1965

The Contributions of R.G. Collingwood To the Philosophy of History

James E. Von Tobel
Loyola University Chicago

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF R.G. COLLINGWOOD TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

by

James E. Von Tobel, S.J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

June

1965

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

A neglected field of philosophy - Before investigating R. G. Collingwood's conception of what a philosophy of history should be and what problems it should deal with, a general survey of the ground this area of philosophic investigation can cover is in order. Such a procedure is warranted because American and British philosophers until the recent years of this century have shown a widespread neglect of history and the philosophic problems which it entails.

This is true because Western philosophers have investigated and reflected upon science and its methods, for the most part, simply because they were impressed with the spectacular progress which science has made over the last two centuries. Thus a philosophy of science has developed, consisting of the investigation of problems which arise from reflection on the methods and assumptions of science and the nature and conditions of scientific knowledge itself.

There has been a tendency positively to exclude history as a branch of knowledge at all. This can be traced back into the seventeenth century to Descartes who, using his criterion of

secure and certain knowledge, declared that history, "however interesting and instructive, however valuable towards the formation of a practical attitude in life, could not claim truth, for the events which it described never happened exactly as it described them."[1]

This devotion to scientific thought and procedures led to an outspoken distrust of any type of reflection which could be termed "metaphysical". By this term is meant any attempt to devise a unified interpretation of experience or to explain all things in a single all-embracing system. Philosophy of history as popularly known until rather recent times would fall into this category of metaphysical reflection. For philosophy of history was conceived as an attempt to discover the meaning and purpose of the whole historical process.

Even the examination of the logic of historical thought and the validity of its credentials are issues of comparatively little interest to many of the leading philosophers of our day. Nevertheless:

> . . . it remains surprising that philosophers pay more attention to the logic of such natural sciences as mathematics and physics, which comparatively few of them know well at first hand and neglect that of history and the other humane studies, with which in the course of their normal

---

[1]R. G. Collingwood, Idea of History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 59.

education they tend to be more familiar.[2]

Because of this tendency to ignore history as a form of knowledge worthy of philosophic reflection, it would be worthwhile to present a general survey of what a philosophy of history is and what problems it investigates, before we present R. G. Collingwood's philosophy of history.

---

[2]Isaiah Berlin, "The Concept of Scientific Theory," History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History, ed. George H. Nadel ('S-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1961), p. 2.

CHAPTER I

PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY INVESTIGATED

The meaning of the word "history". The word "history" can be used to designate two quite different things. It can refer to the totality of past human actions, all that man prior to our time has been involved in. It can also be used to refer to the written account of these past human actions which the historian constructs. Therefore what a philosophy of history is depends on the meaning we give the word, "history". A philosophy of history in the first sense would be a consideration of the course historical events have taken with a view to discovering the meaning and purpose of the whole historical process. A philosophy of history in the second sense would be one which examines the process of historical thinking and the means by which the account of historical actions is constructed. It is primarily interested in the historian as he proceeds to investigate an historical event, not in the particular historical event itself.

Speculative philosophy of history. Philosophy of history, with "history" taken in the first sense defined above, is designated a "speculative philosophy of history". The following could serve as a formal definition of this type of philosophy of history:

> A philosophy of history is any interpretation of history which purports to derive from a consideration of man's past a single concept or principle which in itself is sufficient to explain the ultimate direction of historical change at every point in the historical process. Thus any philosophy of history consists in the formulation of a law of historical change which explains the direction or flow of concrete events.[3]

We will take as examples of this type of philosophizing Karl Marx and Immanuel Kant, keeping in mind that our summaries are strictly for the purpose of illustration and that a comprehensive treatment of their work is not intended.

Karl Marx got the two basic doctrines of his theory of history from Hegel. First, he felt that the facts of history manifest dialectical patterns of reality everywhere and secondly, the different aspects of a society's life (political, social, economic) are organically related, with the economic aspect of life penetrating all others.

How are these two doctrines related in the Marxian theory of history? Marx contended that in order to make a satisfactory analysis of any significant situation in the social life of man at any one period of history, reference must be made to the economic conditions of that period; and then to understand why the conditions of the period are what they are, their dialectical development must be considered. The economic organization or

---

[3]Maurice Mandelbaum, "A Critique of the Philosophies of History," Journal of Philosophy, XLV (1948), 365.

class structure of a society must be seen as it is evolved in response to a need to solve certain production problems which are caused by the means of production available to the society. We must further observe how developments in the means of production put the existing economic organization out of date and give rise to the need for social change at the very foundations of society.[4]

Marx, by developing his philosophy of history in this manner, makes generalizations about the whole course of history. He says, for example, that past historical development shows that economic factors must be a part of any historical situation, or that the dialectical process manifest in history shows that history is tending to the creation of a classless communist society.

Another speculative philosopher of history was Immanuel Kant. His empirical examination of the world indicated that the world was chaotic:

> One cannot avoid a certain feeling of disgust, when one observes the actions of man displayed on the great stage of the world. Wisdom is manifested by individuals here and there; but the web of human history as a whole appears to be woven from folly and childish vanity, often, too, from puerile wickedness and love of destruction: with the result that at the end one is puzzled to know what idea to form of our species which prides itself so much on its advantages.[5]

However, Kant would not accept this conclusion as final.

---

[4]W. H. Walsh, Philosophy of History (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), p. 159.

[5]Immanuel Kant, Collected Works (Berlin edition), VIII, 17-18, as quoted by Walsh, p. 123.

Since (as he proved elsewhere in his work) we must lead a moral life, some sort of intelligible plan, similar to Divine Providence, must be present. Therefore it becomes the task of the philosopher to show that, despite the empirical facts, history is a rational process both proceeding on an intelligible plan and tending to a goal which moral reason can approve.

This demand for rationality outside of the empirical facts leads Kant to a theory of progress in history which explains how man as a species must be progressing to his goal despite appearances to the contrary. The viewpoint which he adopts is markedly teleological. Man is empirically observed to have implanted in him a vast number of tendencies, dispositions, or potentialities. Because it would violate the basic principle that nature does nothing in vain, we must hold it unreasonable to suppose that the potentialities of man should exist but never be developed. Of course we recognize that some of man's potentialities, especially those connected with reason, will not reach full development in the lifetime of any one individual. Therefore we must imagine that nature provides for the development of these potentialities over a long period of time so that they realize themselves so far as the species is concerned, even though they may not in the case of all of the individual members.[6]

Using the examples of Marx and Kant which we have sum-

---

[6]Walsh, Philosophy of History, p. 124.

marized above, let us make a few observations about the speculative philosophy of history which these men represent.

The questions raised by this type of philosophy are about the whole course of history. The empirical facts, the explanation of one or other historical movement, such as the main cause of the Civil War, or the development of labor unions in the United States, are only starting points. This desire to draw generalizations from the individual facts is usually marked by a lack of empirical research. Thus Kant would deny the conclusion to which the historical evidence led him because the principle of moral demand drawn from his philosophy intervened. The historian would say that if one's philosophy is not verified by the facts, then his principles are wrong. Similarly Marx's contention that an economic motive is always present in every historical situation, is not universally verified by working historians.

People such as Hegel, who see all reality as rational and thus who include history under one rational plan, or like Kant, who see rationality in history as a demand because of the ethical tenets of his philosophy, indeed, the vast majority of speculative philosophers, come under the distrust of historians. The reason is simple. Any general conclusions drawn about the course of history as a whole must come from an examination of established historical facts. The task philosophers of this type undertake is humanly impossible. Historians themselves in

the course of a lifetime master one small period of history such as the economic life of the Napoleonic era or the military history of the Civil War. On the other hand, in principle, the speculative philosopher claims a mastery of the major portion of all past history. How otherwise could his vast generalizations be verified?

Speculative philosophy indulges in prediction. It claims that it can discover universal laws of history from empirical facts to cover all historical events, past and future. There are objections to this procedure. The speculative philosopher by insisting on drawing universal laws of history seems to be claiming the same type of verifiability and certitude as scientific knowledge whereas most historians would insist that historical knowledge makes such an assertion impossible. Historically speaking, prediction of future events has been a risky rather than secure pastime.

Critical Philosophy of History. Thus far we have seen what type of philosophy of history develops when we understand "history" to refer to the totality of past human actions. Now it remains to examine the philosophy of history resulting from the understanding of the word "history" to mean the written record of these past human actions. This type of philosophy we shall designate as a "critical philosophy of history."

The concern of the critical philosopher, of course, is not just the written record of history in itself, for this would

hardly distinguish him from the historian. Rather it is a critical reflection upon the whole procedure of the historian who produces the written record. Furthermore it attempts to distinguish his procedures from other fields of activity, especially scientific enquiry. We can, then, formally define a critical philosophy of history as "a critical enquiry into the character of historical thinking, an analysis of some of the procedures of the historian and a comparison of them with those followed in other disciplines, the natural sciences in particular."[7] In this sense, philosophy of history is considered under that branch of philosophy known as theory of knowledge or epistemology.

We can divide the results of this type of investigation into four main problem areas, keeping in mind that the questions treated under one area frequently can be raised elsewhere. The problems are very closely related and our division is merely arbitrary, for the purpose of exposition.[8]

The first and most influential group of modern philosophers to deny history its own place in knowledge are the positivists who say that history can be reduced to scientific knowledge.

Objectors would agree that history is scientific knowledge in the sense of a study with its own recognized methods

---

[7]Ibid., p. 119.

[8]The general division of problems used here is that used by Walsh, pp. 16-24.

which must be mastered by anyone wishing to be a good historian. But they contend that you cannot reduce it to the procedures and methods used in science itself.

The best way of proceeding here is by way of example. Let us take the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Would the entire impact and significance of this event be grasped if we reduced it to a matter of ballistics and the simple biological transition of a man from life to death? This event has a quality, with which the historian is concerned, which is unique and irreducible to general laws or atomic occurrences. The historian is further concerned with this event in terms of its peculiar antecedents and consequences in order to help explain the event itself or trace its impact on other historical events. These are qualities with which the approach of scientific knowledge is not concerned. The historian does not deny that the three shots fired flew in accord with the laws of ballistics, and that the life of John Kennedy ebbed in ways that doctors and biologists could predict. All he claims is that the historian's concern goes far beyond this.

Furthermore, the positivistic thinker says that historians connect historical events by seeing them as examples of general laws. <u>De facto</u>, historians themselves shrink from such a conclusion and find their significance as historians in the examination of particular events, not for the purpose of obtaining general laws of history, but rather for the explanation

of the particular event itself. An historian is interested, for example, in the French Revolution of 1789 or the English Revolution of 1688 or the Russian Revolution of 1917. He is not primarily concerned with the general laws or rules at work in revolutions as such. Thus the average history book includes only the period under review and directly related matter. If the historian's interest and that of the scientist were the same, the book would include another chapter which would be the most important of the book, drawing out the general laws governing the particular event in question.[9]

The positivists are not the only ones to deny history autonomy as knowledge. There are also some schools of realists who say that history does not differ from common sense or perceptual knowledge. They would set up the following relation: perception is to the knowledge of individual facts about the present as history is to individual facts about the past.

Those who object to this elimination of the autonomy of historical knowledge would point out that history, if reduced to perceptual knowledge, would be limited to telling us <u>what</u> happened in the past. The fact is however, that historians are not satisfied with a mere narrative of unrelated facts but want the thread of unity which runs through them. Historians ask not only what happened but also why it happened. Reduction of his-

---

[9]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 39.

tory to mere perceptual knowledge eliminates this second question. It is the question "Why?" that:

> . . . makes intelligible that celebrated identity in difference (which many of the Idealist philosophers exaggerated and abused) in virtue of which we conceive of one and the same outlook as being expressed in very diverse manifestations, perceive affinities (that are often difficult and at times impossible to formulate) between the dress of a society and its morals, its systems of justice and the character of its poetry, its architecture and its domestic habits, its sciences and its religious symbols.[10]

Furthermore what is perceived in history is not the facts of the past. The immediacy possible in perceptual knowledge is gone forever as far as past facts go. All we can have immediate knowledge of is the evidence which allows us to conclude to past facts. This difficulty is very closely related to another problem area which we now take up.

The second main problem area is concerned with truth and fact in history. What truth means to one person depends on what theory of knowledge he holds. But, in any case, truth and fact have special ramifications in relation to history.

Ordinarily we could define a fact as something supposed to have occurred and open to direct inspection in order to be verified. The problem is that historical facts are past facts and thus are no longer open to direct inspection. Statements cannot be verified with an independently known reality. Historical facts must be established by means of evidence. Evidence

---

[10]Berlin, History and Theory, p. 28.

consists of documents, buildings, monuments, eyewitness accounts, etc., which are pertinent to the verification of one or other historical statement. This does not end the problem of historical truth since even the presence of evidence does not guarantee truth. For the historian must decide whether this eyewitness to the eruption of Vesuvius has told the truth in this document, or whether this set of pottery will be admitted as evidence or not. Thus the question of truth in history is reopened. It seems that in some sense the subjective factor, the judgment of the historian himself, cannot altogether be eliminated from history.

