Winch and Romanticism

D. Z. PHILLIPS

It is no exaggeration to say that one of Winch's central concerns, throughout his philosophical work, was the sense *in which philosophy gives an account of the intelligibility of things, of the distinction between sense and nonsense. This account will be, in some sense or other, a* general *account. The vital question is: what kind of generality can this be?*[1]

Philosophising about the concept of a human being is fiendishly difficult. Part of the difficulty lies in this very way of talking: in talk about the *concept of a human being. Yet, we are not going to get very far in moral philosophy without reflecting on human beings and the lives they lead. But what kind of reflection is this? What difficulties stand in the way of it?*[2]

I

No contemporary philosopher has done more than Stanley Cavell to show the lessons we can learn from Wittgenstein's discussions of scepticism in his *Philosophical Investigations*. Like many others, I have benefited from his elucidation of those lessons. When I have been critical of his work, it is of his further claim that to learn their deepest message, 'one will have to take an interest in certain preoccupations of romanticism.'[3] This claim has been very influential, albeit in different ways, in the work of many philosophers.[4] In this

[1] D. Z. Phillips, 'Beyond Rules', *History of the Human Science,* Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 18.

[2] D. Z. Phillips, 'Philosophy and the Heterogeneity of the Human' in *Interventions in Ethics* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, and New York: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 251.

[3] Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 242.

[4] For example, Cora Diamond, 'Losing Your Concepts' in *Ethics,* Jan 1998 (for my criticisms see 'Philosophy and the Heterogeneity of the Human'); Richard Fleming, *The State of Philosophy* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press 1993), (see my review in *Philosophical Investigations,* Vol. 17, No. 2, 1994); Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994), (see my critical notice in

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paper I want to ask whether Peter Winch's philosophical work should be thought of as similar or dissimilar to what I shall call *philosophical romanticism*. The question is important, not only to avoid misunderstandings of Winch's work (an aim sufficient in itself), but because it throws light on the nature of philosophical enquiry.[5]

Before this question can be addressed directly, we need to bring out the emphases in philosophical romanticism with which one might be tempted to compare Winch's work. These are found in the discussions of our response to scepticism.

The sceptic asks us how we can know that we are ever in touch with reality. He seeks to create an unease in us by reminders of the ways we make mistakes in various contexts, and asks us how we know that we are not mistaken all the time. We may invoke criteria which tell us, for example, when another person is in pain, but the sceptic reminds us of people's pretence and exaggeration. Our criteria turn out to be disappointing, telling us we are right except when we are wrong! But then we realize that what the sceptic denies is not any specific claim we may make, but our total involvement with the concept of pain, including the distinctions we make between the genuine, pretence and exaggeration. To realize that the sceptic makes no claim is also to realize that life goes on without him, apparently unaffected by his scepticism. This may have the effect on us of not taking scepticism seriously. Cavell shows that this would be a big mistake. Although the sceptic does not realize it, he teaches us to appreciate that our life-with-concepts, to use Diamond's happy phrase, is not grounded in, or justified by, anything external to ourselves. As Mulhall says, 'The truth of the

[5] This paper grew from a desire to respond to objections made to my attribution of a contemplative conception of philosophy to Winch, one that I take to be opposed to philosophical romanticism. I am therefore grateful for instructive disagreements with David Cockburn, Michael McGhee, and Cora Diamond at an international conference on Winch's philosophy held at University of Wales, Swansea, Summer 1999.

Philosophical Investigations, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1996); Timothy Gould, *Hearing Things* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), (see my review in *Philosophical Investigations,* Vol. 22, No. 4, 1999). In the present paper I also discuss Richard Eldridge, *Leading a Human Life: Wittgenstein, Intentionality and Romanticism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

For my criticisms of Cavell see 'Cavell and the Limits of Acknowledgement' in *Philosophy's Cool Place* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999).

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matter is ... that this fundamental relation to the world (the human creature's basis in the world as a whole) is not one of knowing.'[6] We are *in* the world not the external knowers of it scepticism seduces us to want to be. The sceptic's denials are a denial of our human world.[7] When we learn this, we learn, at the same time, who we are. It is in this way, for Cavell, as Mulhall says, that 'the problems of philosophy become problems of self-knowledge.'[8]

It is at this point that Cavell links these problems of self-knowledge with certain themes in the romantic tradition. From the fact that there is nothing outside our life-with-concepts which determines or guarantees the form it takes, it is concluded that the responsibility falls on us to maintain, or refuse to maintain, our forms of life. This itself, however, seems to sublime the acts of 'maintaining' or 'refusing to maintain', as though they denote *the* relation in which we stand to our forms of life. If we participate in forms of life, they are maintained, but we do not participate *in order* to maintain them.[9] Of course, problems of maintenance can arise in various cases, but that is not the context Cavell has in mind. He argues that our refusal to maintain a form of life is what gives credence to the gap between ourselves and our world to which, in a confused way, the sceptic wants to draw our attention. Cavell claims 'that the *sense* of a gap originates in an attempt, or wish, to escape (to remain a "stranger" to, "alienated" from) these shared forms of life, to give up the responsibility of their maintenance'.[10]

It is not difficult to see how the notion of acknowledgment takes centre stage, at this point, for refusing to maintain our forms of life, for Cavell, is nothing less than a refusal to acknowledge human beings and human existence. For Cavell, this is a scepticism we can live, and it becomes a major theme in his later work. As Timothy Gould has shown, it is developed by using an analogy between texts and human beings. With both, acknowledgment involves a readiness to read them, and to be read by them. Lack of acknowledgment is the refusal to read, or to be read; a refusal which, it is claimed, indicates a suppression of what the text or human being has to say to us.

