

'THE ODD PHILOSOPHER'

This is not the occasion to return to the details of the anthropology/philosophy issue, but Tennekes' mention of the 'odd philosopher' (1971:38) points to an important difference between the two books under review. Put bluntly, Tennekes does not think much of the philosophical perspective whereas MacIntyre, now Professor of the History of Ideas at Brandeis University, continually brings his earlier training to bear on the conceptual problems raised by the activities of social scientists.

According to Herskovits, the 'cultural relativism' thesis involves 'a far-reaching re-examination of pre-existing commitments, a very real struggle between the intellectual and emotional components in attitudes long accepted and convictions long held' (1958: 266). This pertains to the questions which are raised by juxtaposing Tennekes against MacIntyre: should our re-examination, our 'programme' in the paradigmatic sense of that word, involve 'philosophical' investigation?

For present purposes, we can accept Winch's condensed formulation of the programme which relates a philosophical stance to the activity of 'empirically' examining social phenomena. He distinguishes between 'empirical enquiries which must wait upon experience for their solution' and the examination of how concepts work (1958: 16). Since it is taken to be the case that 'in discussing language philosophically we are in fact discussing what counts as belonging to the world' it is one of the jobs of philosophy to show that much, if not all empirical enquiry raises conceptual questions. If anthropologists accept this view, then it inevitably follows that they engage in 'philosophy'. Two things follow from this. First, anthropology of the Radcliffe-Brownian variety stands at a further remove from (linguistic) philosophy than does that of the Evans-Pritchard species. This is because the two varieties apply different types of concepts; linguistic (philosophical) examination of participant discourse is more directly associated with the 'anthropology of meaning' than it is to the 'anthropology of general scientific laws'. It is the difference between the anthropologist who concentrates on working through native categories and the one who treats sui-generis 'meaning' as but a step on the path of applying such scientific concepts as can facilitate the techniques of comparative functionalism. Further, the 'philosopher', especially if he takes a Winchian view as to the nature of social science, can (so to speak) help Evans-Pritchard, whereas his linguistic perspective will probably mean that his relations with Radcliffe-Brown (or Murdock) will be directed through critically destructive channels.

Such considerations are important because they point to the selective impact of (linguistic) philosophy in purely beneficial respects. Thus since Tennekes regards anthropology in some sort of Radcliffe-Brownian sense (ibid: 78), the role of the Winchian philosopher will be relegated to criticism. In other words, if Tennekes extends the component of 'empirical enquiries' (as defined above), then he is (from his own, albeit mistaken, point of view) quite entitled to cast out certain aspects of linguistic, conceptual, analysis.

My second introductory remark is of a more general order. It assumes that the impact of (linguistic) philosophy is selective, and asks, who should we call philosophers? skirting the issue as to whether philosophy can make substantive as opposed to analytical contributions, it is common-sensical that any analytical examination of social phenomena must rest on a set of procedural and interpretative assumptions. So far as I can make out, Tennekes applies the word 'methodology' to cover this stock of ideas. He suggests, 'It is feasible...to remain as much as possible within the boundary-zone between philosophy and empirical science

that is called methodology'. To my mind, this sort of assertion is absurd. It implies that philosophers are solely concerned with specifically philosophical questions and are attempting to develop a substantive body of knowledge by non-experimental (or 'empirical') methods which stand apart from 'methodology'. In fact, several scattered remarks show that this is indeed what Tennekes has in mind (see his references to Ortega y Gasset and Van Peursen). Herskovits also veers towards the 'master-scientist' position. What at least Tennekes does not realise is that much modern philosophy is not of this order, and that much is specifically designed to broach the type of conceptual difficulties which are particularly characteristic of the 'methodological' sector of social science.

It is completely futile to argue: I am an anthropologist, an 'empirical' investigator; it is not my job to examine conceptually my 'methodology'. For, and this is the whole point of my arguments, there are not philosophers and anthropologists. Instead, there are those who are lucky enough to have received a training which allows them to take a philosophical perspective, and there are those who, like Tennekes, retain their faith in the 'empirical' (see Winch *ibid*: 15-16). Look at the collection Rationality (1970) and try distinguishing philosophers from anthropologists on any other criteria than that of competence.