This leads into our third problem area, the problem of historical objectivity. All historians acknowledge the need for objectivity. This is seen in that all reputable historians condemn propaganda and reliance on the historian's personal feelings and preconceptions. But the question remains: How objective is or can history be? How can we, despite the condemnation of bias and propaganda, account for the differences in reporting among historians? For even though historians are concerned with an independent object (past historical events), they have come up with no common canons of interpretation. Therefore we cannot deny that subjectivity enters into historical writing. The question is: To what extent?

This problem is approached gingerly by many. First of all, it is the problem which has led so many to leave history on

the level of perceptual knowledge and refuse it the status of a science in the sense of a field of study, with its own recognized methods. It is a problem which has led so many to historical scepticism, whether they liked the label or not.

Some would say that the subjective element in history makes impartial and objective history impossible. The personal imprint is too strong. The individual historian has too much power in terms of the admittance or rejection of evidence according to his own personal viewpoint.

Others would say that past failures of historians to agree on common principles of judgment regarding their work says nothing about the future. The development of a common historical consciousness is much like the development of a personality. It takes time. Perhaps this development could be based on an objective study of human nature. Agreement on what man is and how he functions could form a basis of agreement on the principles which govern the historian's judgment in his work.

Lastly, many would contend that no matter what one's view, to ask an historian to be detached from his work as a scientist, is asking the impossible. All historians condemn biased and tendentious work, but the historian's point of view cannot be eliminated altogether. His point of view is one of the unifying factors in what he is doing and helps him to select his material from infinite pieces of potential evidence.

The last general problem area involves that of historical explanation. The main conflict here comes down to the difference between historical and scientific explanation. Put in the form of a question we ask: To what extent does history rely on generalizations?

Scientific explanation consists in the resolution of particular events into cases of general laws with the understanding that this process involves no more than an external view of the phenomena under consideration. The resulting understanding is "abstract", in the sense of not being concerned with the particularity of the events studied. Historical explanation never leaves the particularity of the events it studies. This is its main concern. History relates one event to another in order to view them as part of a whole concrete process. History asks the question "Why?", and thus attempts to go beyond the mere phenomena. Thus the Wall Street crash is not viewed of itself but related to events preceding and following it in order to see why it happened. History may use generalizations as presuppositions (e.g. human nature), but its aim is not to formulate a system of general laws.

This completes our survey of the meaning and problems of critical and speculative philosophies of history. Now we must situate the subject of this paper, R. G. Collingwood, first, in relation to the philosophy of history in general and secondly, in relation to the particular type of philosophy of history

he practiced.

Collingwood: In which camp? Robin George Collingwood is more often known and acknowledged for his work in history and related fields than for his work in philosophy. After graduation from Oxford where he won gold medals in both history and classics, he did doctoral work first in history and later in archaeology. For almost thirty years prior to his death in 1943, he was the recognized authority on Roman Britain. However, he was more than an historian. In terms of printed volumes, his most prolific work was done in philosophy. His philosophical works include Religion and Philosophy (1916), Speculum Mentis (1924), Essay on Philosophical Method (1933), Idea of Nature (1934), Idea of History (1936), Autobiography (1939), Essay on Metaphysics (1940), and the New Leviathan (1942). Since he was proficient in both history and philosophy, it is not surprising that he should have been concerned with a philosophy of history.

Collingwood was deeply concerned about the neglect of history by English philosophers. He inveighed constantly against neglecting history and told his Oxford colleagues on more than one occasion that "the chief business of twentieth century philosophy is to reckon with twentieth century history."[11] He insisted that history was a significant branch of knowledge, and that one could not do philosophy as if history did not exist.

---

[11]R. G. Collingwood, An Autobiography (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 79.

"I find myself constantly haunted by the thought that their (English philosophers') accounts of knowledge . . . not only ignore historical thinking but are actually inconsistent with there being such a thing."[12]

Several historical events helped to convince Collingwood of the value of philosophical reflection on history. The First World War and the treaty which ended it struck him with the "contrast between the success of modern European minds in controlling almost any situation in which the elements are physical bodies and the forces physical forces, and their inability to control situations in which the elements are human beings and the forces mental forces."[13] He felt that modern Europeans, if they were to understand human action with a purpose, must do so by using the methods of history. Thus by understanding what others have done and are doing, they could master the situations in which they found themselves:

> Well-meaning babblers talked about the necessity for a change of heart. But the trouble was obviously in the head. What was needed was not more goodwill and human affection, but more understanding of human affairs and more knowledge of how to handle them.[14]

Regarding specific types of philosophy of history, Collingwood rejected the possibility of there being such a thing as

---

[12]Source of this quote not given. Used by Hans Meyerhoff, book review of Theories of History by Patrick Gardiner, History and Theory, Vol. I (1960).

[13]Collingwood, An Autobiography, p. 90.

[14]Ibid., p. 92.

a speculative philosophy of history. This is true because the vast majority of facts from which generalizations are drawn about the universal plan of history are always in the process of being substantiated. History is never a finished product. What is a fact today, with the uncovering of more evidence, may not be a fact tomorrow. So how can a universal plan drawn from changing facts be valid?

> Thus the object of actual historical thinking is an object which is not "given" but perpetually in process of being given. To philosophize about history as if this object, as it appears at this or that moment, were the reality for which the historian is looking, is to begin at the wrong end. If there is to be a philosophy of history, it can only be a philosophical reflexion on the historian's effort to attain truth, not on a truth which has not yet been attained.[15]

Collingwood further rejects the attempt to discover the plan of Divine Providence for the world from history. For him, this would be theological determinism. "The plan which is revealed in history is a plan which does not pre-exist to its own revelation: history is a drama, but an extemporized drama, co-operatively extemporized by its own performers."[16]

Any attempt to discover the plot of history is the job of the historian not the philosopher. The size of the undertaking, even if it were to be an attempt to discover the plot of all history thus far known, is no criterion for distinguish-

---

[15]R. G. Collingwood, "The Nature and Aims of a Philosophy of History," Aristotelian Society Proceedings (1924-25), vol. 25, p. 161.

[16]Ibid., p. 153.

ing the philosopher from the historian. If it is the historian's task to discover the details, it is his work to discover the interconnexion of the details. The historian tells us the plot of the Norman Conquest, the French Revolution, and, if it were possible, the plot of all history that is or can be known to us. The key idea here is to realize that history and the plot of history are not two things but one and thus to know history or the plot of history is the work not of two different kinds of men but one. It is clear then, that Collingwood rejects the possibility of a speculative philosophy of history.[17]

In his book, Idea of History,[18] Collingwood does make clear his notion of philosophy. Philosophy is connected with the reflection on knowledge. It does not think about an object, "it always, while thinking about any object, thinks also about its own thought about that object."[19] Therefore philosophy is thought about thought. Thought which seeks to discover the distance of the earth from the sun would be a task for that field of knowledge which we call astronomy. But the further process

---

[17]Ibid., p. 155.

[18]This book though published posthumously, in 1946, by the editor of Collingwood's unpublished notes and papers, T. M. Knox, consists primarily of thirty-two lectures written during the first six months of 1936, entitled "The Philosophy of History", and parts of a work undertaken in the spring of 1936 called "Principles of History."

[19]Collingwood, Idea of History, p. 1.

of reflection whereby we would seek to discover what it is precisely that we are doing when we discover the distance of the earth from the sun, is the task of philosophy, in this case, either of logic or the theory of science.[20]

Using the example of an historian going about his work, say examining the military stature of Julius Caesar, in order to clarify his thought, Collingwood distinguishes what he considers to be the task of the psychologist, the philosopher, and the historian. The philosopher is concerned not just with the past facts in themselves as the historian is, nor with the historian's thought processes in themselves as the psychologist is, but rather with these two aspects precisely in their mutual relation. For thought in relation to its object is not just thought process but knowledge. So what for psychology is matter for a theory of thought process, of mental events in abstraction from any object, is for philosophy the theory of knowledge. The psychologist asks: How do historians think; the philosopher: How do historians know. The historian on the other hand grasps the past as a thing in itself and tells us that so many years ago such-and-such events actually happened. This is not the job of the philosopher. The philosopher is not concerned with past events as things in themselves but as things known to the historian, that is, what about these particular past events that makes it possible for historians to know them.

---

[20]Ibid.

From what we have said above, we could call the philosopher as he thinks about the subjective side of history an epistemologist and in so far as he considers the objective side, we could call him a metaphysician, always keeping in mind that this distinction does not allow us to treat the epistemological and metaphysical parts of his work separately since we cannot separate the study of knowing from the study of what is known.[21]

Finally, since what we have presented is Collingwood's idea of the general nature of philosophical thinking, what does he specifically mean when he qualifies the term philosophy by adding of history?:

> The philosophy of history is the study of historical thinking: not only the psychological analysis of its actual procedure, but the analysis of the ideal which it sets before itself. Historical thought is one among a number of attitudes taken up by the mind towards the objective world; it is an attitude which assumes that there exists a world of facts -- not general laws, but individual facts --- independent of the being known, and that it is possible, if not wholly to discover these facts, at any rate to discover them in part and approximately. The philosophy of history must be a critical discussion of this attitude, its presuppositions and its implications; an attempt to discover its place in human experience as a whole, its relation to other forms of experience, its origin and its validity.[22]

---

[21] Ibid., pp. 2-3.

[22] Collingwood, Aristotelian Society Proceedings, p. 161.

CHAPTER II

R. G. COLLINGWOOD'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

The failure to explore the questions raised by the existence of historical knowledge. Collingwood, looking back from his fiftieth year, saw that his life's work "has been in the main an attempt to bring about a rapprochement between philosophy and history."[1] In his investigations he reached the conclusion that what was needed was a special branch of philosophical inquiry which was exclusively devoted to the special problems raised by historical thinking.

In the judgment of T. M. Knox, the man who perhaps knew him best and to whom Collingwood entrusted his unpublished works, this ambition was best achieved in the papers contained in the book, Idea of History. For that reason the doctrine elaborated in this chapter is basically that which Collingwood presented in this book.

For Collingwood the development of a philosophy of history involved two stages. The first stage would be to work out

---

[1]Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 77.

philosophy of history in a relatively isolated condition, regarding this philosophy as a special study of a special problem. The second stage would then attempt to work out the connections between this philosophical study and the old traditional doctrines. The Idea of History was concerned with the first stage only. For it was to be a philosophical enquiry into the nature of history, regarded as a specifically distinct form of knowledge with its own distinct object. The second stage, for the time being, was simply not considered.[2]

The first problem which must be taken up is: Why is it that history must be thought of as a special branch of knowledge and thus worthy of a special branch of philosophy? The procedure followed by Collingwood is to analyze the various forms of knowledge which philosophy has considered in the past and to show that they are not adequate to account for the problems raised by the existence of historical knowledge.

The viewpoints of philosophic speculation differ with each age according to the problems called forth at that particular time. The history of philosophy dates back to a Greek heritage. The special task which Greek philosophers proposed for themselves was the laying of the foundations of mathematics and thus it is not at all surprising that their special interest in the theory of knowledge would be based on mathematical know-

---

[2]Collingwood, Idea of History, pp. 6-7.

ledge.

Such a development would be opposed to the development of history, for history considers data and events that occurred in space and time and are no longer happening whereas mathematical thinking can be carried on only in so far as it abstracts from space and time. History, in so far as it is a science of human action and considers things which men have done in the past, commits itself to the concrete world of change where things come to be and cease to be. According to Collingwood, the prevalent Greek metaphysical view during this period of history considered such changeable things as unknowable, and therefore history as an impossible science.[3]

As a result of their philosophical development along mathematical lines, the science of history during the dominance of Greek culture remained in a primitive state. History was no more than a mere aggregate of perceptions. This, of course, affected their view of historical evidence. Historical evidence was identified with the report of facts given by eyewitnesses of those facts. The evidence itself consisted of eyewitnesses' narratives and historical method consisted in obtaining either directly or indirectly these accounts.[4]

During the Middle Ages, theological considerations ab-

---

[3] Ibid., p. 20.

[4] Ibid., p. 24.

sorbed the efforts of thinkers. The dominant concern was discovering more precise knowledge about the relationship between God and man. Therefore it was in this area that philosophy centered its efforts.

Again this atmosphere is not altogether healthy for the development of reflection on historical thought. For theological thinking has for its object a single infinite object whereas historical events are finite and plural.

History itself developed very little in the use of critical apparatus beyond the Greeks. However, in conjunction with the main preoccupation of the age, it took on a new interest, the discovery and exposition of the divine plan for history. Such a turn of events prevented development of historiography.

The medieval historian depended primarily on traditions for his facts and had no effective weapons for a critical evaluation of those traditions. In this atmosphere his task became the discovering and expounding of the divine plan for the world as it was in the mind of God. It assumed a knowledge of the future as well as the past. Such eschatology is always an intrusive element in history and the prediction of future events argues to a faulty conception of historical method. The medieval concept of providence left nothing for man to do and led historians into the error of thinking that they could forecast the future. Our criticism of this age, however, must be tempered, for no one had yet discovered the fundamental concept of the

critical examination of sources and the scholarly substantiation of facts which was to be the work of historical method in the centuries that followed.[5]

With the arrival of our modern age and the great strides forward made by science both theoretically and in its use for the practical improvements of our standard of living, philosophers became preoccupied with thought about scientific method. They became concerned about the relation of the human mind as subject to the natural world of things as object.