[6] Op. cit., p. 106.

[7] For a discussion of the way scepticism is a denial of 'the human', in various contexts, see my *Introducing Philosophy: The Challenge of Scepticism* (Oxford: Blackwell 1996).

[8] Op. cit., p. 107.

[9] For these criticisms see 'Cavell and the Limits of Acknowledgement' in *Philosophy's Cool Place*.

[10] Op. cit., p. 109.

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Thus, for Cavell, we are called to the endless task of reading, and receiving the readings of others.

Cavell's picture, as Mulhall says, 'has an extremely Romantic ring to it. The picture of the author or artist as a world-creating *and* a self-creating genius is central to Romanticism's understanding of its own nature, and Cavell has simply universalized or democratized it by attributing the capacity for such reanimation to anyone possessed by language.'[11] Cavell's picture is deeply influenced by psychoanalytic as well as democratic ideas. On such a view of the voices in our world, we can admit, as Gould does, that 'Each may find the other wanting and each might try to suppress what the other is seeking to say', but conclude, nevertheless, that 'each is made for— and by—the other.'[12]

So far from thinking, as I do, that Cavell's picture departs, decisively, from Wittgenstein's *Investigations,* Richard Eldridge argues that the picture is what the work shows us when read properly. Philosophical romanticism helps us to understand the otherwise puzzling ambivalence we feel, according to Eldridge, when we read the *Investigations*. On the one hand, we appreciate Wittgenstein's devastating exposures of our cravings for generality. On the other hand, the unending dialogue we are offered instead, with its minute grammatical observations, creates in us the sense of a large, unoccupied space, as though some important task which needs to be done, is being left undone. Philosophical romanticism explains this understandable tension. According to Eldridge, despite Wittgenstein's attacks on untenable generalities, a desire for unity does not go away. What sort of unity are we seeking? It is the desire for a transparency of consciousness in which each human being will fully acknowledge every other. We acknowledge Wittgenstein's critique of generality by admitting that all attempts to give a final substantive content to this transparency have failed, and that, in fact, it is unrealizable. We go beyond simply noting differences between ourselves, however, by noting how the unrealizable ideal gives a unity to our attitude to others. Eldridge says, 'The moral—a more or less typical romantic one—is that a certain continuousness of aspiration and self-revision in culture, against the commands of dogma, must be accepted, even embraced'[13]. The moral is there to be seen in the literary form of the *Investigations* if we see it as 'a dramatic text of fragments, in which elegy, expressing a sense of lost or never quite fully realizable human possibilities, is blended

[11] Op. cit., p. 166.
[12] Op. Cit., p. 214.
[13] Op. Cit., p. 7.

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with quest romance, expressing a sense of movement towards those possibilities of continuing aspiration ... that form itself helps to articulate and argue by exemplification for a picture of human beings as continuous self-interrogators and bearers of aspiration.'[14]

According to Eldridge, the price of not accepting this romantic picture of ourselves is a high one: 'Only through such an embrace will it be possible to avoid the reductions of philosophical thinking to either complacent dogmatism or empty self-congratulatory nihilism, and of human life to subservience to either stale, external powers or wayward desires.'[15] This conflation of philosophical and personal consequences is a major feature of philosophical romanticism. It is facilitated by Cavell's notion of 'the sharedness of human life'. How can anyone, even philosophers, not be part of it? Influenced by such thoughts, Diamond sees a continuity between moral philosophy and the reflective aspect of our moral life. When philosophers, on her view, fail to do justice to the sharedness of human life, they are guilty of the very dissociation from the human which their philosophical work threatens to make invisible. Diamond regrets that 'our practice of philosophy encourages the idea that such judgments have no part in philosophical thinking, that it does not call on a responsiveness involving the whole mind.'[16]

It is no part of my criticism to deny that philosophical confusions can be forms of dissociation from forms of human life. I have spent a considerable time in ethics and the philosophy of religion giving examples of precisely that on *both* sides of religious and secular divides. But when the claim is linked to the conceptual parameters of philosophical romanticism, the selective examples fail to do justice to the heterogeneity of human life.[17] Failures to do justice to this heterogeneity are seldom exposed so often, and so consistently, as they are in the work of Peter Winch. But if that is *so* obvious, whence comes the temptation to align his thought with philosophical romanticism?

