

Sutherland and Popper

Lessons for Tauwiwi Philosophers?

Joshua Wilson Black
New Zealand Institute of Language Brain and Behaviour
University of Canterbury

We invite abstracts for papers that relate te ao Māori to topics covered in courses taught in philosophy departments in Aotearoa. [...]

We are also open to papers about whether, and if so how, this enterprise should be pursued by the mostly tauwi inhabitants of philosophy departments in Aotearoa.

- This paper offers the examples of Karl Popper and Ivan Sutherland as an opportunity for reflection on tauwi contributions to the interaction between te ao Māori and philosophy.
- Claim: Sutherland is a positive (and underrated) example for tauwi philosophers.
- Claim: Reflection on Sutherland's substantive philosophical differences with Popper help to explain why academic philosophy has historically struggled to engage with te ao Māori.

Overview

1. Biographical details
2. A philosophical difference: 'tribalism' and reason
3. Lessons and questions

Biographical Details

Ivan Sutherland (1897-1952)

- Ancestors from Scotland and England.
- Born in Masterton.
- BA and MA at Victoria University College (under Thomas Hunter)
- PhD in Philosophy at Glasgow, initially under Sir Henry Jones then Graham Wallas
- Returned to New Zealand as 'assistant and instructor' at Victoria (1924)
- Interest in 'Māori psychology', and the effect of colonisation on the mind, inspired by (amongst others) William Rivers and Paul Radin's *Primitive Man as Philosopher* (1927).
- Heavily influenced by and corresponded with Tā Apirana Ngata (from 1929). Ngata arranged for Sutherland to begin visiting Māori communities.
- Appointed Professor in Psychology and Philosophy at Canterbury University College (ahead of Karl Popper) (1936)
- Edited volume: *The Maori People Today* (1940).
- Died in 1952, leaving large project *Maori and European* unfinished.
- Biography: *Paikea* (O. Sutherland *Paikea*)

Sir Karl Popper (1902-1994)

- Born in Vienna, of Jewish background (but baptised Lutheran)
- Doctorate in psychology at the University of Vienna under Karl Bühler and Moritz Schlick (1928)
- Lectureship in philosophy at Canterbury allowed Popper to escape the rise of the Nazis (1937).
- Writes *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945) while at Canterbury --- a contribution to the war effort.
- Moves to the London School of Economics in 1946.

The Sutherland-Popper Relationship

'Sutherland didn't think much of Popper and Popper thought nothing at all of Sutherland.' (Rosenberg, cited in O. Sutherland *Paikea*, p. 291).

- Initially positive but quickly deteriorated.
- They collaborated on the Christchurch Refugees' Emergency Committee.
- Popper interpreted wartime material restrictions as directed at him by Sutherland.
- Lowlight: Popper claimed Sutherland reported him to the police as pro-German.
- However: *all* resident aliens were interviewed by the police (Munz, in *Paikea*)



'Tribalism' and Reason

'Tribalism' and Reason: Popper

- Popper's *Open Society* targets 'tribalism' (and its less extreme form 'collectivism')
- No obvious engagement with Māori while in New Zealand.
- But Māori are offered as an example of a 'tribal' society:

The early Greek tribal society resembles in many respects that of peoples like the Polynesians, the Maoris for instance [...] There is no standardized 'tribal way of life'. It seems to me, however, that there are some characteristics that can be found in most, if not all, of these tribal societies. I mean their magical or irrational attitude towards the customs of social life, and the corresponding rigidity of these customs. (OS, Ch. 10)

- Note also: frequent use of 'taboo' (36 times).

'Tribalism' and Reason: Popper

- What does Popper mean by 'reason'?
- *Irrationality* is associated with the idea that social norms are equivalent to laws of nature.
- Why? Because this suppresses the capacity for members of the society to consider alternatives.
- 'Rational decisions' are 'decisions based upon an estimate of possible consequences, and upon a conscious preference for some of them'.

The magical or tribal or collectivist society will also be called the closed society, and the society in which individuals are confronted with personal decisions, the open society (OS, Ch. 10).

'Tribalism' and Reason: Popper

- For Popper reason is the individual capacity to
 - consider alternative possibilities,
 - evaluate the means by which they might be brought about, and
 - evaluate the consequences of both.
- Reason is opposed to social traditions, especially if these are considered to be unchangeable.
- Reason is contrasted with instinct and emotion.