Before detailing a comparison of Tennekes and MacIntyre, it is useful to give some further indication of which anthropological problems are most susceptible to (linguistic) philosophical examination. Unless this point is cleared up, the defender of Tennekes could retort - "but given his problematic he has no need to turn to philosophy." We can imagine a hierarchical feedback system. Thus Nuer Religion can be examined, at the procedural level, from a conceptual vantage point (see Winch 1967). At the same time, no philosopher, with the possible exception of Gellner, would deem it necessary to make the actual 'empirical' examination of this aspect of Nuer life. Thus the practising 'empirical' anthropologist is hierarchically related to the philosophical standpoint. In the sense that no philosopher could argue about relativism without turning to a certain number of 'empirical' procedures and findings, the anthropologist is an integral component of his scheme. Conversely, the anthropologist cannot just go into the field and interpret. Hence Evans-Pritchard read Levy-Bruhl (a 'philosopher') before writing on Azande magic, and his knowledge of Catholic philosophy helped him analyse the Nuer's religion. But because 'empirical' examination cannot proceed without assuming a certain way or certain ways of looking at the world, and because the philosopher can always 'create' aspects of his arguments, the relationship is hierarchical.

We can now locate anthropological conceptual difficulties within this hierarchical scheme:

Diagram (1) Conceptual assumptions,
procedural rules,
Tennekes 'methodology',

The 'rationality'
debate; the
problem of
relativism.

Nuer Religion; the
establishment of
cross-cultural
universals.

'Empirical' analysis.

Traditional funct-
ionalism.

As one moves down the system, the upper layers become progressively less; the conceptual implications of such investigations become weaker. But this is not to say that they disappear: the diagram is supposed to show that conceptual and empirical investigations interpenetrate each other, are relative to one another. At the same time, the philosopher (especially the linguistic philosopher) has little to say about the lower levels: criticism is too easy. Conversely, we can see why most philosophers are today writing about the higher level topics. Langer writes, 'the concept of meaning...is the dominant philosophical concept of our time' (1962: 55). Thus recent shifts in anthropology have followed (?) modern philosophy, the result being such works as Rationality. What is more, the shift in anthropology has not been merely from function to meaning; it has also been from 'syntagmatic' to 'paradigmatic'. This latter does not relate to linguistic philosophy in quite the same way. Indeed, portions of A.S.A.10 very clearly show the tension which exists between the paradigmatic approach and such theories of meaning as have been developed by linguistic philosophers. Yet it is still possible to say that this central problematic - the question of how far paradigmatic styles of analysis should be extended - is being discussed in a 'philosophical' style. Ardener's 'The New Anthropology and its Critics' is as 'philosophical' as Winch's The Idea of a Social Science.

Tennekes and MacIntyre are, in their different fashions, addressing the relatively unformulated procedures associated with the question of cross-cultural intelligibility. This enterprise, to increase self-consciousness and critical coherence, is of vital import; as yet there does not exist a book in which the logic of this procedure is systematically portrayed and analysed.¹ There is no clear and logically complete exegesis of those difficulties consequent upon such notions as 'relativism', 'comparison', 'fideism', 'universals', 'evaluation', 'translation' and so on. The lacunae wait to be filled.

MacIntyre, as indicated by the title of his work, is interested in much more than understanding primitive societies. What he does have to say on this topic can be equated with several other articles (J.A.S.O. Vol I No.2 contains some references). This tradition is characterised by (generally) philosophers delving into the rubble-filled foundations of our discipline often to emerge with startling and logically plausible insights. Only rarely, and not at all in the case of MacIntyre, are these insights developed into logically complete systems. This means that it is not easy for the average anthropologist to 'read' their works. The same can be said of the relevant sections of the book under review: lacking an adequate handbook or 'map', the paradoxical situation emerges that the clarifications and arguments developed by MacIntyre act to increase some of our confusions. The lacunae are in a manner of speaking, aggravated; his narrow thrusts widen a field of thought which is already too complex for the typical anthropologist.

There is no reason for us to criticise MacIntyre for not providing us with a handbook. It would appear that this job best awaits an anthropologist, for without such a perspective the trained philosopher is in no real position to see what is, in an overall sense, required. Tennekes, I suspect, has taken on this enterprise. Unfortunately, as is so often the case, a second-rate scholar has stepped in to fill the gap. The result is that our expectations are not realised; his handbook

1. A. Hanson, who has written in this Journal, is working on such a book.

does next to nothing to fill the undoubted need. Even worse, by producing such a bad handbook, Tennekes is likely to mislead and discourage others. He has, if you like, smeared and distorted the lacunae. And unlike MacIntyre's work, his has the word 'anthropology' in the title.