[14] Op. cit., p. 10.
[15] Ibid., pp. 7–8.
[16] Op. cit., p. 275.
[17] There are obvious philosophical and moral dangers in such judgments. Philosophical analyses should account for differing perspectives on human life. Neither can one assume that philosophical insensitivity *must* reflect a moral insensitivity in the personal life of the philosopher. For a fuller discussion of these dangers see 'Philosophy and the Heterogeneity of the Human'.

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II

There is so much in Winch's work which suggests that one should conclude that any attempt to compare it with philosophical romanticism is so bizarre as to be unworthy of further discussion. While I can sympathize with this reaction, I think there is profit in exploring the temptation to do so. Before we do so, however, let us remind ourselves of those features of Winch's work which make the effort seem pointless. These have to do with Winch's attack on our craving for generality.

In an early paper, 'Nature and Convention',[18] Winch tried to argue from the general fact that we are language-users to the conclusion that we must all regard truthfulness as a moral virtue. He came to see that he was mistaken in thinking 'that an argument along these lines was sufficient to establish that truthfulness must be regarded as a *moral virtue* in any possible human society.'[19] He came to this conclusion as a result of a critique of his argument by R. F. Holland:

> 'For the argument neither claims nor implies that truthfulness must exist to the same degree and have the same significance in all societies or among all peoples in a particular society. Well then, if the concern of some of them for truth be such that they would hazard all their prospects for it there is something yet to be accounted for. For the only truth thus far explained is the sort that is told in the degree to which it supports the existing organization or gets you by without disrupting the existing social pattern. All that is necessary for this is a modicum of truth or something that approaches it yet keeps its distance, a conventional sort of standard truthfulness, but anyway a relative truthfulness—even if it be arguable that in some society, in view of the advanced state of commerce say, the standard might have to be very precise or very subtle. I should be sceptical about "*the* standard", but anyhow my point is that alongside it there could co-exist at least for some people in the society a concern with truth of an altogether different character, in which *not to falsify* became a spiritual demeanour. Where then could this come from?'[20]

Holland, as Winch says, 'goes on to point out that the possibility of

[18] Peter Winch, 'Nature and Convention' in *Ethics and Action* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

[19] Ibid., 'Introduction', p. 4.

[20] R. F. Holland, 'Is Goodness a Mystery?' in *Against Empiricism,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

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such a demeanour will have to be sought not in what he calls the "life-style" of a community but in that of the individual in whom it is manifested.[21] Yet, as Winch shows, when one does turn one's attention to individuals, no generality of moral judgment emerges. In his neglected paper, 'The Universalizability of Moral Judgements',[22] Winch discusses the decision of Captain Vere, in Melville's *Billy Budd* to hang Billy, a seaman of angelic disposition, for striking the satanic master-at-arms, Claggart, who has been persecuting him, and who dies as a result of falling from Billy's blow. Vere is faced by a moral dilemma between the terribleness of hanging a man surely 'innocent before God', and the demands of the military code. Winch says that he could not have come to Vere's decision. He would face the same facts, the only difference between him and Vere being that he simply could not hang a man such as Billy, 'innocent before God'.

According to the principle of universalizability in ethics, Winch can claim his decision to be a moral one only if he holds that anyone, in the same circumstances, must come to the same decision. But Winch does not want to say this of Vere. In fact, he says that Vere did what was right for him. In his decision he discovers, at the same time, what is morally possible for him. It is important to realize that Winch is not asking us to accept his moral reaction to Vere's decision. He has no philosophical objection to those who agree with Vere's verdict, or to those who conclude that what Vere did was wrong. He is concerned to preserve a logical or conceptual space in which these judgments can be themselves.

Defenders of the principle of universalizability, aware of this diversity, and wanting to be sensitive to it, point out that people are rarely in 'the same circumstances' the principle requires. They include, in the circumstances, 'how a problem strikes a person'. But that will include his *moral* reaction to it. Once that is admitted, however, as Winch says, 'the last vestige of force is removed from the universalizability thesis'.[23]

Winch's emphasis on 'how a situation strikes a person morally', plays an important role in his opposition to the generality of moral theory. This opposition is expressed in his claim that morality is not a guide to conduct.[24] According to some philosophers, we live in a difficult world, faced with alternative courses of action. Morality, it is said, is a guide around these difficulties. But, as Winch says, but

[21] Winch, 'Introduction', *Ethics and Action*, p. 5.
[22] See *Ethics and Action*.
[23] Ibid., p. 169.
[24] See 'Moral Integrity' in *Ethics and Action*.

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for morality there would be no difficulty. Morality often says, 'Not that way'. It is not a guide around a situation, but is constitutive of one's perspective on it. But perspectives vary. One cannot reduce them to a single form. Winch says that within moral philosophy 'any attempt at formulating conclusive and definitive positions is more likely than not to lead to distortion and dogmatism'.[25] Philosophy cannot arbitrate between different moral perspectives and judgments. In fact, he concludes, 'philosophy can no more show a man what he should attach importance to than geometry can show a man where he should stand'.[26]

As a result of conclusions such as these, how can anyone be tempted to see any affinity between Winch's work and philosophical romanticism? The answer lies in two aspects of Winch's work we have yet to discuss: first, the generality he sees involved in philosophical understanding; and second, the generality involved in the recognition that one lives in a human neighbourhood.

