviour too must exemplify some pattern if we are to make sense of them at all. Wittgenstein does mention this point at various stages, for example, in the *Philosophical Investigations* §207 he imagines a people whose language we find impossible to master when we try to learn it, ‘[f]or there is no regular connection between what they say, the sounds they make, and their activities. (...) There is not enough regularity for us to call it “language”.’ Right after, in §208, he describes how we teach others the meaning of words by pointing to regularities: ‘I’ll show him the same colours, the same lengths, the same shapes’. Winch does make this Wittgensteinian point, that is, he makes it in connection to the meaning of words. He says that only with respect to a given rule, may we say what counts as the same use of a word. He does, however, not explicitly make this point with regard to meaningful behaviour. I think that we can nevertheless safely say that we may extend this point to actions also. For what sense could we give someone’s actions if, e.g., in replying to the giving of an order, he would now give us

⁶⁰ Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 20.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

something, at another time run away and at yet another point keenly wave his hands through the air? Also, I believe this first indispensability claim is warranted by the next step in the argument and is also suggested by Winch's discussion of the meaning of words. After expressing the crucial importance of regularity in connection to words, Winch states: 'So the question: What is it for a word to have meaning? leads on to the question: What is it for someone to follow a rule?'⁶⁵

The second step in the argument is to argue that for meaningful behaviour to be regular, it must be governed by rules. This may seem like the same point in different terms, but I want to separate these steps because this one is about the specific content of this regularity. Their independence becomes clearer if one reifies the notion of a rule, like, I believe, Winch does. In that case, it becomes a distinct answer to the question: what is the essence of this regularity? rather than a more elaborate articulation of what this regularity involves.

Winch draws this step in the argument by appealing to the notion of being committed. We are committed to acting in one way rather than another in the future (e.g. the keeping or breaking of a promise) like we are committed to saying 'that is red' when we wish to point out the colour of blood, or like we are committed to writing 9 after the sequence 1 3 5 7. This commitment, or the sense of being committed, according to Winch, is the result of our actions being the application of a rule. So, to sum this step up, the regularity of our actions arises because of our sense of a commitment that is the result of the rule-governed nature of meaningful behaviour.

The third and final indispensability claim is that for rules to be intelligible, there must be some 'interpersonal agreement' or a form of life. What these terms are supposed to signify is that rules have to be socially established.⁶⁶ In a form of life, we might say, rules have their life. Through this form of life, we, acquire an external check of correctness on the application of rules. Wittgenstein (and Winch in his name) insists that it is impossible to follow a rule privately: "[F]ollowing a rule' is a practice. And to *think* one is following a rule is not to follow a rule. And that's why it's not possible to follow a rule 'privately'; otherwise, thinking one was following a rule would be the same thing as following it" (*PI*, §202)⁶⁷. Wittgenstein is here getting at the point that without external checks, there would be no criteria of correctness. And without those criteria, a rule would have no role left to play in a language-game: if any course of action could be the following of a rule, then what point is left in describing it as such?⁶⁸ Also, Wittgenstein says that '[i]t is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which only one person followed a rule' (*PI*, §199). Rather, for the following of a rule to have any sense, it requires a background of practices, activities and institutions in the same way that ostensive definition is in need of such a background. In a word, for rule-following to have any sense, it requires a form of life in which criteria of understanding have their life.

This final step ties all the previous ones together. We can now also make sense of what Peter Winch says in his introduction of the chapter on the nature of meaningful behaviour, where he first states that epistemology is concerned with 'the general conditions under which it is possible to speak of understanding' and a few lines down: 'epistemology will try to elucidate what is involved in the notion of a form of life as such.'⁶⁹ Understanding, to sum up, is possible only against the

⁶⁵ Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 26.

⁶⁶ See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 109: 'all meaningful behaviour must be social, since it can be meaningful only if governed by rules, *and rules presuppose a social setting.*' Italics mine.