Philosophy of history did not develop fully in this atmosphere because scientific knowledge finds truth through observation and experiment exemplified in what we perceive, whereas historical knowledge finds truth in events which never can be directly perceived because they are past and cannot be duplicated experimentally because they each contain an element that is unique.

Nevertheless history grows where a critical, scientific spirit dominates since sources such as eyewitness accounts or historians of the past are no longer accepted as authorities, but are now put to the test as methods are developed to test their authenticity. Though the growing autonomy of historical thought resisted total absorption in the positivistic spirit, it did not fully gain its autonomy. This is seen, for one example, in the rules which historians developed in their treatment

---

[5]Ibid., pp. 52-56.

of facts:

> (i) Each fact was to be regarded as a thing capable of being ascertained by a separate act of cognition or process of research, and thus the total field of the historically knowable was cut up into an infinity of minute facts each to be separately considered. (ii) Each fact was to be thought of not only as independent of all the rest but as independent of the knower, so that all subjective elements (as they were called) in the historian's point of view had to be eliminated. The historian must pass no judgment on the facts: he must only say what they were.[6]

Such an attitude prevented the further development of historical method for if historians refuse to judge the facts, this means that history can only be the history of external events, not the history of the thought out of which these events grew. This standstill in development was due to a false analogy between scientific and historical facts, scientific and historical ways of knowing.

Science tends to ignore the distinction between history and natural science, or historical process and natural process. It starts from the positivistic principle that natural science is the only true form of knowledge and this principle implies that all processes are natural processes. The problem of the historian is how to avoid this principle.

The scientist tends to regard history as an object confronting the historian in the same way in which nature confronts the scientist. The task of understanding, evaluating, or criticizing history is done by the historian standing outside of

---

[6] Ibid., p. 131.

it. This results in the loss of the spirituality or subjectivity which properly belongs to the historical life of mind itself. The historical process is converted into a natural process. It simply is not true that the historian stands outside history, because it is he who must recreate in his own mind the past events of history for which he has evidence. This recreation of past events in the historian's mind is how the past lives in the present. His subjectivity is an essential part of historical method in a way it is not in scientific method.[7]

Furthermore science primarily is interested in generalizations which although verified in particular instances are valid independent of them. History never is interested in generalization for its own sake. History begins and ends with its primary interest the unique quality of particular historical events which scientific method cannot capture.

A meteorologist studies one cyclone in order to compare it with others, hoping to find out what features in them all are constant. The historian in his work has no such aim. If one finds him studying the Hundred Years War or the Revolution of 1688, one cannot infer that he is in the preliminary stages of an enquiry into the constant factors involved in wars or revolutions in general. If he is in any preliminary stage at all, it is more likely to be a general study of the Middle Ages or the Seventeenth Century. The reason is that the sciences of

---

[7]Ibid., p. 176.

observation and history are organized in different ways. In meteorology observation of this particular cyclone is conditioned by its relation to what has been observed about other cyclones. With history, what is known about the Hundred Years War is not conditioned by what is known about other wars but by what is known about other events and people within the context of the Middle Ages.[8]

So it seems clear that the philosophic viewpoints of the three ages of thought have not either singly or together adequately provided for the existence of historical knowledge. Why hadn't these ages been conscious of the problems raised by historical thinking?

The reason was that historical knowledge had not yet forced itself into the consciousness of philosophers by raising special difficulties which would demand a special technique and study to meet them. When this did happen somewhere within the nineteenth century, the situation was that the current theories of knowledge were preoccupied with the special problems of science and had been working on a tradition based on the study of mathematics and theology, whereas the new historical methods, growing up everywhere, were left unaccounted for. The demand was created for a specific inquiry into this new group of philosophic problems created by the existence of or-

---

[8] Ibid., p. 250.

ganized and systematized historical research. This new inquiry has justly come to be called philosophy of history.[9] It is to this inquiry that we can say Collingwood has made a sizable contribution. What is to follow is Collingwood's philosophy of history, his phenomenological analysis of historical thinking.

Collingwood's insight into knowledge. Through Collingwood's experience as an archaeologist and historian, a basic insight was grasped which was to affect all his philosophical work. The insight came sometime while he was working on excavations of Roman camps in Britain around 1913:

> At the same time I found myself experimenting in a laboratory of knowledge: at first asking myself a quite vague question, such as: "was there a Flavian occupation on this site?" then dividing that question into various heads and putting the first in some such form as this: "are these Flavian sherds and coins mere stays, or were they deposited in the period to which they belong?" and then considering all the possible ways in which light could be thrown on this question, and putting them into practice one by one, until at last I could say, "There was a Flavian occupation: an earth and timber fort of such and such plan was built here in the year a + b and abandoned for such and such reasons in the year x + y." Experience soon taught me that under these laboratory conditions one found out nothing at all except in answer to a question; and not a vague one either, but a definite one. That when one dug saying merely, "Let us see what there is here", one learnt nothing, except casually in so far as casual questions arose in one's mind while digging: "Is that black stuff peat or occupation-soil? Is that a potsherd under your foot? Are those loose stones a ruined wall?" That what one learnt depended not merely on what turned up in one's trenches but also on what questions one was asking; so that a man who was asking questions of one kind learnt one kind of thing from a piece of digging which to

---

[9] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

> another man revealed something different, to a third something illusory, and to a fourth nothing at all.[10]

The importance of this insight is emphasized by the fact that we frequently attempt to criticize before we understand. Because of this, it is important to know what questions we are seeking to answer. When our questions are answered, then is the time for criticism.

This same insight or way of proceeding was adopted by Collingwood in his lectures. He had become something of an expert in Aristotle. In speaking about the De Anima, he concentrated on the question "What is Aristotle saying and what does he mean?" He did not go into the further question of whether what he means or says is true or not. He wished to convey to his audiences the need for a scholarly approach to the philosophical text prior to any process of criticism.[11]

Besides his work as an archaeologist, there were other occasions, some of them quite prosaic, which re-emphasized his insight into the knowing process. Collingwood reflects on one such occasion which occurred a year or so after the outbreak of World War I. At that time he was living in London and working for the Royal Admiralty Intelligence Division which had taken over the quarters of the Royal Geographical Society. Each day he had to walk across Kensington Gardens past the Albert Memorial

---

[10]Collingwood, Autobiography, pp. 23-25.

[11]Ibid., pp. 27-29.

which Memorial by degrees began to obsess him. This Memorial obsessed Collingwood because it was so incontrovertibly ugly, in such bad taste, that the question occurred to him: Why had Scott (architect) done it? What follows is the process of thought which developed in Collingwood's mind:

> Why had Scott done it? To say that Scott was a bad architect was to burke the problem with a tautology; to say that there was no accounting for tastes was to evade it by a suggestio falsi. What relation was there, I began to ask myself, between what he had done and what he had tried to do? Had he tried to produce a beautiful thing; a thing, I meant, which we should have thought beautiful? If so, he had of course failed. But had he perhaps been trying to produce something different? If so, he might possibly have succeeded. If I found the monument merely loathsome, was that perhaps my fault? Was I looking in it for qualities it did not possess, and either ignoring or despising those it did?[12]

This experience as he walked past the Memorial led Collingwood to formulate a principle regarding the question and answer process. It is impossible to find out what a man means by simply studying his spoken or written statements even granting that the individual has a thoroughly competent grasp of the chosen medium of communication and a perfectly truthful intention. To discover his meaning something more is demanded. This "more" is a question, a question which was in the mind of this particular individual and which is presumed by him to be in yours. What he has said, or written, or communicated in any other way was meant to be an answer to a particular question.[13]

---

[12] Ibid., pp. 29-30.

[13] Ibid., p. 31.

From experiences such as those related above, Collingwood concluded that all advances in knowledge came as answers to a definite set of questions. Thinking means asking questions. You don't learn by looking at reality with a blank mind. How significant this insight is for the historian will become apparent as we proceed in the analysis of historical thought. For Collingwood, no intelligent inquiry into any subject could proceed without it.

Collingwood did not feel he had discovered something new even though he did think that he had discovered the importance of a process neglected by many modern thinkers:

> These questions are not put by one man to another man in the hope that the second man will enlighten the first man's ignorance by answering them. They are put, like all scientific questions, to the scientist by himself. This is the Socratic idea which Plato was to express by defining thought as "the dialogue of the soul with itself", where Plato's own literary practice makes it clear that by dialogue he meant a process of question and answer. When Socrates taught his young pupils by asking them questions, he was teaching them how to ask questions of themselves, and showing them by examples how amazingly the obscurest subjects can be illuminated by asking oneself intelligent questions about them instead of simply gaping at them, according to the prescription of our modern anti-scientific epistemologists, in the hope that when we have made our minds a perfect blank we shall "apprehend the facts".[14]

The object of historical inquiry. Our inquiry into historical thought will start with the question: what is the object of historical inquiry? Collingwood defined the object of historical

---

[14]Collingwood, Idea of History, p. 274.

inquiry as "past human actions."

These "human actions" are further defined as "events that admit of thought". It is precisely because of this fact that history has a claim to a separate form of knowledge, for history gets at thought, the inside of action, in a way the natural sciences do not. The occurrences in nature are mere events, that is, not the acts of agents whose thought the scientist attempts to trace. For the scientist nature is a "phenomenon". We do not mean that it is somehow lacking in reality but rather is considered as a being presented to the scientist for his intelligent observation. But historical events are not "phenomenon" presented for intelligent observation. They are events which the historian does not look at but through to discern the thought within them. By penetrating to the "inside" of events, the historian is doing something which the method of the scientist neither demands or permits.[15]

Human action is conceived by Collingwood as thought expressing itself in external behavior. Although historians must start from the merely physical or descriptions of the merely physical, their object is to penetrate behind these to the thought which underlies them. They may start with the fact that a man called "Julius Caesar" on a certain day in 49 B.C. crossed the River Rubicon with such-and-such forces. But this is not the

---

[15]Ibid., p. 214.

goal of historical inquiry. Historians want to go on and discover what was in Caesar's mind, what motivated these external bodily movements. When this transition is made, then and only then do human actions become fully intelligible. The object of historical inquiry is not a mere event, but the thought expressed in it. If you discover the thought, then you understand the event. Once you know the facts in this full sense, there is no further process of inquiry into causes. For in knowing what happened, the historian also knows why it happened.[16]

This passage from the merely physical activities of human beings to a penetration of their inner thoughts has been expressed by the distinction (made famous by Collingwood) between the "inside" and "outside" of an event:

> The historian investigating any event in the past, makes a distinction between what may be called the outside and the inside of an event. By the outside of the event I mean everything belonging to it which can be described in terms of bodies and their movements, the passage of Caesar, accompanied by certain men, across a river called the Rubicon at one date, or the spilling of his blood on the floor of the senate house at another. By the inside of the event I mean that in it which can only be described in terms of thought; Caesar's defiance of Republican Law or the clash of constitutional policy between himself and his assassins.[17]

Though Collingwood distinguished the inside and outside of an action, he does not want us to think that history is concerned exclusively with thought. Historical investigation does

---

[16]Collingwood, Idea of History, p. 214.

[17]Ibid., p. 213.

not allow a concern with one and not the other. The historian is investigating not mere events (something which has only an outside and no inside) but actions. An action is the unity of the inside and outside of an event. The historian is interested in the crossing of the Rubicon as related to Republican Law or the spilling of Caesar's blood as related to the constitutional conflict. He may start with the discovery of the outside of an event, but the goal of his inquiry is not reached until he has thought himself into the action and discerned the thoughts of the agents involved.[18]

At the same time Collingwood is insisting on the concern of the historian for both inside and outside of historical actions, he admits that ultimately the historian's chief interest is in historical thought:

> Unlike the natural scientist, the historian is not concerned with events as such at all. He is only concerned with those events which are the outward expression of thoughts, and is only concerned with these in so far as they express thoughts. At bottom, he is concerned with thoughts alone; with their outward expression in events he is concerned only by the way, in so far as these reveal to him the thoughts of which he is in search.[19]

It should be noted that the definition of human action eliminates from history the study of the objects of natural science, acts of brutes, and the indeliberate acts of man, that is, man's conduct in so far as it is determined by what may

---

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., p. 217.

be called his animal nature, his impulses and appetites. The essence of these acts is their outside. They simply have no inside and thus cannot be a proper object of historical study.[20]

A question which naturally arises from the above distinction would be: In what sense do these events with no inside influence the proper object of historical inquiry since to hold that they have no effect on historical actions is patently absurd? It seems certain that if Lord Nelson's ship sprang a leak at the battle of Trafalgar, even though "springing a leak" has no inside, it certainly would seem to have historical significance.