III

The passage I used as the first motto for this paper is taken from 'Beyond Rules', where I discussed the development of Winch's view concerning *the kind* of generality there is in the intelligibility of things. With respect to this generality, Winch rejected two conceptions of philosophy. First, he rejected the generality of a master-scientist conception of philosophy, which claims that whereas other disciplines give an account of some aspect of reality, philosophy gives an account of reality as such. Second, he rejected the under-labourer conception of philosophy, in which generality is found, not in philosophy's subject matter, but in its method—a method of clearing up confusions on other sites, since philosophy has no site of its own. Note the parallel between these two conceptions of philosophy and the ambivalence between them experienced by Eldridge in reading Wittgenstein's *Investigations*.

As a result of these rejections, Winch did not abandon the view that an important generality belongs to philosophical enquiry, any more than Eldridge did. In his early work, *The Idea of Social Science,* Winch argued that a general account of the intelligibility of our practices can be given by emphasizing that they are all rule-governed. But the rules vary with the practice. Thus there is no reason to think 'that the results of all ... these activities should all add up

[25] Winch, 'Introduction' in *Ethics and Action*, p. 1.

[26] Winch, 'Moral integrity' *in Ethics and Action,* p. 191.

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to one grand theory of reality.'[27] In this way, the rules can account for intelligibility, generality and diversity. But through the influence of Rush Rhees' classic paper, 'Wittgenstein's Builders',[28] Winch became critical of the role he assigned to rule-following. The analogy between the rules of games and language can be pressed too far. The games we play do not add up to one big game, but language games belong to *the same* language. There is a generality involved in that identity which has yet to be accounted for. It will not do to say, as Wittgenstein did at one stage, that the unity of language is that of a family of language games.

Winch came to emphasize, as Rhees had done, that what we say in one context would not be language at all but for its bearings and connections with what is said in other contexts. In a further development of his views, Rhees says, again and again, that language has sense if living makes sense.[29] What we say is said in the course of the lives we lead; it is said at a certain time and place; in a language which has been inherited; a language with its styles of humour, sarcasm and irony; we speak with other people, people with a common history; with people with knowledge of other peoples and other histories. We speak to family, friends, acquaintances, and passersby. What would be the rules for all that? What would be the rules for our reactions to it? What are the rules for the courses their conversations take? As Rhees used to say, we do not learn to speak by speaking to everyone about everything.

Neither Winch nor Rhees regarded language as one big conversation in which we are all engaged, whereas admirers of the romantic ideal *do* seem to regard the conversations of mankind, at any present time, as answerable to the ideal of the hope of transparency of consciousness, a mutual acknowledgment between human beings. I say conversations *at any present time,* since Diamond, for example, admits that there are modes of thought belonging to times past and cultures other than our own, which can be acknowledged without calling for an evaluation from us. In our own time, however, Diamond, like Eldridge and Gould, thinks that evaluation *is* called for, since their homogeneous conception of the human does not allow for final fundamental disagreements in this context.

[27] Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science,* 2nd edn., (London: Routledge 1995), p. 19.

[28] Rush Rhees, Wittgenstein's Builders', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,* 1959–60, reprinted in *Discussions of Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).

[29] Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse,* D. Z. Phillips (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

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Winch's attitude is very different from that found in philosophical romanticism. First, he is not so sanguine about practices in cultures other than our own. In 'Understanding a Primitive Society', Winch's solution to how we can understand such practices, for example, African magic, was to say that our rules are open-ended and capable of extension.[30] Even here, Winch notes that a failure to see any point in practices other than our own may indicate a pointlessness in our own lives in certain respects. By the time of his late essay, however, 'Can We Understand Ourselves?,[31] Winch no longer speaks in this way. He now emphasizes an indeterminacy in the notion of 'understanding' which talk of rules cannot capture. Problems of understanding are no longer said to be due simply to the distinction between our culture and others. On the contrary, Winch shows that we may have more difficulty understanding certain features of our own culture, than we do in understanding certain features of other cultures or centuries. 'Understanding', Winch emphasizes, is a matter of being able to see the point in things; it is a matter of acknowledgment.

Winch's conception of philosophy as contemplative, endless, open-ended discussion, may be confused with philosophical romanticism's task of acknowledging human voices, and refusing to accept anything offered as 'the best case', but they are very different. Winch says that his picture 'does *not* mean that one's views are subject to the test of some ultimate criterion, the criterion of what does and does not belong to human nature',[32] whereas, as we have seen, philosophical romanticism advocates a specific picture of human beings as 'continuous self-interrogators and bearers of aspiration'.[33] The openness of philosophical enquiry in which *different* modes of acknowledgment are recognized conceptually, must not be confused with the *specific* mode of acknowledgment advocated in philosophical romanticism. For example, while some may seek greater accord with others, in the way romanticism advocates, others, confronted by opposing voices, will stand firm because they can do no other. They may be, but need not be, suppressing what those other voices are saying. They may understand them all too well, and want to have nothing to do with them. To deny this attitude, *in the name of philosophy,* is to deny a conceptual respect for differences.