⁶⁷ See also *ibid.*, p. 28: '[I]t 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.'

⁶⁸ This point bears a close affinity to the remarks on the rule-following paradox. There as well as here we concluded that rule-following must be a practice.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

background of a form of life, in which our actions have their sense as the applications of rules and thus acquire the regularity that allows us to understand them as meaningful.

There is, however, one feature of the transcendental argument in general that we have left unarticulated: its limitations. Because the indispensability claims concern our experience, in this case our experience or understanding of meaning, they tell us something about the *nature* of that experience or understanding. Winch's argument, if it is valid, tells us something about what it is to understand meaning, but it is limited to telling us only that. The argument shows us something about our experience, but it cannot show us anything about the *ding an sich* as distinct from from our experience.⁷⁰

VII. The irony of Winch's mistake

It is my conviction that Winch has not paid sufficient attention to the limitations of the transcendental argument, if he was self-consciously employing such an argument. In reifying the notion of a form of life and the rules that govern our behaviour, I believe he overestimated the scope of his argument. To remember, a reification is the move that makes these concepts into entities that have an existence separate of us, rather than leaving them in their relation to us. In other words, in reifying a concept, one transposes an epistemological notion into an ontological one, yet it is exactly this transposition or move that the transcendental argument does not allow. Moreover, I believe it is also fundamentally at odds with the later Wittgenstein's remarks.

Now that we have reconstructed the argument, we can pinpoint with some accuracy where Winch's mistakes are made. Corresponding to his two reifications, we can see that he errs in step two and three of the argument, which are the steps regarding, respectively, rule-following and the notion of a form of life. I will now treat the third step first.

As we have seen in section III, the reifying move consisted in Winch's moving from epistemology as describing the conditions under which understanding is possible to epistemology as the discussion of 'the nature of social phenomena in general'. He moves, in other words, from our understanding to social phenomena themselves, from what we would call an epistemology to an ontology.⁷¹ He asks not of our knowledge of social phenomena, but of their *nature*. Right after this shift, Winch equates the question of the nature of social phenomena in general with the elucidation of the notion of a form of life.⁷² But as we have seen, the notion of a form of life does not allow itself to be represented by a subject over and against a detached object. Winch investigates the nature of social phenomena so that it in turn may dictate what form our understanding will have to take, which is exactly the kind of strategy the representationalist would adopt. But Winch's formulations suggest that he forgets that not the nature of these phenomena dictates our understanding because their ontological structure present us an independent criterion of correctness, but that the relation of these phenomena to us is of such a nature that our understanding them must take the form of an insider's perspective if our understanding them is to have any *sense*.

Moreover, it is exactly this move that is unwarranted by the transcendental argument. If Winch's argument is correct, then it shows us 'the form that any account must take which invokes our own self-understanding', because the transcendental argument shows us what is necessary for our understanding of meaning to have any sense at all.⁷³ However, the argument tells us nothing about

⁷⁰ See for instance, Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 26, where he discusses Merleau-Ponty's thesis of embodied agency: 'If we took this as an ontological thesis concerning the nature of man, from which we ought to be able to derive conclusions, for instance, about how human action, thought, or perception should be explained, then we would be exceeding the potential scope of the [transcendental] argument.'

⁷¹ Nigel Pleasants makes a similar point in *Wittgenstein and Critical Social Theory*, p. 39.

⁷² Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 40.

⁷³ Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 27.

the essence of social phenomena in themselves, as Winch attempts to do. The argument does not foreclose the option that there is a scientific vocabulary that describes social phenomena as they in fact are more accurately. By means of the transcendental argument, we can say that our understanding of meaningful behaviour must always be viewed in light of a form of life, but not what meaningful behaviour or the form of life in reality are. That is why we must be careful not to determine their nature, but, rather, to see conceptual connections between these two notions.