Collingwood's treatment of this obvious objection is clear. All men have certain things in common, for example, eating when they are hungry, or sleeping when they are tired. But these functions have absolutely nothing of interest to the historian. Of themselves eating and sleeping are animal appetites and with them history has no concern. However, in so far as these physiological facts affect human action and thought they are of concern. They have historical significance in so far as, for example, they affect the actions a man might perform because of his own and his children's empty stomachs, or in so far as poverty is related to the rich exploiting the poor for their own ends. It is man's thought about these merely physio-

---

[20] Ibid., p. 26.

logical facts which can have historical significance.[21]

Some (to take another example) have attributed the decline of the Roman empire to a fall in agricultural production owing to the exhaustion of the soil in some regions. The historian is not interested actually with the fact that this soil is exhausted. In itself, this fact is of no significance. It can have importance only in relation to a human being or beings. And then it has significance only in that it presents a problem to be thought about. How can this soil be replenished? If it can't be, then how can one continue to live on a farm with exhausted soil? How can we find another source of agricultural produce? Thus events with no inside of their own can have value to the historian only in so far as they affect the thought and actions of man. The Roman empire did not fall because the earth was exhausted but because in thinking about this problem, the Romans did not come up with a course of action adequate to the problem.[22]

We can say, in summary, that for Collingwood the object of historical inquiry is past human actions. These human actions are those which admit of thought, the inside of human activity. All events which have only an outside (the eruption

---

[21] Ibid., p. 315.

[22] Alan Donagan, The Later Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 205-206.

of a volcano, an empty stomach) have no historical significance except in so far as they affect the thought involved in human actions.

The object of historical inquiry re-defined in terms of the possibility of knowing it. If the object of historical inquiry is past human actions, how do I go about answering the questions put to that object by the historian: What has happened? When did it happen? Why did it happen? The only way I can answer these questions about the past is by re-thinking past thoughts. History as a science is "the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind."[23]

Some examples to illustrate this general definition are in order. I have before me a letter written by Pliny the governor of Bithynia to the Emperor Trajan concerning the treatment of Christians in this province. Now a man who thinks historically has before him this document, this relic of the past. His job is to discover what the past was which has left this document behind it. There are here certain written words and the historian must discover what was meant by the person who wrote them. This means discovering the thought expressed in the words and in this process thinking those same thoughts again for himself.[24]

As another example let us say we have an historian who

---

[23]Collingwood, Idea of History, p. 215.

[24]Ibid., p. 283.

has before himself a certain edict of an emperor. For him merely to read the words of the document and to be able to translate them into his own language does not mean he is aware of their historical significance. In order to reach this, he must envisage the situation with which the emperor was trying to deal and view it from the same point of view as the emperor had. Then he must see for himself just as if he were in the emperor's shoes, how the situation might be dealt with; he must see the various alternatives, the reasons for choosing one course of action rather than another. He thus re-enacts in his own mind the experience of the emperor. In this way he has an historical (as distinct from a merely philological) knowledge of the meaning of the edict.[25]

By re-enacting past thought, an historian will in this one act answer all the questions of history, for the re-thinking of past thought means that the historian has apprehended all the facts of the case. Therefore, there is no further process of inquiring into their causes. When the historian knows what happened, he already knows why it happened.

One of Collingwood's favorite examples for illustrating points of his theory was Admiral Nelson at the battle of Trafalgar:

---

[25] Ibid.

> If I know what Nelson did at the battle of Trafalgar . . . I also know why he did it, because I make his thoughts mine and pass from one to another as I should in my own thinking. I have no need of any general knowledge of the behaviour of admirals in sea battles to attain this understanding. It is not, in fact, a matter of discursive, but of immediate knowledge. But it is only this because thought and only thought is in question.[26]

The reason we can define history as the re-enactment of past thought, is the distinction which Collingwood made between the inside and the outside of an event. He felt it was clear that a past act as such was dead forever. However thought was something that could transcend time. With this distinction he felt that he was able to do away with those who objected to the possibility of a re-enactment of past thought. To those who would claim it absurd to think that the same identical act could happen twice he would say that a past act of thought in its physical context cannot be re-lived since physical qualities pass away in the flow of consciousness. But thought, since it is distinct from the merely physical, can be captured and regained in its entirety. So far as experience consists of mere consciousness of sensations and feelings pure and simple, it is true to say a past event has been carried away forever. But an act of thought is not just sensation and feeling. It is knowledge which is more than immediate consciousness.[27]

Collingwood considered it one of the wondrous peculiarities of thought that it could survive changes in physical con-

---

[26]Walsh, Philosophy of History, p. 52.
[27]Collingwood, Idea of History, p. 287.

text:

> The peculiarity of thought is that, in addition to occurring here and now in this context, it can sustain itself through a change of context and revive in a different one . . . . The self-identity of the act of thinking that these two angles are equal is not only independent of such matters as that a person performing it is hungry and cold, and feels his chair hard beneath him, and is bored with his lesson: it is also independent of further thoughts, such as that the book says they are equal or the master believes them to be equal.[28]

Inside myself, I can revive one and the same act of thought. For example, I learn for the first time that it is true that I can prove the existence of God from an examination of finite reality. Three months later, I can revive this identical same act of thought. It is true that the first discovery of a truth differs from any later contemplation of it. But the difference is neither in the truth nor in the act. Rather it is that the immediacy of the first act can never be captured again. The jolt which a new insight gives, the freedom following the solution to a perplexing problem, the triumph of achievement, all these immediate experiences connected with the first act of insight are what we cannot re-capture.[29]

It should be made clear and explicit at this point that Collingwood is insisting that my act of thought and the act of thought that Julius Caesar had which I am trying to re-think are not similar acts but identically the same acts.

---

[28] Ibid., p. 297-298.

[29] Ibid.

His position is clear in attempting to answer objectors who say that since the acts take place in two different persons they are two distinct acts. He uses as an example a situation where a lapse of time over a lengthy period is involved. If we take the two persons involved, Euclid and myself, and we grant that the interval of time lapsing is no ground for denying that the two acts of thought are really one and the same, the further question must be asked: Is the difference between Euclid and myself ground for denying the identity of the two acts? Collingwood contended that there exists no tenable theory of personal identity which would contradict his position. Euclid and I are not like two typewriters which, because they are not the same typewriter, can never perform the same act but only acts of the same kind. A mind is not a machine but a complex of activities. And to say my act of thought and Euclid's cannot be the same because they are part of a different complex of activities is an unproved assertion.[30]

Collingwood claims that those who object to his position implicitly assume that identical acts of thought can and do happen. For the objector to Collingwood maintains:

> that although the object of two people's acts of thought may be the same, the acts themselves are different. But, in order that this should be said, it is necessary to know "what someone else is thinking" not only in the sense of knowing the same object that he knows, but in the further sense of knowing the same act by which he knows it: for the statement rests on a claim to know not only my own act

---

[30]Ibid., pp. 287-288.

> of knowing but someone else's also, and compare them. But what makes such comparison possible? Anyone who can perform the comparison must be able to reflect "my act of knowledge is this" -- and then he repeats it: "from the way he talks, I can see that his act is this" -- and then he repeats it. Unless that can be done, the comparison can never be made. But to do this involves the repetition by one mind of another's act of thought: not one like it but the act itself.[31]

Collingwood argues for the identification of my act of thought and the thought of the historical personage I happen to be studying on the ground that if I could only think the same thought content of Caesar and not revive Caesar's act of thinking, then I could never know that my thoughts were identical with his. How could I say I <u>know</u> what Caesar thought if I can't revive his act of thought?

Collingwood feels he has shown why it is necessary to hold that "acts of thought can be detached from their felt background with perfect legitimacy, for it is because they can that history is possible and is properly described as a re-enactment of past experience."[32]

One of the motives behind Collingwood's distinction between thought and felt background, the inside and outside of events was a deep-seated fear of historical scepticism. Past events can never in their totality be re-captured, so how could

---

[31] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 288.

[32] W. H. Walsh, "Collingwood's Philosophy of History," <u>Philosophy</u>, Vol. 22, (1947), p. 157.

we ever know them to be true? But thought, since it is not limited to time and place, could transcend this obstacle and allow the historian to get inside the actions of history. Collingwood, however, has never taken the time to detail precisely how it is that we go about re-thinking these past thoughts.

In summary, we can say that the questions put to past human actions (what happened? why did it happen? when did it happen?) can be answered by the re-enactment of past thought. There is a sense in which a past act of thought, either my own or someone else's can be revived by me now, though not with the same precise physical background as it had before. We can distinguish thought from its context of felt background because acts of thought are not mere constituents of the temporal flow of consciousness, but things which can be sustained over a stretch of time and revived after an interval. A proposition of Euclid can be contemplated by a person for several seconds and again can be brought to mind after my attention has wandered from it. If I ask how many acts of thinking are here involved, the answer is one only. If this holds for my own acts of thinking, it holds also when I am dealing with other people's thoughts. Because we can distinguish thought from its immediate context, knowledge of the past becomes a real possibility.

Re-thinking past thoughts: object or means of historical inquiry? We have declared human actions to be the goal of historical inquiry in the first part of our analysis of historical thought. Then we said that the re-

thinking of past thought is what makes historical knowledge possible. The question now arises as to the relationship of these two elements. Is there present here a relationship of means to end? Is the re-thinking of past thoughts the means by which I get to past human acts? If it is not a means to end, in what sense is it the goal of historical inquiry? Another way of posing the same question would be to ask: Is the re-thinking of past thoughts a part of historical method, or part of the goal which any historical method ought to achieve?

The precise role that the re-thinking of past thoughts plays in the theory of history worked out by Collingwood is simply not clear from his own writings. This is obvious from the disputes among his commentators. We adopt a view here which seems to be most consistent with the whole of Collingwood's theory:

> Collingwood undoubtedly thought that historians must re-think the thoughts inside past actions in order to explain them, but he **did not** consider such re-thinking to be intuitive. . . . To re-think significant past thoughts is part of the end an historian strives to accomplish; it is not even the whole of it, for he must also both demonstrate that he has re-thought them, and use them to explain past actions. Collingwood's interpreters have mistaken his descriptions of an element in the goal of historical inquiry for descriptions of historical method; . . . Few commentators have recognized either that Collingwood acknowledged that imaginative reconstructions of past thoughts are corrigible and, in a sense hypothetical; or that he rejected the view that an historian who succeeds in re-

> thinking a past thought must intuitively know that he has done so.[33]

We must understand then, the re-thinking of past thoughts as an element in the goal of historical inquiry, not as a means to the end. Re-thinking past thought is a condition for the possibility of historical knowledge. The subject matter on which the historian labors really is not the past as such, but the past whose evidence we can understand, the past in so far as we know it. To call history past actuality, except in so far as we know it, would mean setting up an insurmountable barrier between the historian and the past, between knower and the object to be known. History is the knowledge which we have of this past, and to consider it apart from the conditions in human cognition which make it possible, is illegitimate. Collingwood then has simply re-defined the object of history (human actions) in terms of what in these actions is able to be known, namely, past thoughts.

Evidence is the means to the goal of historical inquiry. Since to re-think past thoughts is the goal of historical inquiry, what is the means by which I can accomplish this goal?

> History, then, is a science, but a science of a special kind. It is a science whose business is to study events not accessible to our observation, and to study these events inferentially, arguing to them from something else

---

[33]Alan Donagan, "The Verification of Historical Thesis", Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 6 (1956), pp. 199-200. It should

> which is accessible to our observation, and which the historian calls evidence for the event in which he is interested.[34]

Evidence then, is second best because past events are not present except in terms of the monuments, documents, or testimony in which they now exist. It is from this point that we can make inferences to the past and can conclude that a certain particular past action presupposes this particular thought.

It is in relation to evidence and the inference to past thought that the oft repeated phrase in historical circles, "all history is contemporary history" is understood. This is true because the past must somehow still be alive in the present. In order that a past event can be said to have left a "trace" of itself in the present world, which is evidence of its existence for the historian, this trace must be something more than a material body. We can, for example, suppose that a certain medieval king granted land to the monastery of Cluny and that the charter recording this grant has been preserved to our own day, a brown and aged piece of paper covered with certain strange black marks. Now if nothing else save this parchment survived from the Middle Ages into the world of today, then this parchment would not serve as evidence of the grant as far as the modern historian is concerned. To take only one example, the

---

be noted that the two most prominent authorities on Collingwood are Donagan and the editor of Idea of History, T. M. Knox.

[34]Collingwood, Idea of History, p. 252.

knowledge of Latin survives. If it hadn't, the parchment could never have told the historian what in fact it does tell him. The modern historian can study the Middle Ages because they are not dead. This is true because their writings, paintings, etc. are still in existence, not only as material objects, but also because their ways of thinking are still in existence as ways in which people still can think. This survival of thought patterns need not be continuous or active in modern life. Such things have been raised from the dead such as the ancient languages of Mesopatamia and Egypt.[35]

"All history is contemporary history" can be understood in still another sense. Not in the ordinary sense of the word where contemporary history refers to history of our recent past but in a very strict sense of consciousness of one's own activity as one actually performs it. History is not contained in books or documents but lives as a present interest and pursuit in the mind of the historian when he criticizes and interprets documents, testimony, etc., and by so doing re-lives for himself the states of mind into which he is inquiring.[36]

The ultimate reason that past actions of history can be present is because they can be re-thought. They are present in so far as they are the external expression of thought:

---

[35]Collingwood, Autobiography, pp. 96-97.

