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4-29-03

In light of two specific passages from Peter Winch's book, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (second edition), I will reflect on what is involved in learning to act morally. As well as exploring to what degree Winch avoids Relativism and provides space for objectivity in ethics.

The first passage, "...the notion of following a rule is logically inseparable from the notion of making a mistake" (32), is key to developing an understanding of what is involved in learning to act morally with respect and consistency to Winch. In order to act morally, this passage is basically telling us that we must have knowledge of both sides of rule in order to define it. For Winch, problems arise in consistency of moral action when the rules of moral action are not defined. In learning to act morally, the rules that are followed are more easily elucidated by defining what also constitutes a violation of such rules. Defining what constitutes a violation of the rules helps to set the parameters of what is accepted as moral action. Only when we have pushed the rules to the limit of acceptability can we find out what will be tolerated by the group or society, which judges the standards of morality.

The second passage (see attached sheet) also applies to learning to act morally, in Winch's view. This passage is about predicting an action or reaction in accordance with the social rule, which is applicable to a given situation. The fact that Winch uses numbers in his example is irrelevant, they only serve to help make his point clear. It is often the case that a person is in a situation that they have never been in before, and an action in such a situation may require moral action. We learn from our experiences, and here

Winch is demonstrating one formula from which we can derive the correct way to react to a rule. It is not, as Winch suggests, always practical to “copy down” a series of actions or reactions that a person may have used or seen used in a previous situation. Sometimes, these new and unfamiliar situations require new and unfamiliar moral actions. So, in learning a series of morals (substituted for Winch’s “numbers”), it is involved in “being able to go on” with moral actions that have not previously been exposed to a person. This “involve[s] doing something different from what was originally shown,” but also, must be “in relation to a rule that is being followed” (59). This helps to breed consistency in moral action by keeping a central rule, or set of rules, the focus of each situation.

This consistency in moral action that Winch has noted helps avoid relativism. If there must be a dedication to a rule, or set of rules, in each situation it is then, it is possible that the reinforcement of the rule(s) at hand can help avoid relativism. There must be dedication to a set rule(s) as shown by the second passage, on page 59, in that a person would not be able to make sense out of an attempt to act morally or learn moral action if they were constantly changing the rules that they were basing their attempt on. This contradiction is clarified by the example Winch gives where a person is asked to continue a set of numbers. They try to, but the other person (who posed the question) continues to say they are wrong. The problem here is not that the “rule(s)” are changing, but that the first person that is attempting to continue the number set has not realized that the rule is that s/he will always be wrong. Again, we have found consistency of the rule. Winch also suggests that if no consistency can be found, despite all efforts, that a rule(s) is not actually being followed. With this last condition relativism is then avoided on a case-by-case basis.

I point out that it is avoided on a case-by-case basis because Winch cannot justify a complete avoidance of relativism. The first passage we are considering of Winch's work helps us understand this point. The notion of a rule must have accompanying it the notion of breaking the rule ("or making a mistake"). That this opposite notion exists demonstrates that at least one other person has attempted to apply this as their rule. If no one had ever opposed the mainstream rule, then the rule would simply have become a law, a definite. Thus, since the idea of mistake and violating a rule exists, some relativism must also exist in learning to act morally. Learning is a process of trial and error (mistakes and learning from them.) We have to then view these mistakes relative to the attempts of the people who are genuinely pursuing moral action. If we did not look at these mistakes in a relative view then progress towards learning how to act morally would be nearly impossible. Everyone's mistakes would solely be hindrances towards achieving moral action, instead of what we now consider mistakes, as stepping-stones.

Winch provides some space for objectivity in ethics: ethics being a collective whole of moral actions. The link can be found in the first passage, as the external reality that we perceive and are live in is what helps define making mistakes. Relative to a situation and the actions that a person takes, society or the group said person is in, will define if a mistake has been made. Some of these mistakes are reflections of following a rule and then taking some physical action. For instance, it would generally be viewed as a mistake to purposefully hit a person in a cross walk in Maine, whereas in other cities or countries this may not be viewed as such a serious matter. Here, both objectivity and relativism can be seen. It is an external reality that a car has hit a person, and it is a reality that in Maine this was a mistake (as society has defined this not acceptable.) Let

us say this event occurred in a fictitious city, we would call “Adanac.” In Adanac the person hit by the car was a known bank robber and rewards are given out to the public for stopping criminals, by any means. In this situation objectivity coincides with the ethics and moral actions that Winch’s work allows for. The rule that Adanac follows was not violated, and there was practical, external application of a rule. This manner allows for objectivity in Winch’s ethics.

Overall, Winch does manage to include enough room for objectivity in ethics so that his ideas seem practical in what is obviously a materialistic society. Also, he avoids relativism on a grand scale that would do more harm to his arguments than good. In light of the two specified passages, I have briefly evaluated what is involved in learning to act morally according to Peter Winch.