The second reification, the reification of a rule, is made in step two of the transcendental argument. It is at this stage, that the reification becomes most pressing. Winch's thesis may be summed up in his proposition that 'all behaviour which is meaningful (therefore all specifically human behaviour) is *ipso facto* rule-governed'.⁷⁴ Again, this is not a claim about our understanding of meaningful behaviour, but about that behaviour itself. And again, his hypothesis is therefore not one concerning an epistemological matter, but a hypothesis regarding an ontological one. It attempts to determine the essence of our actions, that is, of the subject matter of the social scientist: the nature of social phenomena in general. It is at this juncture, that Winch's two reifications come together and cross the boundaries of the transcendental argument.

Another way to put this point is as follows. In reifying the notion of a form of life and of a rule, Winch's thesis quietly and subtly becomes a form of representationalism. Perhaps against all his intentions, we might say the philosophical cravings for, e.g., generality have steered his work in this direction. In itself, this should not present Winch any difficulties, but representationalism relies on a basic distinction between subject and object, so that the subject may thus represent the object in a detached way, whereas the transcendental argument does not allow for such a distinction as the object always remains connected to the experience or understanding of the subject. In this way, the transcendental argument is incompatible with the philosophical presuppositions of representationalism; in this way too, Winch's insufficiently careful formulations of his philosophical strategy constitute a misuse of the transcendental argument.

But not only does Winch traverse the limitations of the transcendental argument, he also opens his work to an 'immanent' critique, for I believe Wittgenstein criticises precisely such a reifying motion.

We have already established in section IV that Winch advances a particular picture about meaningful behaviour, i.e., that it is rule-governed. It is the ontological picture that I have just outlined. We have already raised the difficulties that present themselves if we try to hold on to our picture, even against our evidence: we know we do not always consciously apply rules, so we *must* apply them unconsciously. But now we need to explain how we are able to do this, so we conjure up theoretical devices. But Wittgenstein is univocal in saying: 'All *explanation* must disappear, and description alone must take its place' (*PI*, §109). And explanation is necessary only precisely because of our advancing of a theory or a picture. It is the need for explanation, the philosophical craving for an explanation because things *must* be so, that indicates that what we are dealing with is indeed a picture.

This is the form of a false picture that forces itself upon us: "'But *this* isn't how it is!' - we say. 'Yet *this* is how it *has to be!*' (*PI*, 112). It is 'a preconception to which reality *must* correspond.' (*PI*, §131)

Wittgenstein's '*picture*' of the general propositional form 'held [him] captive' (*PI*, §115). Whereas he had said in the *Tractatus* (2.1511): '*That* is how a picture is attached to reality. It reaches right up to it' and (2.1512): 'it is laid against reality like a ruler', he now makes a different diagnosis: 'And we couldn't get outside [the picture that held us captive], for it lay in our language' (*PI*, §115).⁷⁵ The picture is something that lies in our language and that *we* put onto the world: 'The idea now absorbs us that the ideal '*must*' occur in reality.' (*PI*, §101)

⁷⁴ Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 48.

⁷⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung)* (London: Routledge, 1963). These are translations of my own.

The picture describes a way that we look at the world, how we picture it. *We say* of meaningful behaviour that it accords with rules (now he is following an order, here is he greeting his friend casually, now he is declining an offer by saying ‘thank you’, etc.), but we must not confuse ourselves with the idea that social reality or our form of life is in fact made up by some complex system of rules that, if we only tried hard enough, we could represent as faithfully as possible. We may maintain that people behave *as if* they were governed by rules, but not that their behaviour *is* governed by rules. Like in the case of the transcendental argument, we may say that regarding meaningful behaviour as rule-governed makes sense to us and advances our understanding of it, but once we transpose our way of looking at things to how these things in reality are, we are making one of the gravest mistakes in philosophy.⁷⁶

