

*Ethics, Society and Politics: Themes from the
Philosophy of Peter Winch*
ed. by Michael Campbell and Lynette Reid

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Campbell, Michael and Lynette Reid (eds.): *Ethics, Society and Politics: Themes from the Philosophy of Peter Winch*. Nordic Wittgenstein Studies. Cham: Springer Verlag 2020.

The volume *Ethics, Society and Politics: Themes from the Philosophy of Peter Winch* (Springer 2020) is to be welcomed in several respects. The most obvious is that it represents a rare instalment of the debt to Peter Winch, one of the most insightful but also most underappreciated thinkers of post-war philosophy. However, unlike Colin Lyas' (1999) Winch monograph – until now probably the only book-length response to Winch's work – most pieces collected in this anthology respond to Winch's thought as a challenge and opportunity.

The collection originates from a 2017 conference devoted to Winch and organised by one of the editors, Michael Campbell. However, several chapters have been added to the collection, and several talks from the conference have already been published elsewhere (thus, as further readings, e.g. Hertzberg 2017, Richter 2018, Crary 2018, Beran 2018).

In the Introduction, the editors mention what seems to be a recurring (but no less true) *leitmotif* in works reviewing the post-war Wittgensteinian tradition (and its seminal figures, such as Winch, or Rush Rhees): that its philosophical significance has never been adequately matched by recognition and response from other thinkers, as the legacy of Winch and others was eclipsed by their contemporaries – Elizabeth Anscombe or Bernard Williams. Campbell and Reid attribute this to the difficulty presented by the internal unity of Winch's philosophy, mostly ignored in “a mistaken belief that there are no systematic connections between the different aspects of Winch's work” (p. 3). I am less sure. Williams' work (for instance) appears no less heterogeneous; also, speaking (apparently) to several distinct audiences – such as ethicists, political philosophers or philosophers of social science – could have amplified rather than restricted the thinker's renown.

The reason might have equally well had to do with the complexity and difficulty of Winch's discussions, or with the characteristically Wittgensteinian stress on taking the discussed topics seriously, rather than as an intellectual exercise.

Whichever reason was responsible for the lack of recognition, the interrelatedness of Winch's work is unquestionable. Though the chapters of the book can be (roughly) divided to those located in the areas of ethics, political philosophy and the philosophy of social science, the division is not neat, and topics and issues from all the "areas" emerge throughout.

The dominant emphasis is ethical; several chapters revisit, in minacious discussions, some of Winch's most famous and important arguments. Carolyn Wilde offers an overview of the key topics in Winch's ethics: the particularity and irreducibly personal character of our morality and moral agency, and the need for integrity therein. David Cockburn relates Winch to Wittgenstein's remarks on will, person and the relationship between language and reality. For Cockburn, neither "metaphysical" nor "ethical" considerations of these relationships are truly secondary to the other, representing two sides of the same coin. Takeshi Sato revisits Winch's famous argument against universalizability and places it into the context of responses to it: Karl-Otto Apel's (critical), David Wiggins' (positive), and – most interestingly – Richard Hare's, whose putative reaction to

Winch's criticisms of his work Sato ingeniously reconstructs. Kamila Pacovská presents a detailed discussion of the moral-psychological problem of perfectionism and humility, based on her close reading of Tolstoy's "Father Sergius", partly through Winch's own account, partly independently of it. Steven Burns explores the topics of unity and multiplicity in Winch's work and applies the notion of "primitive reactions" to show that those relating to trust and truth-telling are pervasive and make the moral form of life conceivable. The book is closed by Craig Taylor's chapter investigating a tension within Winch's remarks about the moral status of animals, between the earlier doubts about the intelligibility of attributing them the capacity to follow rules, and his later approach to the issues of mindedness through the Wittgensteinian notion of an "attitude towards a soul".

Of special interest are contributions dealing with politico-philosophical issues – topics that were at the forefront of Winch's own interest in his last years though most his writings about politics remain unpublished. The blurredness of the "disciplinary boundaries" between ethics and political philosophy is evident in the chapters about punishment. Lars Hertzberg explores the possible justification and justifiability of punishment through the lens of "primitive reactions" and stresses that some practices have no further justification and can only be properly understood in their interrelation with other kinds of our responses, centrally moral.

Lynette Reid offers thoughts parallel to Hertzberg's account, stressing that much as the practices of punishment are open to critique, they are indispensable for understanding and responding to what it means to commit a wrongdoing. She adds an "intensional" analysis of punishment as inherently *for* something. Two other chapters deal with more clear-cut political topics of law and authority. Olli Lagerspetz pays attention to the role of agency in establishing authority and institutions and to its relevance for the standing of those acting outside or against the institutions and the importance of dissent. Conversely, Marina Barabas suggests critically that the notion of political authority remains underdeveloped in Winch's writings (insufficiently distinct from familial or social) and that it requires being assigned an autonomous standing in order to be done justice to.

On the boundary between ethics and the philosophy of social science stands the elaboration by Camilla Kronqvist of Winch's idea of limiting concepts, with a special emphasis on sexual relations as explicitly relational and carrying specific meanings, personally specific and irreducible to normative concepts that we apply generally, in abstract. Mark Theunissen provides a detailed account of the history and reception of Winch's *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy* (1958) and argues that its resistance to the demand for a general "philosophical" fundament to social science is still largely unparalleled within the philosophy of social science. Christopher Winch follows the implication of

Peter Winch's thought for the philosophy of education, showing that education and learning itself cannot be understood outside the network of complex relationships in which it stands within a particular society.

The picture of the diversity of Winch's thought is supplemented by two chapters engaging with Winch's readings of other thinkers: Francesca Recchia Luciani pays attention to Winch's dialogue with Simone Weil, Sarah Tropper to Winch's – until recently (Winch 2020) largely unknown – "special relationship" with Spinoza.

Somewhat apart from the rest, Helen Geyer takes Winch's discussion of *Billy Budd* as a point of departure for her inquiry into the operatic depictions of the topics of old age and the change of ages.

This overview shows the diversity of Winch's thought but also its internal connections. The present anthology, rather than being heterogeneous, does justice, in an illuminating way, to this diversity. Not all the chapters will strike every reader as equally stimulating. Thus, for instance, I have to admit my difficulties with Geyer's piece, or with some of those that deal more closely with political topics. On the other hand, some of the chapters impressed me as going in great depth in the directions indicated by Winch: Cockburn's rehabilitation of the "metaphysical" lens on action as that which has been actually done, Reid's "intensional" analysis of punishment, Pacovská's exploration of the tension between moral perfection and humility, revolving round the paradox of

self-reflection and self-conception, or Kronqvist's application of Winch's social-scientific insights on the issue of the importance of our ideas about sexual relationships for these relationships.

Winch's philosophy represents a continent to explore; and the collection truthfully conveys this picture; being, as it were, in itself an island to explore, compressed into a smaller, manageable shape for a philosophical wanderer. Its apparent disadvantage – the authorial disunity – is in fact its advantage: for it will never let the reader forget that she must pay attention on every step and take the work of engaging with directions of thought opened by Winch as constantly beginning anew. A self-contained single-authored book might convey the impression that the job can be easily wrapped up and finished.

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