



Seminar

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Peter Winch and R.G. Collingwood on Logic

Tuesday, 19 March, 2019, 2:15 p.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala
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S W E D I S H
C O L L E G I U M
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ABOUT OLLI (OLOF) LAGERSPETZ

Olli Lagerspetz studied philosophy and sociology at Åbo, doing part of his doctoral studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Between 1992 and 1998 he was Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Wales Swansea. He holds the position of docent (adjunct professor) in History of Ideas at the University of Oulu. Lagerspetz was elected a Fellow of the Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters in 2013.

Lagerspetz has written extensively on the philosophy of the human sciences, philosophical anthropology and the history of social anthropology, often with reference to Ludwig Wittgenstein, Peter Winch or Edward Westermarck. His recently published books include *Edward Westermarck: Intellectual Networks, Philosophy and Social Anthropology* (with Kirsti Suolinna; the Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, 2014); *Trust, Ethics and Human Reason* (Bloomsbury, 2015); and *A Philosophy of Dirt* (Reaktion Books, 2018). Lagerspetz has edited the volume *Evolution, Human Behaviour and Morality: The Legacy of Westermarck* (with Jan Antfolk, Ylva Gustafsson and Camilla Kronqvist; Routledge, 2017).

Between 2009 and 2011 Lagerspetz was the head of two multidisciplinary research projects: the Finnish Academy project 'Emotions in Dialogue: Perspectives from the Humanities' and the Kone Foundation project 'Westermarck and Beyond: Evolutionary Approaches to Morality and Their Critics'.

Lagerspetz is currently working on a comparison between the philosophical approaches of R. G. Collingwood and Peter Winch, especially on issues concerning linguistic idealism and relativism. The focus of his research at SCAS will be on Winch, particularly his take on the nature of philosophical concept formation. The common thread that runs through the works of both thinkers concerns the historical embeddedness of human knowledge and understanding.

ABSTRACT

The two English philosophers R.G. Collingwood (1889-1946) and Peter Winch (1926-1997) were of crucial importance in mid-20th century debates on the relation between natural and human sciences. Both thinkers wanted to articulate the specific kind of knowledge involved in social and historical understanding. The adequate understanding of action requires a kind of insider perspective, involving use of the concepts that the agents themselves would employ. Broadly speaking, the human sciences should stress their affinities, not with (natural) science but with philosophy.

Collingwood's and Winch's views on this score are well known. What is less well known is that they took their argument to have profound implications not only to the status of social science and history, but also to the prevalent self-understanding of philosophy itself. If actions and concepts are two sides of a coin, some standard ideas of what conceptual analysis involves are seriously flawed. Philosophers generally believe they are dealing with unchanging concepts like rationality, reality and logical contradiction. However, in order to cash out the meaning of these thinking tools in real life we must look at socially embedded action. The meaning of logical inference reveals itself in human interchanges where people react to the words of each other as being either consistent or contradictory.

Both Collingwood and Winch made this point by way of a contrast between 'Aristotelian' and 'Socratic' logic. 'Aristotelian' logic implies that the validity of an inference can be read off from its abstract logical form. In 'Socratic' logic, described as well as exemplified in Plato's dialogues, logical relations between the various things that people say are dependent on their function as instruments in human dialogue. For Collingwood, the sense of propositions depended on historically situated *question and answer complexes*. Winch, especially in the 1990s, stressed the importance, for reasoning, of a background of *persuasion*. Persuasion can be achieved in good and bad ways, but persuasion is not something that is opposed to rational argument as a matter of principle.