There is, to sum up, a great irony present in Winch’s *Idea of a Social Science*: it advances a picture exactly like the one that Wittgenstein put forward in the *Tractatus*. Now there is nothing intrinsically wrong with a picture, the picture of human behaviour as rule-governed, for example, may be of great pragmatic use to us as human beings and social students. However, it becomes problematic when one holds on to a picture, even against our evidence (e.g., we do not seem to follow rules all the time) - it becomes problematic, in other words, if we reify it and think of our picture as if it was the world itself, as if the world did in fact consist of a structure of rules. It is in such a situation that we are in danger of being held captive by one, like Wittgenstein was when he was convinced that the general propositional form *must* picture the structure of the world itself. In that case, we mistake our means of representation for the thing represented and our picture becomes

⁷⁶ One might object here that this point itself relies on a false ontological dichotomy between subject and object, one that Kant and Wittgenstein would both reject. However, that granted, Kant does distinguish between constitutive and regulative principles. The former constitute the experience of the subject and so about the object universally, whereas the latter merely regulate our experience further, they structure our individual judgements about experience. By referring to constitutive principles, it is still possible for Kant (and Kantians) to claim that propositions about our experience possess objective validity without thereby crossing the limits of the transcendental argument.

It now seems at some points that Wittgenstein employs a transcendental argument as well, for instance in his discussion of what is needed for ostensive definition to work in the first place. I would, however, prefer to read it as an analysis of *our* institution of ostensive definition and of the practices, customs and speech-acts, if you will, in which it is embedded, rather than an examination of the conditions that *must* hold for ostensive definition to be possible. And one could say the same thing about rule-following. Wittgenstein does not attempt to prove that in order for us to be able to speak a language, we should somehow be able to follow rules. On the contrary, it is an idea that he attempts to deconstruct by problematising it at every step. That is not to say that it makes no sense to us to picture our language-use as rule-governed, but it means that it is just that: a picture - “The line intimates to me the way I am to go.” - But that is, of course, only a picture.’ (*PI*, §222)

The picture has pragmatic value to us, it presents us with a metaphor or a *means of representation* to make sense of our speaking and acting, but this picture does not, in Kantian terms, constitute our experience or understanding necessarily nor universally. It is contingent in that it changes along with our speaking and practices, or, our form of life: ‘the point of the notion of a form of life is precisely to de-transcendentalize [the contrast between conditions of sense and matters of fact] by acknowledging that grammar is an integral part of human practice, and hence subject to change.’⁷⁵ (Hans-Johann Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), p. 125) The picture of rule-following is therefore much more like a regulative principle in the Kantian sense, in that it guides us to understand meaningful behaviour, but it does not grant objective validity to propositions that invoke it.

Winch, in other words, seems to confuse regulative for constitutive principles and appears to take Wittgenstein’s notes on rule-following as universal rather than contingent - that is the reason why he nowhere states that his method might be a pragmatically fruitful way to look at meaningful behaviour, but instead speaks quite boldly of ‘*general conditions*’ and ‘the *nature* of social phenomena *in general*’.

So either we defend Winch’s argument by thinking of it as describing a constitutive principle, in which case he is misleading about being a Wittgensteinian, or Winch’s argument should be thought of as articulating a regulative principle, in which case Winch may not appeal to objective validity and so his thesis relies on a non-sequitur, i.e., that our understanding or experience of social phenomena tells us something about the *nature* of social phenomena themselves. Either way, a Wittgensteinian would say that he commits the mistake of predicating of a thing what lies in the means of representation.

an ontological thesis. Winch's misuse of the transcendental argument seems to me to be an example of the putting forward of such an ontological thesis. Winch thus commits exactly *that* mistake on which Wittgenstein spent a great deal of his *Philosophical Investigations* repudiating - one that we commit so easily when doing philosophy: 'One predicates of the thing what lies in the mode of representation.' (*PI*, §104)

VIII. Winch as a hermeneutic

As I have attempted to show, Winch's argument tends to collapse into a form of representationalism, because Winch gives the impression that his aim is to represent social phenomena rather than to interpret them, and the two reifications are the main sources for this impression. The problem in this case is, however, that Winch can never consistently be a representationalist, for representationalism still presupposes a subject/object ontology that appoints a detached perspective to the observer. But when employing a transcendental argument, one is not legitimated in adopting such a perspective, because this type of argument always relies on our relation to the subject matter at hand. In this section, I will therefore attempt to give an indication of what a reading would look like that would interpret Winch as a hermeneutic of the variety of Gadamer and Taylor, a current of thought that takes seriously the consequences of the transcendental argument in that it does not presuppose a subject/object dualism.