[30] Peter Winch, 'Understanding a Primitive Society' in *Ethics and Action*.

[31] Winch, 'Can We Understand Ourselves?', *Philosophical Investigations,* Vol. 20, No. 3, 1997.

[32] Winch, 'Human Nature' in *Ethics and Action*, p. 88.

[33] Eldridge, op. cit., p. 10.

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Winch is insisting on a difference between the recognition of what is possible for human beings, and the recognition of what is possible for oneself. The latter is not *underwritten* by philosophy. Someone may object: what if, in the course of philosophical discussion, I come to recognize a possibility as the only one for me? Why deny that philosophy has led me to that conclusion?[34] That biographical fact is not being denied. To be a philosophical thesis, however, one would have to hold that proper attention to argument would show this possibility to be the only possible one. A personal conviction has been confused with a philosophical thesis. The thesis is *intellectually* corrupt, Winch argues, because it obscures other possibilities towards which one may be personally tolerant, intolerant, or indifferent.

Winch's conclusions cannot be avoided by an appeal to Rhees' insistence that our uses of language bear on each other in innumerable ways, since these ways will themselves include proximities and distances, reconcilable and irreconcilable differences. Where these begin and end is not something philosophy can determine. For example, Winch points out how 'Gandhi's ascetic morality can hardly be formulated except by specifying a relation in which it stands, to a conception of morality like Orwell's and *vice versa*'.[35] But he also points out that what separates them cannot be appreciated if we assume that the conflict can only be genuine if we can specify what would settle it. In fact, Winch says, 'There is no ground whatsoever *a priori* for expecting the emergence of some position free of difficulties which everyone would be able to accept.'[36]

Does this conclusion mean that someone could not live by the ideal proposed in philosophical romanticism? Not necessarily, since as Winch says, there is a 'difference between someone who accepts and lives by a position with clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, of where it may lead him, of what the alternatives are, and someone who does not understand these things.'[37] The trouble

[34] I owe this question to David Cockburn.

[35] Winch, 'Ethical Relativism' in *Trying to Make Sense* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 188.

[36] Ibid., p. 189.

[37] Ibid. There is a generality here which Winch goes beyond. For example he recognizes that differences show, not simply in the priorities which people give to alternatives, but in what they take their alternatives to be. Condemning Billy Budd was not an alternative for Winch. Unlike Vere, he had no dilemma.

Winch also continues his present point by saying: 'But if we do not understand, we are in no position to know what we are getting indignant about or, as the case may be, what forgiving' ('Ethical Relativism', p. 193).

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is that the *philosophical* presentation of romanticism shows that these things are *not* understood.

Let us consider some of the weaknesses of the romantic ideal, for example, the claim that 'self-conscious self-unity is achieved ... only when each person is recognized by all others as an expresser of free spontaneity and rationality.'[38] How is this similar to, or different from, the Christian conception of the neighbour? Are they meant to be higher forms of self-conscious unity than anything realizable in special relationships?[39] Put alongside them the fact that most people, I suspect, would count themselves fortunate to have five close friends to whom they could speak about anything—and I mean *anything*—if they wanted to. Does it make sense to reject this as 'the best case'—as something to be transcended by the romantic ideal? What would we make of someone who claimed to have a hundred close friends? Similar questions arise in relation to other relationships too, such as those between husband and wife, or parent and child. I do not know the answers to these difficulties, where philosophical romanticism is concerned, but let us suppose they could be overcome or, at least, recognized as limitations. It *still* would not follow that relations to human beings, in order to be *true human relations, must* conform to the romantic ideal. But if that is so, what constitutes a contemplative, philosophical attitude to the ideal? According to Winch, 'It means only that new difficulties and perhaps new ways of meeting the difficulties, are always lurking below the horizon and that discussion continues. Sometimes, if one is lucky, the discussion clarifies or extends one's conception of what is possible for human beings. But it is no use saying that this is contingent on what *is* or *is not* possible for human beings; for our only way of arriving at a view about that is by continuing to try to deal with the difficulties that arise in the course of the discussion.[40]

As we have seen, however, romanticism is not content to be regarded as one possibility for human beings among others. In the

[38] Eldridge, op. cit., p. 32.

[39] I have posed this question for Kierkegaard's comparison of love of the neighbour with erotic love and friendship in *Works of Love* in 'Kierkegaard and Loves that Blossom', to appear in *Kierkegaard's Works of Love,* published by de Gruyter.

[40] Winch, 'Human Nature', *Ethics and Action*, p. 88.

But in 'Can We Understand Ourselves?' Winch recognizes other cases. For example, in his horrified reaction to the fatal shooting of a footballer who scored an own goal, his revulsion is linked to an incomprehension about how this could have been done. Faced by great evil, our response may well not be one of comprehension. But these are matters I cannot pursue here.