Why does a reading of MacIntyre serve to expose the shallowness of Tennekes? As indicated, everything, with the possible exception of mental endowment, hinges on their different attitudes to the philosophical perspective. Defining 'cultural relativism' as the thesis that 'all human action is profoundly determined by culture and hence bound by a given cultural situation' (op cit: I), he follows Herskovits (who in turn followed Siegel) and distinguishes three aspects: the methodological, the philosophical and the practical (ibid: 8). The second, which Herskovits describes as 'concern(ing) the nature of cultural values and, beyond this, the implications of an epistemology that derives from a recognition of the force of enculturative conditioning in shaping thought and behaviour' (1951: 24) is dismissed - 'I will limit myself to the (scientific) hypothesis (viz. as outlined above), for the philosophical thesis lies beyond the competence of empirical science' (op cit: 23). Thus Herskovits is described as 'pretentious' (ibid) for concentrating on the implications.

One difficulty is to understand what Tennekes means by 'philosophical'. On page 22 we find, philosophically speaking, 'cultural relativism implies that a judgment is considered valid when and in so far as it is culturally accepted', and on page 154 we read, 'the relativity or absolute validity of such value judgments'. Perhaps this is not of much significance, but the same cannot be said of the next point. That is to say, he does not remain faithful to his enunciated programme. At times he appears to be using the word 'methodological' in the Herskovitsian sense, when this procedure must be carried out before (if it is to be allowed) cross-cultural evaluations can be made. Thus, the, to complete the last quote, 'scientific determination of the universality of specific value judgments and value-standards as such say nothing as to the philosophical question of the relativity or absolute validity of such value judgments' (ibid). Yet we read, 'one can speak of value judgments with cross-cultural validity' (ibid).

Again, this in itself might not matter. It is true that Winch, in his discussion of moral universals, takes a philosophical perspective (see :1960), but in terms of his own system Tennekes is here regarding such universals as a factual component of social life. But at other points this excuse is less easy to apply. After denying any connection between the factual ('is') validity of value judgments and the philosophical 'ought' perspective (ibid) we find Tennekes concluding his work with the asseration that a) cognitive systems are necessarily evaluated by science, and b) 'in social sciences more specified and more controversial values play their part. These lead to valuations which, taken strictly, are not part of the scientific results, though they are not unrelated to them' (ibid: 218).

We wonder what 'strictly' means: elsewhere he writes, 'facts are relevant for values and values for facts' (ibid: 210). More importantly, we cannot but wonder that Tennekes is not practising philosophy. Is he not discussing Herskovits 'the nature of cultural values'? Is he not arguing for some sort of 'philosophical' judgment? Is he not playing around with the fact-value distinction?

At least, Tennekes, whatever he thinks about the matter, is 'doing' philosophy; is working out logical implications. The trouble, one suspects, is that he takes such a narrow 'substantive' and absolutist view of philosophy. Philosophy has to do with the wrong sort of values. However, even with this conceptualisation, he has to admit that 'in the final analysis all 'relativism' is orientated (to philosophical relativism)', and that the relatively non-scientific values mentioned above 'figure importantly in empirical inquiry and automatically imply certain values' (ibid: 34,219). On a more reasonable scale, we might say that Tennekes is torn between an incorrect definition of philosophical relevance, and an implicit awareness that philosophy is essential. He is, of course, quite correct to suppose that 'empirical' conclusions as to the nature of cross-cultural unity (see his discussion of the 'biotic', 'psychic' and 'social' substrates) have much relevance for the conceptual examination of relativism and have a procedural significance, but our hierarchical model demonstrates that the true 'context of relevance' cannot be distinguished from 'philosophy'. 'Empiricism' can never be pure; resting upon assumptions which should be examined logically, this enterprise in turn provides more data for the 'philosophical' perspective which then generates new ways of looking at the facts.

Thus Tennekes does philosophy even as he denies it. Or at least, partially denies it, for at several points he has to admit the relevance (ibid: 39, 43, 58, 197). And at other suggestive moments his refusal to develop this orientation shows through like a sore thumb (ibid: Chpt.V especially p.191-204). In fact, many of the contradictions which weaken his argument would be resolved if he cast aside Herskovits' scheme to work instead with a more suitable framework. This is to say, his philosophy is poor. And it is not difficult to see why: 'I will largely limit myself to American cultural-anthropological statements... since it is especially in the United States that the case for cultural relativism has been presented by cultural anthropologists' (ibid: 2). This is factually incorrect, in that America is the context of the 'odd philosopher'. Since many British philosophers have discussed the problem, Tennekes summary blockade is of the order of a geographical Gluckman. Perhaps this is not being fair to Gluckman: regional naivety is even more vulgar than inter-disciplinary ignorance, and Tennekes combines the two. How can this possibly be the case for one who is probably primarily interested in the problem of evaluation? (ibid: 145, 206). Surely Winch et al have something to offer?