[36]Collingwood, Idea of History, p. 202.

> All history is contemporary history, to use Croce's phrase, not because history is an "eternal present", but because the "present" is the product of consciousness at the level of thought, which is an activity capable of spanning the time-series. The levels of consciousness inferior to thought have no history because, as ephemeral sensation, their identity cannot be re-captured. Neither my anger in its initial impact nor that of someone else is susceptible of revival; my thought is.[37]

The logical conclusion to these reflections on evidence and the senses in which evidence makes all history contemporary is that the subject-matter of history is not the past as such, but the past for which we have evidence. Much of the past has irrevocably perished since we have no documents or other evidence for reconstructing it. We believe on mere testimony that the Greeks were great painters but this belief is not historical knowledge since, their works having perished, we have no evidence which would give us the opportunity of re-living in our own minds their artistic experience.[38]

Historical evidence is constituted by a two-fold condition: the questions the historian wishes to ask and the evidence (documents, testimony etc.) that is available to him. "You can't collect your evidence before you begin thinking . . . because thinking means asking questions."[39]

It is in this area of the use and constitution of evi-

---

[37]E. W. F. Tomlin, R. G. Collingwood (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1953), p. 32.

[38]Collingwood, Idea of History, p. 202.

[39]Ibid., p. 270.

dence that Collingwood made his greatest contribution toward distinguishing the activity of the modern historian from the pseudo-historian. The distinction he made is between the scissors-and-paste historian and the scientific historian.

Scissors-and-paste history assumes that the function of the historian is to examine sources of high repute and then to write history as a correlation of the best sources. In this way we remain strictly objective. All the historian has to do is find out if the document or testimony is true and then he can rely on it.

Collingwood has many difficulties with this theory. According to it the essential elements of history are memory and authority. In order for an event or state of affairs to be known historically, the following process is necessary. First, someone must be acquainted with the event; then he must remember it and state his recollection of the event in terms which are intelligible to another; and finally this other person must accept his statement as true. A practical definition of this type of history would be "the belief in someone else when he says that he remembers something." The believer is the historian; the person believed is called an authority.

This doctrine implies that historical truth, in so far as it is available to the historian, exists in the explicit statements of his authorities. These statements become the sacred text of the historian. Their value depends on the un-

brokenness of the tradition they represent. Therefore, he may not tamper with them, change or add to them, nor in any way contradict them. To take it upon himself to regard some statements as pertinent and others as not, to choose some and not others to make a point, is to appeal to another criterion beyond the bare statement of the authority. This is precisely what this theory does not allow him to do. What the authorities tell this historian must be regarded as the truth, the whole accessible truth, and nothing but the truth.

Collingwood repudiates this theory by simply stating that in practice historians repudiate the consequences of such a position. Every historian on occasion does tamper with his authorities. He selects from them what he thinks is important, concludes to statements which the authorities do not explicitly make, criticizes and rejects statements he regards as either based on mis-information, or on outright lies, or on bias. The historian does all this without, for the most part, considering the philosophical consequences of what he is doing.[40]

This kind of common sense, naive approach to historical knowledge which we have been talking about seems to underlie most faulty views of historical method, and in its various forms it tries to seduce the unwary from a critical, reflective understanding of just what a historian is really doing. Collingwood has described in detail the historical method which the histor-

[40] Ibid., pp. 234-235.

ical scissors-and-paste school must use, given their basic assumptions.

Fundamentally the scissors-and-paste historian believes that he must, by reason of his trade, deal with ready-made statements which he can accept as true or reject as false. He must first decide upon a subject to write about. He then starts his search for statements by people who took part in the event or who repeat what eyewitnesses told them. He looks for any statement by an "informed source", and after accumulating a good number of them, he excerpts from them and incorporates them into his history. If these statements contradict each other, he must find some way of reconciling them. He considers critically the relative trustworthiness of the sources and decides which he is to accept. If some statement should relate an event which he simply cannot believe, he will reject it out of hand. Though such an approach to history was more common in the past, it has not completely disappeared even today. The key point is that the scissors-and-paste historian can have only one problem to settle: whether to accept or reject a certain piece of testimony bearing upon the question in which he is interested.[41]

The trouble with scissors-and-paste history is that, with a totally inadequate methodology, it conceives of the past as an object at which one can take a look and immediately un-

---

[41] Ibid., pp. 257-261.

derstand. More concretely, this means that the scissors-and-paste historian looks at a document and finds the meaning already there, right out there on the page where anybody can see and read and understand. The scissors-and-paste historian simply repeats the statements that other people have made and he can get to work only when he has a generous supply of ready made statements on the subjects about which he wishes to think and write.[42]

To combat this scissors-and-paste approach with a more scientific attitude, we must remember that historians do not come with a blank mind to the data but rather with questions about it which determine the course of their investigation. Testimony becomes just another source of information for the answers to their questions.

Historians must realize that the most important question about any statement appearing in his source material is not whether it is true or false but what it means. To ask what a statement means is to transcend the limitations of scissor-and-paste history and to step into a world where history is more than copying out the testimony of the best sources. Scientific history enables the historian to come to his own conclusions. "Thinking about the statements of our sources is critical thinking."[43]

---

[42] Ibid., p. 274.

[43] Ibid., p. 260.

We have here a fundamentally different attitude toward authorities and testimony. When an historian accepts an answer to a question asked, given him by another person, this other person is often said to be his "authority" and the statement or answer accepted is called "testimony". To accept the testimony of an authority as historical truth means the surrender of the name "historian." To accept testimony backed up by evidence is, on the other hand, much more. The affirmation of something based on evidence is historical knowledge.[44]

Scissors-and-paste history keeps the historian one step removed from historical knowledge. History is the re-enactment of past thought. But to base our historical knowledge on valid testimony or the reliability of sources is to avoid this primary function. I may have a desire to find out if Pythagoreas really proved that the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the square of the other two sides. I could consult any number of good mathematicians or I could even read what Pythagoreas himself said. But the only way of knowing whether a given type of argument is cogent or not is to learn how to argue that way and find out. Meanwhile, it is only a second best thing to take the word of those who have done so for themselves.[45]

Even in the case where I am my own witness and authority in terms of a past experience of my own, reference to evi-

---

[44] Ibid., p. 256.

[45] Ibid., p. 263.

dence is absolutely necessary for historical knowledge. For I have a tendency to combine past thoughts with further developments. This tendency can be checked upon in only one way. If I want to be absolutely sure that such a thought was in my mind twenty years ago, I may not merely state this, but must have evidence of it. That evidence must be a book, a letter, a note, a picture I painted, a recollection (either my own or another's) of something I said or did, any of which might show what was in my mind. Only with such evidence before my mind and interpreting it without bias, can I prove to myself that I did think thus some twenty years ago.[46]

Another quality of the competent scientific historian is one which is often mistakenly called an "historical sense" or historian's ability to enter into the thought and context of the period he is studying. He is not satisfied with viewing his sources and evidence as a witness but uses them to get inside the event.

Collingwood has briefly contrasted the scissors-and-paste historian and the scientific one:

> The scissors-and-paste historian reads them (various kinds of evidence) in a simple receptive spirit, to find out what they said. The scientific historian reads them with a question in his mind, having taken the initiative by deciding for himself what he wants to find out from them. Further, the scissors-and-paste historian reads them on the understanding that what they did not tell him in so many words he would never find out from them at all; the

---

[46] Ibid., p. 296.

> scientific historian puts them to the torture, twisting a passage ostensibly about something quite different into an answer to the question he decided to ask; where the scissors-and-paste historian said quite confidently "there is nothing in such-and-such an author about such-and-such a subject", the scientific or Baconian historian will reply "Oh, isn't there? Do you not see that in this passage about a totally different matter it is implied that the author took such-and-such a view of the subject about which you say his text contains nothing."[47]

Collingwood has illustrated the procedure that the historian must follow by drawing an analogy between the detective and the historian which has won wide acceptance and use in historical circles because of its accuracy of description:

> A detective investigating a case begins by deciding what he can regard as undisputed fact, in order to build his theories around that as a framework. If the theories work out, the framework will be declared to have been well-founded, and no further questions will be asked about it. But if results are not forthcoming, a stage may be reached at which it is necessary to go back to the beginning and doubt some of the initial "facts" of the case. A detective who, through devotion to the Correspondence theory of truth, refused to take that step would be very little use to his profession, though naturally he would not be encouraged to take it till every other expedient failed. The case of the historian is exactly parallel. He also must be prepared, if necessary, to doubt even his firmest beliefs -- even, for example, the chronological framework inside which he arranges his results -- though it does not follow that he will involve himself in such an upheaval lightly. He will indeed do all he can to avoid it, undertaking it only as a last resort, but all the same he must not rule it out in principle.[48]

---

[47] Ibid., p. 270.

[48] Walsh, Philosophy of History, p. 87. This is a summary of the principles illustrated by Collingwood's detective analogy under the title "Who Killed John Doe?" along with subsequent development on pages 266-282 of Idea of History.

One of the main points Collingwood is trying to make by the use of this analogy is that an historian, like a detective, must go beyond the evidence presented, not only in a critical way, in terms of judging his sources to be meaningful or not, but also in a constructive way. Going beyond your evidence in a constructive way means the use of interpolation between statements taken from authorities and other statements only implied by them. To take a very simple illustration, our authority may tell us that on Monday Caesar was in Rome and sometime later in Gaul. Nothing is said about a trip, but such an interpolation is made with no doubt about the truth of such a statement.

This act of interpolation which the scientific historian uses has two significant characteristics. First, it is in no way an arbitrary or fanciful act. It is absolutely necessary. If we filled up the narrative of Caesar's journey with details about persons he could have met on the way and what he probably would have said if he met them, the interpolation would be arbitrary, the type of "fact" created by a good historical novelist who departs from a basic historical reality into the world of fiction. But the interpolation we are talking about must involve nothing that is not necessitated by the evidence. Without this type of historical construction there would be no history at all.

Secondly the type of inference used in history is something imagined. If we look out to sea and perceive a ship on the horizon, and then, having gone about our work, ten minutes

later look back again and see it in a different place, we find ourselves automatically imagining it as having occupied at successive intervals the area covered when we were not looking. Quite the same thing is at work when, using the process of interpolation, we imagine Caesar as having traveled from Rome to Gaul when we are told that he was first in one place, then another.[49]

In summary, we can say that evidence is the means by which we are enabled to re-think past thoughts. The thoughts of history live in the present in terms of evidence. This is what is meant by the term, "all history is contemporary history". Evidence as such has no historical value unless by it we can get at past thought. Evidence can be used in various ways. The scissors-and-paste historian simply looks at his sources, decides whether they are true or false and then correlates the best of them into a coherent picture of the past. His history is limited to his evidence and cannot question or go beyond that evidence. The scientific historian considers evidence not only in a critical way but also in a constructive way. The constructive use of evidence consists in interpolating implied statements of sources between those that have been substantially proved, in order to allow me to make an imaginative (not imaginary) reconstruction of the past. Like the reconstruction of the detective,

---

[49]Ibid., pp. 240-241.

this picture is valid in so far as it explains and justifies the facts.

The problem of truth in history. The use of evidence, which we have just described, raises the further question of truth in history. How do we judge what the scientific historian does with his evidence in reconstructing the past to be true or false? The question here is not over the truth of this or that particular fact, but rather scepticism about whether we can ever reach truth or state fact precisely.

If we take up the activity of interpolation just described above, the question arises as to how this imaginative reconstruction of the past which I have made is verified. Verification distinguishes my reconstruction from sheer fantasy.

There are several aspects to be verified. First, I must verify the evidence which I happen to be using for my imaginative reconstruction of the past, say, for example, an eyewitness account to a particular event I am interested in. I may ask the question: Can I put this man's statements into a coherent picture? If I cannot, then I have grounds for questioning this particular source. Even if this man's statements do pass this test, they must further harmonize with my other evidence.

Secondly, I must verify the inferences which I myself have made from accepted evidence. I or someone else may check on the logic or soundness of these inferences in terms of their

relation to the known facts. However if the historian goes about his work of inference carefully, there is little danger that his imaginative reconstructions will resemble those of a novelist rather than an historian:

> The historian's picture of his subject, whether that subject be a sequence of events or a past state of things, thus appears as a web of imaginative construction stretched between certain fixed points provided by the statements of his authorities; and if these points are frequent enough and the threads spun from each to the next are constructed with due care, always by the a priori imagination and never by a merely arbitrary fancy, the whole picture is constantly verified by appeal to these data, and runs little risk of losing touch with the reality which it represents. . . . The hero of a detective novel is thinking exactly like an historian when, from indications of the most varied kinds, he constructs an imaginary picture of how a crime was committed, and by whom.[50]

Ultimately the truth of my reconstruction depends on two factors. The first factor is the evidence available. "Truth" has no meaning for the historian unless it means "what the present evidence obliges us to believe."

The second factor is the historian functioning as an historian. The historian must bring out of himself the problems whose solution he desires to find and he must construct the clues with which he is to approach his material. This subjective element is an essential factor of all historical knowledge.[51]

Any discussion of the problem of truth in history eventually reduces itself to the most difficult element of the

---

[50] Ibid., p. 243.