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philosophical presentation of it we have discussed, it is claimed that it *must* be embraced if dogma in philosophy and subservience in life are to be avoided. There is no use saying that this *is* what our-life-with-the concept of 'the human is like', since this can only emerge in discussion and, in fact, has failed to do so. If these objections are not considered, philosophical romanticism becomes an example of the very dogma in philosophy it claims to oppose.

Wittgenstein was interested in the phenomenon of dogma in philosophy, since he saw it linked to the fact that the obstacle to accepting philosophical clarification is not an obstacle of the intellect, but an obstacle of the will. The difficulty does not lie in the intellectual complexity of what is being proposed, but in the unwillingness to give up a way of thinking which acceptance would involve. For example, there is no intellectual difficulty in the suggestion that not all dreams are sexual. Yet, Wittgenstein said, if we could convince Freud of that fact, his response would have been, 'In that case, what are all dreams?' He could not drop the 'all', the desire for one all-embracing account. There is no intellectual difficulty in the suggestion that romanticism is one view of human life among others, but it becomes *the* picture of human beings in philosophical romanticism, a picture which will not be given up. Rush Rhees says that Wittgenstein recognized these obstacles, not only in others, but in himself. 'It is hard to get rid of a powerful mythology; hard to see through and fight against a powerful mythology. And unless you do it, then your mind will stay ill with something more crippling than stiffness of the joints. (In a remark in a notebook of 1944 he wrote: "I, like all the people I know, find it so much easier not to think than to think".)'[41]

If we see the romantic ideal for what it is, does it follow that it must be renounced? I want to compare it with what Wittgenstein says about the fate of metaphysics. Rhees says that after 1931, Wittgenstein did not speak of *renouncing* metaphysics, but of appreciating what is going on in it: 'I remember him telling, in 1938, of discussions he had been having with Ursell regarding Cantor's "diagonal proof" of transfinite cardinals. Ursell agreed finally with Wittgenstein's criticisms, but he added: "Still I must admit that such proofs have a very great charm for me." When he was told of this, Wittgenstein said with a smile of real pleasure: "Well that is fine, if anyone can say that. They have no charm whatever for *me*. But someone like Ursell finds a charm in them, O.K." His point was that Ursell was not any longer trying to find some *further*

[41] Rush Rhces, 'On Wittgenstein', D. Z. Phillips (ed.), *Philosophical Investigations*, 2001.

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significance in Cantor's proofs; he recognized that it was just that they did have a certain charm for him.'[42] Ursell is no longer saying that Cantor's proofs are what they are not.

Might not the same conclusions be drawn about romanticism? No doubt its ideal has a great charm for many, although it has none whatsoever for me. If they had settled for that, they would not be saying that the ideal is something it is not. They would not be trying to find a *further* significance in it as a philosophical thesis about human existence. For that very reason, however, the thesis is hard to give up, and criticism of it hard to accept. But this may be an obstacle of the will. Rhees wrote as follows of Wittgenstein:

> 'In one of his depressed moods (about 1943 or 1944) he was wondering whether there was any point in trying to publish his work. Supposing it were there in print, so that people could read it if they wanted to. They would still not be brought to think along the lines he was trying to open up. I said that one of the functions of philosophy was to combat sophistry. And I said there would be value even in his negative criticisms, like his criticism of "the Cantor business". Wittgenstein replies, "Certainly you can criticize the Cantor business. You can knock the Cantor business sky-high. But people will go on clinging to it nevertheless. They have other reasons for wanting to cling to it."'[43]

Cavell, and some of those influenced by him, speak sometimes of the decline, or even demise, of large religious conceptions of human life in our culture. Is romanticism a substitute? Are there reasons, moral and political, for wanting to cling to the ideal as though it were a general philosophical thesis?

IV

We have discussed the temptation of aligning the generality Winch sees in tasks of philosophical acknowledgement, with the generalities in philosophical romanticism. A stronger temptation for such alignment, in some ways, is found in Winch's treatment of the generality involved in acknowledging that we live in a human neighbourhood, hence the second motto I selected for this essay.

In 'Eine Einstellung zur Seele'[44] Winch discusses the generality involved in our response to others as human beings captured in

[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] See *Trying to Make Sense*.

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Wittgenstein's remark, 'My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul'.[45] He is successful in showing that the generality of this response is neither a generalization from particular beliefs, nor a summation of them. If it were the former, it would make sense to say, as it clearly does not, that, on some occasions the others are not human beings. If it were the latter, our response to others as human beings would be less certain than our particular beliefs, which it plainly is not. Winch argues that the generality in our response to human beings is found elsewhere, namely, in a *range* of expectations we take for granted with respect to them. I think that Winch is essentially right in reaching these conclusions. We do not react to others in these characteristic ways because we first believe that they are human beings. Rather, our sense of the human is shown *in* our reactions.