'Tribalism' and Reason: Sutherland

- Sutherland rejects 'intellectualism': views of the mind which centre cognition to the exclusion of instincts, emotions, impulses, the unconscious.
- Sutherland nonetheless defends reason as an essential feature human life.
- For Sutherland, reason is 'the tendency of the mind towards harmony and integration, and the practical reason is the synthesis or harmonized body of impulse-feelings made aware of its goal' (PhD, 188).
- Reason is 'the characteristic feature of man' and rationality is 'the ideal of individual and social life' (PhD, 215).
- 'Harmony' and 'integration' can take many forms, all of which are equally rational.
- This view *requires* instincts, emotions, social norms and traditions as the material for reason.
- I.e., there must be something to be harmonised!

'Tribalism' and Reason: Sutherland

- Sutherland's pluralism about reason is the theoretical background for his later work.
- It grounds his account of the psychological impact of colonisation.
- Sutherland takes coordination between individual, society, and natural environment to be a significant, but fragile, achievement.
- I add the claim that this 'coordination' is, in so far as it is successful, the result of 'reason' in Sutherland's sense.
- The consequences disrupting such 'coordination' are significant.
- Similarity: Wallas on the effect of industrialisation on the emerging working classes in Britain.

‘Tribalism’ and Reason: Sutherland

- After making contact with Ngata, Sutherland moves away from theory to application.
- He is interested in the process of re-establishing Māori forms of life and governance against the background of colonisation.
- Visits land development projects, takes interest in social scientific detail.
- Experience of marae-based deliberation (unlike Popper).
- Emphasises that these processes come *from within* the Māori world.
- This is to explore, as far as an outsider can, what *reason* looks like in particular cases of ‘tribal organisation’.
- Also engaged in political advocacy for the success of these projects.

Aside: Sutherland and Radin

- Soon after PhD, Sutherland discovers Paul Radin's *Primitive Man as Philosopher*.
- Introducing ideas Radin to Ngata was Sutherland's 'most important contribution' to Māori anthropology (Sorrenson 1982, 15).
- In particular: Radin argued against the view that 'primitive' peoples were do not engage in abstract thought or speculation for its own sake.
- Radin's evidence was (largely) drawn from his own ethnography with the Ho-Chunk people and his reading of *The Lore of the Whare Wānanga* (Whatahoro 1913).
- Radin: the proportion of people interested in speculation for its own sake is pretty much constant across human societies.
- Philosophical practices include song, poetry, and re-tellings of traditional stories.
- Moreover, unlike Popper, he takes individual intellectual freedom to be *greater* in indigenous societies.
- More recent developments: indigenous criticism of European society as a catalyst for the Enlightenment (Graeber and Wengrow 2021).

Popper vs. Sutherland

- Both Popper and Sutherland think that evidence of human irrationality doesn't mean we should give up on reason.
 - Human beings 'should be as reasonable as they can, by effort, make themselves' (Sutherland)
 - 'though [human irrationality] may be so, we should do what we can to remedy it, and should try to make reason play as large a part as it possibly can' (Popper)
- But they differ on *what reason is*.
 - Means of 'harmonising' instinct, social forms, emotions vs. means of overcoming them.
 - Emphasis on individual and society vs. emphasis on individual.
 - Looks different according to culture and circumstance vs. looks roughly the same.
- Sutherland's view encourages detailed knowledge of particular cases.
- I haven't attempted to adjudicate between these views.

Lessons and Questions

Lessons?

- Engagement between tauiwi and Māori: Sutherland and Popper offer two very different examples.
 - Sutherland led by Ngata (he was ‘the junior partner’ (Sorrenson 1982))
 - Sutherland doesn’t take Māori to be a passive object of study.
 - Presumably importance of engagement differs by topic.
- What counts as philosophy?
 - Objection: ‘Sutherland isn’t a philosopher!’
 - Benefits of genre expansion in the history of philosophy: ‘contextualist’ history of philosophy and female philosophers in Early Modern Europe.
 - Radin’s example is also useful here.
- But: value of places for philosophy outside of ‘academic departments’?
- Does a bicultural academic philosophy require acceptance of particular first-order philosophical views? (for instance, what if Sutherland is *totally wrong* about reason?)
- **NB:** Popper has been a constructive research *for Māori scholars* (e.g Tau 2001). My complaints about Popper don’t apply here!

Ngā mihi nui!