[51] Ibid., p. 180.

problem, respect for the judgment and autonomy of the historian himself. Collingwood felt that first of all a man must learn to think and judge historically by practice as an historian. As his historical work develops he becomes more aware of his autonomy. The historian's criterion of judgment is something which he brings with him to the study of the evidence. That something is himself, not qua scientist but qua historian. By practising historical thought he learns to think historically. Experience of historical thinking provides his criterions of judgment and these criteria grow in maturity with every growth of historical knowledge. "History is its own criterion: it does not depend for its validity on something outside itself. It is an autonomous form of thought with its own principles and its own methods."[52]

In general, historians fail to perceive the momentous consequences of what they are doing. By explicitly recognizing what they are doing, historians could possibly bring about what we might call a Copernican revolution in the theory of history: the discovery that the historian does not rely on authority other than himself to whose statements his thought must conform, but rather he is his own authority.

The clearest demonstration of the historian's autonomy is provided by historical criticism. The historian's autonomy

---

[52] Ibid., pp. 139-140.

is here manifest in its most naked form, since it is here evident that somehow, in virtue of his activity as an historian, he has power to reject something explicitly told him by his authorities and to substitute a conclusion of his own. If that is possible, the criterion of historical truth cannot be the fact that a statement is made by an authority. Rather it is the truthfulness and the information of the authority that are in question; and this question is one the historian must answer for himself, on his own authority.[53]

When the historian re-thinks a past thought, it is at this moment that he passes judgment on the truth or falsity of history. When the historian re-enacts past thought in the context of his own knowledge, he, at the same time, criticizes it, forms his own judgment of its value, corrects whatever errors he can discern in it. This criticism of the thought whose history he traces is not secondary to tracing the history of it. It is an indispensable condition of the historical knowledge itself. Nothing could be more misunderstood concerning the history of thought than to suppose that the historian as such merely ascertains what someone in the past has thought, leaving it to someone else to decide whether what this person in the past thought was true or not. "All thinking is critical thinking: the thought which re-enacts past thoughts, therefore,

---

[53] Ibid., pp. 236-238.

criticizes them in re-enacting them."[54]

As early as 1925 Collingwood denied that insistence on the autonomy of the historian would mean a commitment to subjectivism and historical scepticism. The denial implies the ability to judge the historian and his work from a higher viewpoint:

> Each historian sees history from his own center, at an angle of his own; and therefore he sees some problems which no other sees, and sees every problem from a point of view, and therefore under an aspect, peculiar to himself. No one historian, therefore can see more than one aspect of the truth; and even an infinity of historians must always leave an infinity of aspects unseen. Historical study is therefore inexhaustible; even the study of a quite small historical field must necessarily take new shape in the hands of every new student.
>
> This, we may observe, is not subjective idealism, unless it is subjective idealism to maintain that a hundred people looking at the same tree all see different aspects of it, each seeing something hidden from the rest. The more their perception is an intelligent perception, impregnated with thought, the more nearly true it will be to say that each sees what the others see, and that all see not merely an apparent tree but the real tree; but they can never detach themselves from the distinct starting-points at which they took up the process of perceiving.[55]

The historian even establishes the "facts" of history. For what modern historians have realized is that historical facts are not "given" to the historians but must be established by them. In history, the word "fact" does not have the common sense meaning we are familiar with. The fact that in the second

---

[54] Ibid., pp. 215-216.

[55] Collingwood, Aristotelian Society Proceedings, p. 172.

century the legions began to be recruited wholly outside Italy is not something immediately given. The fact is arrived at only inferentially by a process of interpreting data according to a complicated system of historical rules and assumptions.[56]

The objective truth of history is always open to further modification depending on the ability of some future historian and the acquisition of new data. No fact is ever wholly ascertained, but may be progressively ascertained; as the labor of historians goes forward, they know more and more about the facts, and reject with greater and greater confidence a number of mistaken accounts of them. But no historical statement ever expresses the complete truth about any single fact.[57]

The ultimate goal of history is human self-knowledge. The last question which Collingwood was to ask himself about history was: In the last analysis, what is history for? This is not a question about the object or goal of historical inquiry, but rather about the purpose or goal of historical thinking as such.

The answer proposed is that history is the very life of our mind "which is not mind except so far as it both lives in historical process and knows itself as so living."[58] Therefore history is "for" human self-knowledge. It is generally thought to be of importance that man know himself. We mean here not just

---

[56]Collingwood, Idea of History, p. 133.

[57]Collingwood, Aristotelian Society Proceedings, p. 160.

[58]Collingwood, Idea of History, p. 227.

knowing his merely personal peculiarities, the things that distinguish him from other men, but his nature as man. This means knowing "first, what it is to be a man; secondly, knowing what it is to be the kind of man you are; and thirdly, knowing what it is to be the man YOU are and nobody else is."[59] It means knowing what you can do; and because no one knows what he can do until he tries, the only clue to what man can do is what man has done. The value of history is that it teaches us what man is by showing us what he has done.

This same notion is re-stated by Collingwood in terms of the goal of historical inquiry, the re-thinking of past thoughts. If what the historian knows by a process of re-thinking is past thoughts, it follows that, in knowing what somebody else thought, he knows what he himself is able to think. Finding out what he is able to do is finding out what kind of man he is. If he is able to understand the thoughts of a great many different people, it follows that he must be a great many different kinds of man. "He must be, in fact, a microcosm of all the history he can know. Thus his own self-knowledge is at the same time his knowledge of the world of human affairs."[60]

Man is the product of his past. History can bestow upon man an eye for his situation in the present. It can provide

---

[59] Ibid., p. 10.

[60] Collingwood, Autobiography, pp. 114-115.

an exact knowledge of the range of past responses to a profuse variety of situations and thus provide him with an intelligent guide to the determination of the kind of man he will make himself to be:

> The body of human thought or mental activity is a corporate possession, and almost all the operations which our minds perform are operations which we learned to perform from others who have performed them already. Since mind is what it does, and human nature, if it is a name for anything real, is only a name for human activities, this acquisition of ability to perform determinate operations is the acquisition of a determinate human nature. Thus the historical process is a process in which man creates for himself this or that kind of human nature by re-creating in his own thought the past to which he is heir. By historical thinking, the mind whose self-knowledge is history, not only discovers within itself those powers of which historical thought reveals the possession, but actually develops those powers from a latent to an actual state, brings them into effective existence.[61]

For Collingwood, human nature is historical activity and is what distinguishes man from all other beings. "The idea that man, apart from his self-conscious historical life is different from the rest of creation in being, a rational animal, is a mere superstition."[62]

This completes Collingwood's analysis of historical thought. He has considered the object of history, past human actions, and re-defined it in terms of the possibility of knowing it, namely, by re-thinking the past thoughts of historical

---

[61]Collingwood, Idea of History, p. 226.

[62]Ibid., p. 227.

persons manifested in exterior actions. Since the re-thinking of past thoughts is still part of the goal of historical inquiry, he further explained the use of evidence, by which the past is made present. Evidence is the means to our goal. It is by putting evidence to the torture, by using it as a point of inference and by using it to judge my imaginative reconstructions of the past that I am ultimately able to re-think past thoughts, and in the process of re-thinking them, judge them. By carrying on historical thinking, I acquire self-knowledge in terms of the possibilities and limitations of man (and therefore myself) as manifest in history.

A final definition of history. As Collingwood analyzed it, we could finally define history as "a science or an answering of questions; concerning human actions in the past; pursued by interpretation of evidence; for the sake of human self-knowledge."[63]

The four major characteristics of history are that it is:

> (a) scientific, or begins by asking questions, whereas the writer of legends begins by knowing something and tells what he knows; (b) humanistic, or asks questions about things done by men at determinate times in the past; (c) rational, or bases the answers which it gives to its question on grounds, namely appeal to evidence; (d) self-revelatory, or exists in order to tell man what man is by telling what man has done.[64]

Having completed our investigation of Collingwood's philosophy of history, it remains for us in the next chapter to trace briefly its relationship to the other branches of philosophy.

---

[63] Ibid., p. 11.

[64] Ibid., p. 18.

CHAPTER III

COLLINGWOOD'S CONCEPTION OF THE RELATION OF PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY

Purpose of chapter. As we have seen, Collingwood was both a distinguished historian and a gifted philosopher. In his works he covered many of the chief areas of knowledge: history and archaeology, the philosophy of art, cosmology and the philosophy of science, the philosophy of history, philosophical method, and even recent politics. But diverse as his activity was, it had a clearly marked unity which he indicated in his Autobiography. "My life's work hitherto, as seen from my fiftieth year, has been in the main an attempt to bring about a rapprochement between philosophy and history."[1] This goal was set by Collingwood because as both philosopher and historian, he saw that philosophers did not recognize the value and worth of historical knowledge.

This chapter will be attempting what Collingwood himself proposed but never formally did. Collingwood worked out, in the Idea of History, a philosophy of history, an inquiry into the nature of historical knowledge. But he left undone the work of relating that inquiry to the other departments of philosophy

---

[1]Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 77.

and to other studies and activities. The goal of this chapter is to make explicit the relationship of philosophy and history as seen in Collingwood's works. When we understand his ultimate conception of this relationship, we will understand why any further inquiry into the relationship of philosophy of history to other departments of knowledge was considered unnecessary.

Early position: Speculum Mentis.[2] This work of Collingwood, written in 1924, is basically an epistemological inquiry. He described it himself as "a critical review of the chief forms of human experience."[3] Therefore the work is involved with the different forms of knowledge which correspond to the different forms of human experience. The investigation begins with three basic assumptions: first, that the five basic forms of human experience which man has discovered are art, religion, science, history, and philosophy; secondly, that these forms are experienced not as mere abstractions but as a concrete form of experience in which the whole person is engaged; thirdly, that because each is a concrete form of experience, there is in some sense a kind of knowledge, a specific activity of the cognitive faculty, involved in each experience.[4]

Having made these assumptions, we can then state the

---

[2]R. G. Collingwood, Speculum Mentis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924).

[3]Ibid., p. 9.

[4]Ibid., p. 39.

question or problem that Collingwood hoped to solve. We have five forms of knowledge and each claims to give us the truth about the nature of reality. Does one or the other form of knowledge give us the whole and absolute truth about reality or do they all share in truth? If they share in giving us the truth, does any one form give us more truth than any other?

To answer these questions, we must construct a test of the true form of knowledge. The test is that of self-consistency. This test is applied by using each form of cognition, by thinking historically, philosophically, or religiously and then showing the necessary inconsistency of the form being criticized. The thinker must show the form of knowledge demolishing itself through the working of its own inconsistencies. This procedure led Collingwood to work out what he called his "map of knowledge" on which the various forms of knowledge are shown to be related in a hierarchical relationship. His map of knowledge

> is to be a statement of the essential nature or structure of each successive form of experience, based on actual knowledge of that form from within, and concentrated upon the search for inconsistencies, rifts which when we come to put a strain on the fabric will widen and deepen and ultimately destroy it.[5]

The map of knowledge. The life of reason is found first to develop in the aesthetic consciousness. Art is the first and most elementary form of knowledge. It is primarily concerned

---

[5] Ibid., p. 46.

with the use of imagination, and as such is not concerned with the truth or falsity of things. It does not assert reality of its object. But it can and does express in its various forms, profound and ultimate truth and yet because at the same time it functions primarily in the imagination, it provides no means, in itself, for judging the merits of this or that particular work.

To overcome this failure, to be able to judge truth, we must introduce a logical element into it. There must be an assertion, without full reflection, that what is essentially imaginative is true. This is religion in its most primitive form as it springs from the error in art. Religion is the dogmatic assertion of truth, of reality. It is a fuller form of knowledge because it claims to be true. It is dogmatic because it refuses to argue. Religion is still artistic in that it is essentially imaginative and is interested in the pursuit of beauty, but is more like full knowledge of reality because it is interested in the beauty of conduct and revealed truth. The main error in religious thought is this: it fails to assert the distinction between its mythological symbols and what is symbolized. This problem is illustrated when we teach the child about God the Father. We say "God is your Father and He dwells up there in heaven." If we told the child, "Well God is not really your father and He really doesn't live in the sky," if we separated the meaning of God from the words used to symbolize Him, there would be no intelligibility left of God for the child.

Therefore, the knowledge of God must grow on this imaginative scaffold where symbol and what is symbolized is left undistinguished. This is the basic error of religion.

Science overcomes this error by the use of abstraction which enables it to divorce the symbol from what is symbolized. The use of abstraction, in effect, tends to split reality into two parts; the mind or thought and the external world. The new abstract symbolism of science becomes mathematics. This leads to a new difficulty and error of thought. Mathematics, starting from unproved assertions, views the world sub specie quantitatis which leads to a materialistic view of all reality. The abstract symbolism of science tends to be given an existence of its own and is imposed on the world.