It is important to recognize how congenial these conclusions are to philosophical romanticism. It, like Winch, is opposed to the idea that our conception of a human being is essentially biological and that our responses to others are responses to that fact. Both agree that our sense of 'the human' is to be found in our life-with-the-concept of 'the human'. As Diamond says, 'What it is to grasp the biological concept is nothing like what it is to grasp the concept of a human being.[46] Those who want to reduce 'the human' to 'the biological' are accused of insensitivity to this fact, but in this matter, Winch, in the eyes of philosophical romanticism, is on their side of that divide.

There is another feature of Winch's discussion of our response to others as human beings which makes him seem more akin to philosophical romanticism than he actually is. Despite the emphasis on the heterogeneity of the human, so clearly emphasized in other papers, in 'Eine Einstellung zur Seele' Winch gives too homogenous an account of our response to others as human beings, emphasizing our sympathetic responses at the expense of our unsympathetic responses. In my criticisms of this tendency I emphasized the importance of the *mixed* character of our primitive responses to others. Both are integral to our understanding of 'the human'.[47] For the most part, Wittgenstein emphasized our sympathetic reactions to suffering, saying that pity is one form of the conviction that another is suffering. But he also said: 'Nobody likes being con-

[45] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), II iv.

[46] Op. cit., p. 265.

[47] I have emphasized this in my criticisms of Winch in 'My Neighbour and My Neighbours' in *Interventions in Ethics*.

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fronted by a wounded spaniel. Remember that. It is much easier patiently—and tolerantly[48]—to avoid the person you have injured than to approach him as a friend. You need courage for that.'[49]

If we ignore the mixed character of our reactions to others, we will equate our sensibilities with respect to 'the human' simply with moral sensibilities.[50] But greater difficulties develop if we ignore the variety of forms moral sensibilities may take. We will assume, wrongly, that a sense of 'the human' is tied, necessarily, to one specific form. This is what happens in philosophical romanticism which emphasizes that we have no choice concerning what that form is. Thus, when Winch, discussing the spiritual dimension he finds in Wittgenstein's work, says that 'a lack of clarity ... can have grave implications for [a person's] relation to life',[51] he will be heard, by philosophical romantics, as reminding us of a sensibility with respect to 'the human' expressed in their own ideals of human relationships. To be clear about human relationships, as Eldridge said, is to embrace the romantic picture. Diamond, too, suggests that this must be so. To think otherwise, she argues, is to deny the solidarity expressed in 'the sharedness of human life'. What that 'sharedness' amounts to 'has nothing to do with our *choosing* to evaluate things one way or another. I cannot choose what weight it shall have that I ... on some occasion look at you with a look that leaves you a mere circumstance and not a human being.'[52] I certainly agree with Diamond that our sense of the human is not a matter of evaluations we choose to add to a biological conception of human beings. Our values are constitutive of many aspects of that sense. But those values are themselves mixed. Philosophical sensitivity to 'the human' must take cognisance of that fact. The importance of doing so can be shown by taking up Diamond's example of the look we may give another.

Winch has shown how clarity about the mind-body problem can enrich our sense of human relationships. He refers to a letter Wittgenstein wrote to M. O'C. Drury when the latter was having doubts about his vocation as a doctor. Wittgenstein wrote: 'Look at your patients more closely as human beings in trouble and enjoy

[48] 'In the German there is a play on the words *geduldig and duldend,* which intensifies the irony which I have been unable to catch in English' (Tr.).

[49] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value,* trans. Peter Winch, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p. 11.

[50] See 'My Neighbour and My Neighbours'.

[51] Winch, 'Discussion of Malcolm's Essay' in Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein—A Religious Point Of View*?, edited with a Response by Peter Winch, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 130.

[52] Op. cit., p. 265.

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more the opportunity you have to say "good night" to so many people ... I think in some sense you don't look at people's faces closely enough.[53] Winch then asks us to compare these remarks with Wittgenstein's discussion of how a sensation like pain can be related to the human body:

> 'But isn't it absurd to say of a *body* that it has pain?—And why does one feel an absurdity in that? In what sense is it true that my hand does not feel pain, but I in my hand?

What sort of issue is: Is it the *body* that feels pain?—How is it to be decided? What makes it plausible to say that it is *not* the body?—Well, something like this: If someone has a pain in his hand, then the hand does not say so (unless it writes it) and one does not comfort the hand, but the sufferer: one looks into his face.'[54]

Winch responds: 'The last sentence gives me a wonderful sense of a fog suddenly lifting; the confused shapes that loom up and disappear again in the familiar philosophical discussions of "mind and body" vanish and I am left with a clear view of something, very familiar of which I had not noticed the importance. Its "importance" lies in the first instance in its relation to the philosophical discussion. At the same time in attending to this minute detail which plays such an enormous role in our relations to each other, my sense of the dimensions of those relations in both transformed and enriched: when comforting someone who has been hurt, I look into the sufferer's eyes. Here is an illustration of what Wittgenstein may have meant in suggesting (in the passage I took as my epigraph) that the quoted verses from Longfellow could serve as his motto.[55] "The gods" are there in "each minute and unseen part"; and to make them apparent we must *pay attention* to those details. In Wittgenstein's letter to Drury precisely the detail is at the centre of his spiritual advice—"I think in some sense you don't look at people's faces closely enough"—but that spiritual dimension is discernible clearly enough in *Philosophical Investigations* too.'[56]

I want to turn immediately from this example to very different ones found in *The Life and Adventures of Matthew Pavilchenko*, a short story by Isaac Babel. Babel's stories are born of a tension

[53] Ibid. Quoted by Winch on pp. 125–6.
[54] Wittgenstein, *Investigations* I: §286.
[55] In the elder days of art
Builders wrought with greatest care
Each minute and unseen part,
For the gods are everywhere.
[56] Winch, 'Discussion of Malcolm's Essay', p. 130.