All this indicates that the anthropologist is not advised to read Anthropology, Relativism and Method except for one end. Shambling through a series of quotations, this 'foot-stool' scholar merely presents us with a reflection of current American anthropological thought on relativism. His classifications, we have seen, are as poor as theirs. At least, he tells us what work is being done. In this context, it is particularly interesting to realise that the group attending to cross-cultural universals do not, as summarised by Tennekes, realise the relevance of linguistic and kinship studies. Yet the former is precisely the field of which Ardener can say, 'the intuition that a total relativism is unproductive has been supported by the evidence from comparative study' (1971: xxi). It is indeed curious that just at the moment when anthropology is preparing itself systematically to relate the formal examination of universals to the Sapir-Whorf and 'context of situation' problematics, Tennekes should come along and blurr the impact - should scarcely even distinguish between 'structural' and 'functional' universals.

MacIntyre's conclusions cannot be mentioned in detail, but as a summary: a) 'What is at stake in these arguments (over the explanation of action? Not only philosophical clarity, but also the question of the nature of the human sciences' (op cit: 204), b) human action can be explained in causal terms. c) 'The social scientist cannot evade the task of deciding what types of arguments and evidence are logically appropriate in different areas; he must be able to decide what constitutes the rationality of a scientific belief, or a moral belief, or a religious belief. But to do this is to do philosophy' (ibid: 259), d) it is valid to distinguish between irrational and rational modes of thought, e) the two types have to be explained differently, f) and such characterisations are obviously evaluative. g) Waismann is incorrect - there are 'expressions and criteria which transcend the divisions between his language strata' (ibid: 250). Additionally, MacIntyre has some most interesting things to say to the anthropologist interested in morality (see especially p.141), and his essay on comparative politics proves to be far more subtle than such remarks as are typically addressed to the comparative method.

MacIntyre shows most of us up. If it be the case that 'Happily or unhappily, the philosophers cannot be restricted merely to interpreting the social sciences, the point of their activity is to change them' (ibid: 259), then without an adequate background we are left as counters. For instance, the anthropology of religion is, in many respects, 'within' the rationality debate. So unless MacIntyre's remark, '(I can) find no reason to suppose that my investigations of Prichard's claims (he is a moral philosopher) and of the social background of these claims ought to differ radically from an anthropologically minded historians investigation of eighteenth-century Polynesia (i.e. the notion 'taboo')' is demonstrably wrong, we have no option but to widen the scope of our reading (ibid: 166).

Prima facie, to juxtapose Tennekes against MacIntyre bears a moral which should not be ignored. What should we do? - manipulate the counters of bald and shallow assertions made in the past, or move on into more sophisticated domains? Lead the reader into an unnecessary morass of details concerning the notion 'culture'¹ (does Tylor have to be quoted in the course of concluding 'man is not only determined culturally, but also biotically, psychically, and socially'? (op cit: 105)), or get on with the job in an economic fashion? Paradoxically, it is the economic MacIntyre who has to be read and re-read; Tennekes, unless one tries to sort out his confusions, makes light reading. But is this not to be expected? Is it not MacIntyre who thinks, and Tennekes, at best, who recapitulates?

Finally, I must admit that I am not at all sure that I have properly understood Anthropology, Relativism and Method. However, whereas MacIntyre can profitably be criticised, the tensions in Tennekes work between judgment/no judgment and anthropology/philosophy are such that we just do not know where we stand. Further, how much faith are we to have in a figure who can dogmatically distinguish between 'cultural' and 'social' anthropology then to assert, 'Culturology still is...in its infancy' (ibid: 49-50)? Or again, for someone who is prepared to make 'short shrift' of several certain issues, Tennekes is remarkably self-assured as he drifts from the free will problem to the nature of social science, to the nature of science...(ibid: 191).

In my opinion, the reader who can (perhaps) sort out Tennekes contentions might just as well think out the arguments for himself - or read MacIntyre and the rest.

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1. This is not to deny that the conceptual scheme as centred around the notion 'culture' is not of some relevance.

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