This error is, in turn, corrected to some degree by history. History, in the practice of historical method, realizes that the abstract must always rest upon the concrete, that the foundation of all speculation is the concrete fact. However the historian does not altogether escape the tyranny of abstraction, for he still retains the notion of the separation of his mind and thoughts from the world. Reality is regarded as something wholly external to himself. He looks at history as something wholly outside himself. There is, therefore, the need of philosophic thinking to overcome this final contradiction and error of knowledge.

Philosophy is the process of bridging the separation

between subject and object. A philosopher really is an historian who realizes he is part of the process he is studying. He converts historical thinking into self-knowledge. Basically, philosophy is reflection on all forms of knowledge, realizing that no one form of experience is all experience and never separating the knower and the act of knowing from the thing known.

We have given this brief summary of Speculum Mentis in order to illustrate Collingwood's early views on the relation of history and philosophy. What can we now say about this relationship as it is viewed by Collingwood in 1924?

First, we should note that philosophy and history, though closely related, are considered to be distinct. History, though not the whole of the knowledge of reality, is still regarded as the highest form, more free from error than any other. Philosophy is above all forms of knowledge and a distinctly different operation of the mind. For it reflects on all other forms of knowing and integrates them into a full picture of reality. Philosophy is formal self-knowledge, the ultimate end of all operations of knowing.[6]

Though distinct, philosophy and history are closely related for philosophy is only one brief step beyond historical

---

[6]Ibid., pp. 308-311.

knowledge.[7] By reflection philosophy integrates the knower and the thing known and helps the knower to know himself as part of the total reality known. This is just one brief step beyond historical knowledge which considers history as knowledge of an objective world and does not consider the historian himself as part of the process.

Secondly, we may observe that Collingwood considers the method of philosophy to be historical. This can be observed in his very definition of a philosopher as "an historian who realizes he is part of the process he is studying."[8]

Thirdly, if we examine the procedure used in this book, we see a further indication of the identification of progress in knowledge with historical progress. In the development of Collingwood's theme, the aesthetic mode of knowing corresponds with the primitive ages of man, the religious form of knowledge with the rise of Christianity and the Middle Ages, the scientific mode of knowing with the rise of science in modern times, and the historical mode of knowing with the short jump to philosophy as the ultimate development of mind, to be popularized by Collingwood himself. We see, then, that Collingwood at a

---

[7] Ibid., p. 246. "Though, in the transition from history to philosophy, history as such is destroyed, the transition is so brief and so inevitable that much belonging to the historical frame of mind is taken over almost unchanged by the philosophical."

[8] Ibid., p. 246.

very early age in his development regarded both history and philosophy very highly, but had not yet fully reflected upon and articulated their relationship with its implications.

Collingwood's "second plateau". What we call the "second plateau" in Collingwood's development, refers to three of his works, composed, for the most part, between 1933 and 1936: Essay on Philosophical Method (1933); Idea of Nature (1934); Idea of History (1936). Professor T. M. Knox has called these works the most successful attempt of Collingwood in bringing about his rapprochement of philosophy and history.[9]

Essay on Philosophical Method (1933). Professor Knox has described this book as a "philosophic landmark" because it both argued for and gave examples of man's interfusion of philosophical and historical thinking.[10] In this book Collingwood argued that the subject matter of philosophy resembles history rather than nature and therefore philosophical method must be constructed accordingly. This does not mean that Collingwood now identifies history and philosophy because he thinks that they have identical methods. That he did not think this way can be shown.

In the opening pages of the book, Collingwood makes it

---

[9]Collingwood, Idea of History, pp. vii-viii.

[10]"R. G. Collingwood", Proceedings of British Academy, XXIX (1943), p. 471.

clear that theories of science or of history, reflections on their methods, are not parts of science or history but rather of philosophy.[11] Such formulations would come as a result of an epistemological investigation.

That historical and philosophical method are not identical is evident from the fact that as thought, philosophy is actually more like science in that it is concerned with the universal, not the concrete particular. It is concerned with truth as such, or the universal principles of art or historical method. This universality is seen in the very subject matter of philosophy which is <u>being</u> considered as one, true, and good. Being, as good, would manifest itself in various forms of goodness on a scale of forms running from the lower to the higher form. These scales of forms of goodness or unity etc. are so related that the higher good or unity is not only better or more unified than the lower but also includes it.[12] Therefore it is clear from both what the philosopher is doing and the subject he deals with that history and philosophy are not identified.

But as in his previous work, Collingwood saw very important connections between the two disciplines. In this particular book, Collingwood emphasizes two of these connections.

---

[11]R. G. Collingwood, <u>Essay on Philosophical Method</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933, pp. 1-2.

[12]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 88.

First of all, let us consider that philosophy deals with being. But being is only found by reflection on experience. This experience is of a special kind, not perceptual experience but the experience of one who thinks.[13] Now a philosopher who reflects on some special field of knowledge such as politics or natural science is not himself a natural scientist or politician. Therefore in so far as he does think scientifically or politically, his knowledge is largely historical; a re-thinking of the thoughts of other men.[14] We can say that the experiential basis for the study of being involves historical thought.

The second relation between history and philosophy is that a history of philosophy and my own philosophical system ought to largely coincide. For each new philosophic system begins where its predecessors left off, and thus in essence, sums up the previous history of philosophy.

A new philosophic system is necessitated because a previous one has been found in error in so far as the old system has not identified or solved all the problems to which its existence gave rise or to which further philosophical thinking will give rise. Nonetheless, the old system was a step forward in so far as it solved the problems at hand that it was meant to

---

[13] Ibid., p. 169.

[14] Donagan, Later Philosophy of Collingwood, p. 8.

solve.[15]

A further conclusion following from the above conception of philosophy in historical evolution is that higher forms of philosophy are developed later in time than the lower. For it is the lower forms of philosophy that set up the problems that the higher ones solve. We should be careful not to conclude from this that a simple narrative of which philosophical system happened to follow the other is the same as a critical account of which philosophical systems are genuine developments in philosophical thinking. This ability to criticize in terms of a true or false system is what still enables Collingwood to distinguish historical and philosophical thinking in this area.

The distinction between history and a critical philosophic system is maintained even though Collingwood goes much further in relating them than most of his contemporaries would have. He believed that one philosophic system could certainly be nearer the truth than another.[16] He believed it was both valid and pertinent to ask which of two philosophic systems is true. And to ask "Is this or that system true or false?" is a philosophical, not an historical question. Philosophy is "a distinct and living form of thought," not "an appendage of

---

[15]Collingwood, Essay on Philosophical Method, pp. 190-191.

[16]Ibid., p. 189.

natural science or a part of history."[17]

Idea of History (1936). In this book, Collingwood continues to maintain a distinction between history and philosophy. The philosopher can consider the poetic relation between the historian and his object of knowledge. Collingwood distinguishes between thought about the past (history) and the awareness of and reflection upon the thought process involved in historical thinking (philosophy of history). The historian of astronomy, for example, would investigate the conclusions that past astronomers have arrived at and also show how they happened to arrive at these particular conclusions. But the philosopher would take up the investigation of the truth of these conclusions and the soundness of the methods of investigation in this particular science. The object of the historian is to discover and explain past actions. If he takes the further step of reflecting upon historical method and determining what method ought to be used by all good historians, he becomes a philosopher.[18]

In his study of history, Collingwood still affirmed that there is such a thing as truth, understood as a reality that transcends any single historical period and which enables

---

[17] Ibid., p. 5.

[18] Collingwood, Idea of History, p. xviii; pp. 3-4.

a man today to judge an historical action as right or wrong, good or evil.[19] To pass judgment on historical action in this way is not the main function of the historian and it has traditionally been the object of study by the philosopher. A philosopher then, according to Collingwood's principles, is able to go beyond the work of the historian because he can investigate factors in human life which transcend the particularities of any historical period.

Idea of Nature (1934). This book shows how philosophical questions can be illuminated and solved by an historical approach. When Collingwood was in the process of publishing the Essay on Philosophical Method, he remarked to a friend that he intended to apply the philosophical method evolved in that book to a problem which had never been solved, that is, to the philosophy of nature.[20]

This book, then, proceeds with an historical analysis of past thought on nature, dividing the development of cosmology (the relations of science and philosophy) into three periods. Part I consisted in the Greek cosmology as exemplified by the Ionians, Pythagoreans, and Aristotle; part II gives the Renaissance view of nature; part III, the modern view.

According to the philosophical method elaborated by Collingwood, what was to follow was his own view of cosmology,

---

[19] Ibid., p. 225.

[20] R. G. Collingwood, Idea of Nature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), p. v.

having prepared the ground for it by a thorough analysis of past considerations on nature. T. M. Knox assures us that "from August 1933 to September 1934 he was working intensively at this subject, studying the history of both natural science and cosmological speculation, and elaborating a cosmology of his own."[21]

However the cosmology of Collingwood which was developed in 1933, presented in lectures given during 1934 and again in 1937 was dropped during a drastic revision of his notes while preparing them for publication in September of 1939. At this time a short note or conclusion was substituted for the description of his own cosmological system. The note was considered to be both a warning and a question. A warning that the end of an historical summary of thought about nature is not a conclusion but a beginning. Historically speaking, there is no indication that thought about nature had reached any conclusions in absolute truth. The question raised by his historical study was simply this: Where do we go from here?

Collingwood then takes it upon himself to suggest the direction in which we should advance. We must realize that natural science is not, as modern positivists have thought, the only department of human thought which indulges in a fruitful search for truth. Moreover, it is not even a self-contained and self-sufficient form of thought, but depends for its existence

---

[21]T. M. Knox, "Editor's Preface," in Collingwood, Idea of Nature, p. v.

on some other distinct and irreducible thought form. Further searching must determine what this thought form is and then take it into consideration in trying to determine what nature is.

This other thought form which grounds thinking about nature is history. There follows an account of the similarities between natural science and history. There are scientific facts which are events in the world of nature just as there are historical facts in the world of human activity. There is a process of verification of facts similar to historical verification. Observations about facts of nature must be recorded and interpreted as in history. Thus scientific facts are a class of historical facts and no one can understand what a scientific fact is unless he understands enough about the theory of history to know what an historical fact is.

This can be said about theory. Scientific theory rests on certain historical facts and is verified or disproved by other historical facts. Any investigation of past theories and their subsequent interpretation involves us in historical research:

> I conclude that natural science as a form of thought exists and always has existed in a context of history, and depends on historical thought for its existence. From this I venture to infer that no one can understand natural science unless he understands history: and that no one can answer the question what nature is unless he knows what history is. This is a question which Alexander and Whitehead have not asked. And that is why I answer the question, "Where do we go from here?" by saying, "We go from the idea of nature to the idea of history."[22]

---

[22] Ibid., p. 177.

We can note here a transition in the thought of Collingwood about his conception of the relation of history and philosophy. The suppression of his own personal cosmology which was to form the conclusion to the historical study we find in the Idea of Nature indicates a break with his previous clear position on this relationship. He substituted for a personal cosmology a conclusion designed to further heighten the value and position of history in human thought. History is now asserted to be not only of value in itself as an autonomous branch of knowledge, but also to be at the very root of scientific thought. History has now been readied to move in and solve many of Collingwood's philosophical problems in a manner more radical than he had ever previously suggested.

The final rapprochement. In Collingwood's latest writings, Autobiography (1939) and Essay on Metaphysics (1939), we have his final answer to the question proposed at the beginning of this chapter, regarding the relation of history to other studies and activities, and more particularly to philosophy. In these works Collingwood advocates the view that all knowledge (including scientific knowledge in the narrow sense) has an historical basis. Unfortunately Collingwood falls into gross historicism and the same error of which he was constantly accusing the positivists. For his exclusive reliance on history as the only valid form of knowledge is the exact counterpart of the positivist reliance on natural science and scientific knowledge. Our examination of

Collingwood's thought in these books, will show that he fosters in his own thought the irrationalism and scepticism of which he accused all who did not accept history as true knowledge. For Collingwood excluded from his own system any inquiry which would justify the existence of knowledge itself.

What led Collingwood to the drastic revision of his views on philosophy and history was his study of A. J. Ayer's Language, Truth and Logic, first published in 1936. He came to the conclusion, with Ayer, that the propositions of traditional metaphysics are unverifiable.

Such conclusions were in the back of Collingwood's mind as he prepared his Metaphysics. In the first chapter of the first part of this book, he announces the chief intention of his work:

> A great deal of work has been done in metaphysics since the time when Aristotle created it; but this work has never involved a radical reconsideration of the question what metaphysics is. . . . On that question Aristotle bequeathed to his successors a pronouncement containing certain obscurities; and from his time to our own these obscurities have never been cleared up. To clear them up is the task of the present essay.[23]

What is the main problem with traditional metaphysics? The main problem is that it has as its object of investigation "being," which means that it has nothing to investigate. Collingwood's problem with this object of metaphysics is that it is formed by a process of abstraction. He argues that, if science

---

[23]R. G. Collingwood, Metaphysics, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), p. 5.

requires a definite subject matter, the abstraction necessary in forming universals can only be carried so far. He concludes: "The universal of pure being represents the limiting case of the abstractive process . . . . To push abstraction to the limiting case is to take out everything; and when everything is taken out there is nothing for science to investigate."[24] Thus, if the concept of being as being is to be formed by abstraction, there can be no science of pure being; and metaphysics must either fold its tent and silently steal away, or it must find a new object.