As we have seen, Winch's account of meaningful action presupposes a form of 'interpersonal agreement' or intersubjectivity that is expressed through the notion of a form of life. This means that before we can understand ourselves as acting subjects or interpret the actions of others as objects, we always already have to presuppose a form of life that is permeated with meaning. It is in this way that the subject/object dichotomy is replaced by a type of intersubjectivity or shared background.

We rely on the concepts, rules and meanings that have their place in the form of life, for what others are we to use? We talk among ourselves about our actions and interpret them in the concepts that are available to us: we are, as Taylor calls it, 'a self-interpreting animal'.⁷⁷ Winch makes the same point when he speaks of the rules governing sociological investigation and the rules governing 'what the sociologist is studying'.⁷⁸ What we have here is what has been called a 'double hermeneutic', that is to say, the study of society is doubly interpretative - the phenomena that need to be interpreted itself invoke meaningful concepts and actions that are interpretative.

Winch acknowledges the double hermeneutic, but he does not heed its implications. We can see one of his reifications at work once more when he remarks: "And it is these rules [the rules that govern what the sociologist is studying], 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."⁷⁹ Winch seems to consider the double hermeneutic as an opportunity to escape the hermeneutic circle in Taylor's sense, which is roughly the idea that we can only substitute one interpretation for another.⁸⁰ According to Taylor, (logical) empiricism tries to break out the circle by appealing to an objective standard, i.e., raw empirical data. In citations as the one above, Winch appears to attempt to do the very same thing, to latch onto social reality by means of the concepts that are at use in the particular form of life under study. But in so doing, he forgets that we always have to presuppose the hermeneutic circle, or a form of life, before we can make any sense of those concepts at all.

⁷⁷ Charles Taylor, 'Interpretation', p. 16.

⁷⁸ Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 81. The original contains italics.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁸⁰ See Charles Taylor, 'Interpretation', p. 6.

Hermeneutics, on the other hand, takes the hermeneutic circle seriously and acknowledge no final court of appeal, like brute data or concepts at home in the area under study: there is no object here that could serve as a criterion. All we can substitute for a bad interpretation is a better interpretation. That does not mean that there are no criteria for better interpretations as well. For example, Charles Taylor notes that the ‘superiority of one position over another will thus consist in this, that from the more adequate position one can understand one’s own stand and that of one’s opponent, but not the other way around.’⁸¹ It is just that we cannot step outside this circle of interpretations to check independently which one is correct.

There is, however, in *Idea of a Social Science* also evidence to the contrary, i.e., evidence for the proposition that Winch self-consciously acknowledges the hermeneutic circle. He complains about a tendency to put a mind over and against a world in order to be able to represent it: ‘Our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality is given for us in the language we use’ and ‘there is no way of getting outside the concepts in terms of which we think of the world’.⁸² At another stage, he contents that ‘reality has no key’ and that what is needed in case of a wrong interpretation is ‘a better interpretation, not something different in kind.’⁸³ It seems, then, that Winch is ambiguous in his writings that treat of the idea of a hermeneutic circle, but if we want to interpret him as a hermeneutic, we must accord greater weight to these latter remarks.

Also, and more importantly, we need to put a gloss on the two reifications that we have identified. The first, regarding epistemology, requires us to give a different reading of the term ‘nature’ in ‘the nature of social phenomena in general’. If we read it as signifying ‘essence’, and that is how we are used to reading it, it is clear that what we are looking for is a classic definition in terms of sufficient and necessary conditions. We should, rather, interpret it as ‘manner of being’ or the German ‘*Wesen*’, as it is current in the continental tradition. The manner of being of social phenomena designates what is involved in the constituting of these phenomena in relation to us.