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within him between the Jewish spirituality he was brought up in, and the warrior ethic of the Red Cossacks with whom he rode. Babel disappeared in one of Stalin's concentration camps. As Lionel Trilling says, 'The opposition of these two images made his art—but it was not a dialectic his Russia could permit.'[57]

In the story I want to discuss, Matthew, who has become a Red general, returns to visit a terrible revenge on a former master who had abused him:

> 'Then I stamped on my master ... trampled on him for an hour or maybe more. And in that time I got to know life through and through. With shooting—I'll put it this way—with shooting you only get rid of a chap. Shooting's letting him off, and too damn easy for yourself. With shooting you'll never get to the soul, to where it is in a fellow and how it shows itself. But I don't spare myself, and I've more than once trampled an enemy for over an hour.'

Perhaps the story is meant to be indeterminate with respect to the reactions it provokes. Read in one way, it can be seen simply as an attempt to break a man's soul, something trampling succeeds in doing, but shooting does not. My point about our 'sense of the human' is that it includes these mixed reactions. *Both* reactions to suffering in the human face, the desire to break as much as the desire to comfort, are in contrast to a merely biological conception of a human being.

More important, for our present purposes, is that what constitutes sympathetic reactions to suffering vary enormously, as illustrated in an alternative reading of Babel's story. Matthew's enemies are certainly going to die, but it is thought important to give them an opportunity to show what they're made of. 'With shooting you only get rid of a chap.' The desire is to get at the soul, 'to where it is in a fellow and how it shows itself'. For that you need to look into a person's face. This is certainly the moral in another story in which a priest has been left until last in the execution of hostages. The Cossacks are certain that he will die with a style one can admire and learn from. In the event, the priest grovels and pleads for his life. He is shot quickly; they get rid of the chap; there is nothing of interest in the face.

Here, in Babel, we have conceptions very different from those in philosophical romanticism. If they are denied, cannot it be said that certain texts are being ignored, that one is looking at some faces, but not others? If they are not ignored and one does look, does not the discussion clarify and extend one's conception of what is possible

[57] Lionel Trilling, 'Introduction' to Isaac Babel, *Collected Stories* (London: Penguin Books, 1961).

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for human beings? That is why I concluded, in my criticisms of Winch, that it is a mistake to think of 'the attitude towards a soul', of which Wittgenstein speaks, as itself a specific *substantive* attitude: 'Rather, our conviction that the others are human beings is held fast by, and has its sense in the context of, the diverse reactions we have discussed. We would not know what to make of someone who suggested that the creatures we react to might not be human beings, since he, though raising the question, would himself exhibit characteristic reactions towards them.[58]

How is philosophy's contemplative task related to this mixed scene? It strives to do conceptual justice to it, faced by temptations to give general accounts of human existence. The romantic ideals are part of that mixed scene, as are those of Babel's Matthew Pavilchenko who says, 'You see, I want to know what life really is, what life's like down your way'. Allegiance to particular ideals may blind one to other possibilities. I have suggested that this happens in the case of philosophical romanticism.

Winch finds the contemplative philosophical tradition in Plato (writing, in dialogue form), in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works, in Simone Weil's depiction, in her essay on *The Iliad,* of a morality which is not her own, and in Wittgenstein's battles with the voices in his *Investigations*.

The philosophical tradition, Winch says, 'has concerned itself precisely with the problem how to present moral or religious world-views in such a way that the passion behind them, which has to be evident if one is to recognize them for what they are, is clearly in view, along with the conception of the good that they embody, while at the same time equal justice is done to alternative and even hostile conceptions. Achieving this is a task of enomious difficulty, both at the technical level and also because of the moral demands it makes on the writer, who will of course him or herself have strong moral or religious commitments and will also be hostile to certain other possibilities.'[59]

At the end of our discussion, this is the moral which philosophical romanticism will not embrace: that the moral demands on a philosophical writer involve him in doing conceptual justice to moral views other than his own. This is what philosophical romanticism fails to achieve, but is what Winch strives after with such passion. That is why the distance between them is so great.

[58] 'My Neighbour and My Neighbours', p. 239.

[59] Winch, 'Doing Justice or Giving the Devil his Due' in *Can Religion Be Explained Away*?, D. Z. Phillips (ed.), (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1996), p. 173.

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