However, Collingwood, not being able to convince himself that all past metaphysical speculation was in vain, did not abandon metaphysics. He gave it new subject matter. The subject matter of metaphysics becomes what A. J. Ayer called "unverifiable propositions" and what Collingwood came to call "absolute presuppositions."

Metaphysics is the science of absolute presuppositions. The problem raised by Ayer is skirted for, because we are dealing with presuppositions, we are no longer concerned with the truth and falsity of these presuppositions. The absolute truth or falsity of a presupposition apart from its historical context, is not a part of metaphysical inquiry.

Metaphysics does not, in a futile manner, seek to transcend the limits of experience. Primarily it is an inquiry into

---

[24] Ibid., p. 14.

what people believed, at some particular historical period, about the world's general nature. Such beliefs are the presuppositions of all their physics, that is, their inquiry into the details of the world. Secondarily, metaphysics seeks to discover the corresponding presuppositions of other peoples and other times in order to follow the historical process by which one set of presuppositions has turned into another.[25]

Collingwood's attention was drawn to absolute presuppositions by his insight into the question-answer dialogue described earlier in this paper. Collingwood found that all propositions are answers to particular questions. Actually, to ask whether something is true or false only makes sense in this context. To be true or false can only mean to ask whether this particular statement does or does not answer the question it was meant to answer. Therefore truth or falsity does not belong to this or that proposition in isolation, but rather to the question-answer complex as a whole.[26]

Any given question involves a presupposition from which it directly arises. For example, if I ask "Have you stopped beating your wife?", such a question would never be asked unless I presuppose that in fact you have for some time in the past been doing just that.[27]

---

[25]Collingwood, Autobiography, pp. 65-66.

[26]Ibid., pp. 38-39.

[27]Collingwood, Metaphysics, pp. 25-26.

Most presuppositions are relative presuppositions, that is, they are really answers to previous questions. However at the base of the question-answer complex, there are what we call absolute presuppositions. These never come as answers to a previous question but must be a presupposition of all relevant questions in a certain area of thought. For example, an absolute presupposition of medicine would be: every disease has a cause. This is absolutely presupposed by the doctor in probing any particular disease and tests the relevance of any questions he may propose to himself in the course of his investigation. It follows that because these presuppositions are not answers to questions, the problem of their truth or falsity never arises.[28] These absolute presuppositions are the subject matter of metaphysics.

If the function of metaphysics is the inquiry into absolute presuppositions, then the metaphysician is really an historian who inquires into the absolute presuppositions of various areas of thought at various times. It is the business of metaphysics to discover through analysis what absolute presuppositions are being made in the thinking of a given society and then, not to justify them, but to describe them scientifically.[29]

Metaphysics is an historical science; for, Collingwood

---

[28] Ibid., p. 33.

[29] Ibid., pp. 47-48.

argues, "The question what presuppositions underlie the 'physics' or natural science of a certain people at a certain time is as purely historical a question as what kind of clothes they wear."[30] The method of metaphysics, then, is to be historical method as it is commonly understood at present. Further, the propositions of metaphysics are to be historical propositions, that is, each metaphysical proposition is to be formed of an absolute presupposition prefixed by what Collingwood calls the "metaphysical rubric"; "In such and such a phase of scientific thought it is (or was) absolutely presupposed that . . ."[31] The metaphysician, having discovered and stated the absolute presuppositions of a given phase of scientific thought, must then examine the relations existing among these presuppositions. These presuppositions, since they are absolute, must be independent of each other; for a presupposition that could be deduced from some other presupposition would by that very fact cease to be an absolute presupposition. But, though not deducible from one another, the absolute presuppositions of a given period must be consupponible, a term which Collingwood explains thus: "It must be logically possible for a person who supposes any one of them to suppose concurrently all the rest."[32] The metaphysician, then, may examine the absolute

---

[30]Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 66.

[31]Collingwood, Metaphysics, p. 55.

[32]Ibid., p. 66.

presuppositions of any period of scientific thought, he may compare these presuppositions, he may study the process by which one set of presuppositions changes into another; but he may not elaborate metaphysical systems, nor may he attach himself to a metaphysical school, for to do this is to ignore the historical character of metaphysics.[33]

The point has now been reached where a radical historicism is substituted for metaphysics or any other pursuit of ultimate truth. Metaphysical presuppositions are no longer true or false according to their internal logic but depend for their truth or falsity upon their historical context only.

The problems of philosophy are then in no sense "eternal" or "perennial".[34] For Collingwood now explicitly claims that "history is the only kind of knowledge."[35] This identification means that we can ask only one question, say, about Plato's philosophy and his explanation of goodness; "What was Plato's conception of goodness?" We may not ask "What is goodness?" because such a question is not concrete and presupposes some absolute criterion of truth which does not exist. Obviously we may not ask "Is Plato's concept of goodness true or false?",

---

[33] Ibid., pp. 66-77.

[34] Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 69.

[35] Collingwood, Idea of History, p. xi.

since we can in no way transcend our historical condition.[36] If we should answer the question, "What did Plato think?", the further question of whether it was true or not is answered. What Plato thought, is true in so far as it answered the question Plato set out to answer.

What we have said here about the purely historical character of metaphysics applies also to every other area of thought. Logic is only an attempt to expound the principles of what, in the logician's historical period passed for valid thought. Ethical theories differ, it is true, but we cannot declare any single one true or any wrong. For such theories are simply attempts to state what kind of life a particular individual considers worth aiming for. Natural science is not absorbed into history as philosophy is, but neither can it be considered knowledge. For science starts from certain presuppositions and thinks out their consequences; but since the presuppositions of science are neither true nor false, thinking about them together with their consequences can be neither knowledge or error.[37]

Since philosophical and historical questions are now one and the same, scepticism about truth must be predicated of historical knowledge itself. Here again we cannot come up with any

---

[36] Ibid., p. ix.

[37] Ibid., pp. xii-xiii.

critical standards of right and wrong, true or false which transcend a particular historical period:

> St Augustine looked at Roman history from the point of view of an early Christian; Tillemont, from that of a seventeenth-century Frenchman; Gibbon, from that of an eighteenth-century Englishman; Mommsen, from that of a nineteenth-century German. There is no point in asking which was the right point of view. Each was the only one possible for the man who adopted it.[38]

We should note that if we cannot ask whether a past thinker is right or wrong, we have not brought about a rapprochement between history and philosophy but have eliminated the philosophical question altogether.

Having reduced all knowledge to historical knowledge, Collingwood was faced with a problem which he could not solve. If history is the only kind of knowledge, how does it justify itself as such? Collingwood is forced into the contradiction of attempting to justify history on non-historical grounds. For Collingwood the subject matter of history is the concrete.[39] But the presuppositions of history, of metaphysics, and of any other field of inquiry in so far as they are historical sciences, are not concrete and therefore cannot fall within the competence of history; and therefore history, the only form of knowledge, must base itself on what is not knowledge. For example, Colling-

---

[38] Ibid., p. xii.

[39] Ibid., p. 234.

wood's own arguments to establish the historical character of metaphysics as a science of absolute presuppositions are not themselves historical and therefore are not knowledge. On this point, T. M. Knox comments thus:

> The Essay on Metaphysics professes not to expound the author's own metaphysical ideas, but to explain what metaphysics is and "has always been". If so, then, on his own principles, it can hardly be a work of history. . . . Philosophy would thus seem to have resisted absorption into history at the very time when its absorption was being proclaimed.[40]

Collingwood ends his work in a radical scepticism, the very enemy he was attempting to escape.

Conclusion. This thesis has attempted to concentrate on the outstanding contributions of Collingwood toward the understanding and appreciation of the philosophy of history. In chapters I and II, after a brief introduction to this field of study itself, we saw, in the writings of Collingwood, many impressive arguments for the recognition of the values of historical knowledge as a balance to those who worship at the shrine of natural science. We further saw his attempts to resist the positivists in their attempts to absorb philosophy into natural science as the sole form of knowledge. Unfortunately, as we have seen in Chapter III, Collingwood ultimately went further than the impressive arguments offered in the Idea of History. Paradoxically, he took up a position, equally intransigent and just as sceptical, as was that

---

[40]T. M. Knox, "Editor's Preface," in Collingwood, The Idea of History, p. xix.

of his positivist opponents. He began to claim for history exactly what they claimed for science. The goal of his life's work, the rapprochement of philosophy and history did not, in the end, content him.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Bagby, Philip. Culture and History. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959.

Collingwood, Robin George. Autobiography. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938.

_____. Essay on Metaphysics. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940.

_____. Essay on Philosophical Method. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933.

_____. Idea of History. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946.

_____. Idea of Nature. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945.

_____. Speculum Mentis. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1924.

Donagan, Alan. The Later Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.

Ducasse, C. J. Philosophy as a Science. New York: Stechert, 1941.

Garraghan, Gilbert J. Guide to Historical Method. New York: Fordham University Press, 1946.

Meyerhoff, Hans. Philosophy of History in Our Time. Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1959.

Nadel, George H. (ed.). History and Theory. Vol. I: Studies in the Philosophy of History. 'S-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1961.

Renier, G. J. History: Its Purpose and Method. London: Allen & Univin, 1950.

Tomlin, Eric. R. G. Collingwood. London: Longmans Green, 1953.

Walsh, William Henry. Philosophy of History: An Introduction. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960.

Weiss, Paul. History: Written and Lived. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962.

Articles

Child, Arthur. "History as Imitation," The Philosophical Quarterly, II (1952), 193-207.

Collingwood, R. G. "Are Science and History Different Kinds of Knowledge," Mind, 31 (1922), 443-451.

_____. "The Limits of Historical Knowledge," Philosophy, 3 (1928), 213-222.

_____. "The Nature and Aims of a Philosophy of History," Aristotelian Society Proceedings, (1924-25), 151-175.

_____. "A Philosophy of Progress," Realist, 1 (1929).

_____. "The Present Need of Philosophy," Philosophy, 9 (1934), 262-264.

Danto, A. C. "On Explanations in History," Philosophy of Science, XVIII (1956), 15-30.

_____. "On Historical Questioning," Journal of Philosophy, LI (1954), 89-99.

_____. "Mere Chronicle and History Proper," Journal of Philosophy, L (1953), 173-182.

Dommeyer, Frederich C. "Review of the Idea of Nature by R. G. Collingwood," Philosophical and Phenomenological Research, VII (1946-47), 169-172.

Donagan, Allen. "Explanation in History," Mind, LXVI (1957), 145-164.

_____. "The Verification of Historical Theses," Philosophical Quarterly, VI (1956), 193-208.

Dray, W. "Explanatory Narrative in History," Philosophical Quarterly, IV (1954), 15-28.

_____. "Historical Understanding as Re-thinking," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXVII (January, 1958), 200-215.

_____. "Laws and Explanation in History," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXVII (1957-58).

_____. "R. G. Collingwood and the Acquaintance Theory of Knowledge," Revue International de Philosophie, XI (1957), 420-432.

Ducasse, C. J. "Review of Essay on Metaphysics," Philosophical Review, 50 (1941), 639-641.

_____. "Review of Essay on Philosophical Method," Journal of Philosophy, 33 (1936), 95-106.

Harris, Errol E. "Collingwood on Eternal Problems," Philosophical Quarterly, I (1950-51), 228-241.

Mandelbaum, Maurice. "A Critique of the Philosophies of History," Journal of Philosophy, XLV (1948), 365-378.

_____. "Review of Idea of History by Robin Collingwood," Journal of Philosophy, XLIV (1947), 184-188.

_____. "Some Neglected Philosophical Problems Regarding History," Journal of Philosophy, XLIX (1952), 317-329.

Meyers, Edward D. "A Note on Collingwood's Criticism of Toynbee," Journal of Philosophy, XLIV (1947), 485-489.

Muirhead, J. H. "Review of An Autobiography by Robin Collingwood," Philosophy, XV (1940), 89-91.

Murphy, Arthur E. "Review of Idea of History by Robin Collingwood," Philosophical Review, LVI (1947), 587-592.

_____. "Review of Idea of Nature by Robin Collingwood," Philosophical Review, LV (1946), 199-202.

Nowell-Smith. "Are Historical Events Unique?" Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, LVII (1956), 107-160.

Reis & Kristeller. "Some Remarks on the Method of History," Journal of Philosophy, XL (1943), 225-245.

Richmond, I. A. "A Critical Study of Collingwood," Proceedings of the British Academy, XXIX (1944).

Stebbing, L. Susan, "Review of Essay on Metaphysics by Robin Collingwood," Mind, L (1941), 184-190.

Strauss, Leo. "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History," Review of Metaphysics, V (1952), 559-586.

Strong, Edward. "Fact and Understanding in History," Journal of Philosophy, XLIV (1947), 617-625.

Walsh, William Henry. "R. G. Collingwood's Philosophy of His-History," Philosophy, 22 (1947), 153-161.

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by **James E. Von Tobel, S.J.**

has been read and approved by three members of the Department of **Philosophy.**

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

5/8/65
Date

Muriel R Vogel S.J.
Signature of Adviser