This reading would harmonise better with Winch’s otherwise quite careful wordings. He never, for example, talks about a ‘characterisation’ of the nature of social phenomena, but speaks of ‘a discussion’ of them (p. 39), ‘an account’ (p. 41), ‘*what is involved* in the concept of a social phenomenon’ (p. 40). Also in the case of the notion of a form of life, he mentions that we have to ‘elucidate’ it (p. 40) and show ‘what is involved’ in it. In accordance with his use of the transcendental argument, Winch seems to be interested in what *constitutes* social phenomena, not what they *are*. With this gloss, we can see how we are to interpret his thesis that all human behaviour is rule-governed: meaningful behaviour is constituted by, it gains its sense for us from, its manner of being, that is, its being governed by rules.

We must, however, now that we have arrived at the subject matter of the second reification, not forget that these rules do not signify some ontological feature of the social world, but are a frame of reference for understanding this world. It may be a bit strong to express this point by saying that human behaviour is, in this sense, rule-governed. Rather, we should say that it is the idea that meaningful behaviour is rule-governed that makes understanding that behaviour possible.

With these two annotations, I believe Winch’s thesis escapes inconsistency. Of course, we may advocate other criticisms, but they would not involve his misuse of the transcendental argument. What becomes of his thesis is, I think, much like Taylor’s in his ‘Interpretation and the Sciences of Man’ - a hermeneutic thesis. The main difference is, however, that Taylor champions his program a lot less ambiguously and more self-consciously than Winch does.

⁸¹ Charles Taylor, ‘Interpretation’, p. 47.

⁸² Peter Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 14.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 96 and 106 respectively.

Conclusion

By interpreting Winch as a hermeneutic, we thus immunise him against the charge of inconsistency. It presents a way for him to escape the representationalist framework that is ultimately incompatible with the use of a transcendental argument, for representationalism relies on an ontological picture that serves as a criterion of correctness, whereas it is exactly such an ontological picture that is beyond the scope of the transcendental argument.

In the case of Peter Winch, we have seen that the ontological picture is this: meaningful behaviour is rule-governed. This picture provides an answer to the primary question of epistemology: what is the nature of social phenomena in general. He moves from an epistemological question, the inquiry into our understanding of the social world, to an ontological answer, the social world itself. Winch, moreover, equates the question of the nature of social phenomena in general with the elucidation of the notion of a form of life as such. He seems to think that a form of life *is comprised of* the rules that govern these social phenomena, whereas the former is only *constitutive of* the latter. This was our first reification.

In addition, the rules that govern meaningful behaviour, are, upon closer examination, impossible to discover at an ontological level. But, as we have seen, Winch contends that our acting must be the application of a rule. What we must say here is that our conception of rule-following is not an ontological, but an epistemological one: our behaviour makes sense to us in terms of rules. This was the nature of our second reification.

In our sense of bafflement that we could not systematically flesh out our intuition that our behaviour is rule-governed, it became clear that we were dealing with a picture. The picture is something that *we* place onto the world. It is our frame of reference through which we look at the social world, rather than that world itself: 'One thinks that one is tracing nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it.' (*PI*, §114) It is thus that Winch's *Idea of a Social Science* is glossed with a bitter irony. For it is exactly the reification of a picture that Wittgenstein believed he had effected in the *Tractatus* and that he repudiates in the *Philosophical Investigations*, the work on which Winch's book is based.

In conclusion, Winch's misuse of the transcendental argument and his fundamental opposition to Wittgenstein's philosophy may thus be said to overlap in the diagnosis that Wittgenstein makes of his own work in §104 of the *Philosophical Investigations*: 'One predicates of a thing what lies in the mode of representation.'