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THE METAPHYSICAL BASIS OF R. G. COLLINGWOOD'S

PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

being a Thesis presented by

Albert Prior Fell

to the University of St. Andrews in

application for the degree of B.Phil.



DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the following Thesis is based on the results of research carried out by me, that the Thesis is my own composition, and that it has not previously been presented for a Higher Degree.

The Research was carried out in St. Andrews.

CERTIFICATE

I certify that Albert P. Fell has spent three terms of Research Work in St. Andrews, that he has fulfilled the conditions of Ordinance²⁶¹ No. 50 (St. Andrews) and that he is qualified to submit the accompanying Thesis in application for the degree of B.Phil.

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INTRODUCTION

A. The Conception of a Philosophy of History.

(1) 'Philosophical' History.

'Philosophy of History' is an expression which was first used by Voltaire. Although there had appeared many centuries earlier works which we would now call contributions to the philosophy of history, Voltaire, in the 18th Century, was the first consciously to employ that expression to denote a specific group of studies. What did he mean by the expression 'philosophy of history'? Voltaire's position with regard to history was largely a reaction against the traditional notions about the nature and scope of historical inquiry, though he did retain in his own writing the polemical style common to the theological histories of the age immediately preceding his own. Historical consciousness in its most primitive form is myth, that is, a record of activities attributed to the divinity and partly fabricated events in human society put down in some kind of temporal succession. Here the cognitive, artistic, and religious elements are so fused as to make the whole inarticulate

from a purely scientific point of view. Out of this primitive historical consciousness emerged various more definite ideas of history. Herodotus, for example, represents a fairly high level of historical consciousness, for he was interested in the changing actions of human beings which had created his own time. But the critical methods at his disposal precluded an account of history beyond the span of a single lifetime. Thucydides represents the beginning of the decline of Greek historical consciousness, for he gave in to the dominant trend of regarding as unknowable that which changes. Thucydides gave up the attempt to know past actions and tried to find the unchanging laws of human activity.

Largely under the stimulus of Christian teaching, historians finally overstepped the limits of their own times to write histories of periods and peoples and theological histories of mankind. In modern times universal history became the ideal. This was the conception of history as the complete account, on a narrow military and political basis, of the development of civilization.

Now it was the genius of the 18th century to recognize the narrowness of the approach of earlier historians to world history. Voltaire and the Encyclopaedists, as the very name of this group suggests, extended their interest in history beyond military

and political matters to the industrial, commercial, intellectual and cultural aspects which they recognized to be influential factors in directing the course of history. They wanted to give a more comprehensive and all-inclusive account of human history, and if they fell short of the ideal, and were blind to the significance of whole epochs in human history, nevertheless theirs was a creative intellectual move which implied a recognition of the historicity of many more elements in human society, and an understanding of the relations between the various factors in human civilization. The efforts which ensued were based on inadequate factual resources and were accompanied by hasty judgments on many phases of the past. But they produced social and cultural histories such as Voltaire's "Age of Louis XIV" which initiated a new trend in historical writing.

From our point of view this 18th century development appears as a broadening and clarification of the notion of history itself, based on historical evidence, using only historical methods, and therefore not properly called a specifically philosophical study at all. But it was characteristic of the 18th century, particularly in France, to regard everything comprehensive and all-inclusive as 'philosophical'. The same intellectual position that labeled the

enlightenment thinkers as the 'Philosophe', was also responsible for calling the new kind of history, a philosophy of history, meaning really 'philosophical' history. 'Philosophical' has been placed in inverted commas because it is not the use of the term which has been common in the history of thought. What Voltaire called a philosophy of history we would call simply history, and therefore it would be misleading to retain his use of the expression.

(ii) Speculative History.

The conception of the philosophy of history which may be called 'speculative history' subdivides into two different ideas. Firstly speculative history can mean an imaginative reconstruction of the past with a larger degree of speculation with regard to the facts than is usually thought warranted. Historians, when they think of a certain period in the past, always in some degree go beyond the limits of direct evidence to infer from established facts that certain actions took place for which there is no direct evidence, involving a more or less indeterminate degree of probability. But some historians, the historians of the Romantic period particularly, motivated often by a desire for a more concrete and living account of the past, have relied

to an unusual and perhaps scientifically unjustified extent on the imaginative faculty and forego the necessary rational control of the historical imagination which requires strict adherence to the canons of historical evidence. History of this kind can at its best be forceful writing, having many values other than historical values. But as history we must judge it by the standards of history, and at its worst it must be recognized as a fabrication which consciously or unconsciously distorts historical truth.

The second kind of speculative history is not mere history but is consciously a philosophical study. It is an interpretation of historical fact in terms of some basic metaphysical presuppositions about reality. This is to be distinguished from the philosophical study which considers the historian's thinking activity with certain metaphysical presuppositions in mind, which will be discussed below. The former discipline, speculative history, is an attempt to find a meaning or plot, to recognize something of universal significance, in or underlying the facts of history themselves. In this endeavour, the interpretation of history only begins when the historian's task is finished. The interpretation of historical fact is in terms of non-historical categories, sometimes of theological thought, sometimes of metaphysical thought. In the

latter case we have a discipline which, if it is valid at all, is a philosophical study. As a philosophical study it is out of fashion among philosophers today who, mainly with Hegel in mind, criticize any attempt to attain new knowledge about historical fact by non-historical methods. For if historical methods are used, then the study is simply history. If some metaphysical interpretation is given, then this is a philosophy of history the validity of which rests on the justification of the prior categories of interpretation. The strength of the attack on this kind of thinking rests on the fact that the metaphysical categories of interpretation are incapable of justification with reference to historical evidence, yet it is precisely in terms of these categories that it purports to say significant things about the historical process itself.

This is usually considered by critics the traditional conception of the philosophy of history. M. Mandelbaum lists as representative of this approach, the work of St. Augustine, Bossuet, Condorcet, Hegel, and as well as these monistic linear interpretations of history, the morphological philosophies of

history of Spengler and Professor Toynbee.¹ K. Mannheim who derived much from Hegel would also come under this classification.

Hegel's metaphysical category of historical interpretation, as stated in his "Philosophy of History", was "the simple conception of Reason; that Reason is the Sovereign of the World; that the history of the world therefore presents us with a rational process."² For Hegel it is the philosopher who must find out the precise nature of this rational process. The historian ascertains the facts and the philosopher tries to understand them by finding the plot underlying them. Selecting from the facts of history, Hegel maintained that this plot is the growth of freedom. But the ultimate justification of this position lies in the a priori metaphysical category of Reason. For whereas the principle of Reason is only an hypothesis in history, in philosophy it is asserted, and proved by "speculative cognition."³

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1. Mandelbaum, M.; A Critique of Philosophies of History, in The Journal of Philosophy vol.45, 1948, p. 365. Collingwood, using a different principle of classification, claimed that Spengler and Professor Toynbee have much in common with the positivistic approach to history.
 2. Hegel; Philosophy of History, tr. J. Sibree (London 1857, H.G. Bohn) p.9.
 3. ibid

Similarly for Karl Mannheim and others interested in the sociology of knowledge, the philosophy of history is essentially an attempt to find a meaning in the historical process as a whole. "At this juncture (with the working out of the Histori-
cist world view)¹ however, our historical researches and also our ways of experiencing the present become more than mere historiography - they turn into a philosophy of history. We no longer wish to know merely "what happened". We are interested not only in the immediate "why" (the immediate causal antecedents) of an event, but also we constantly ask ourselves; "what does it mean?" As we integrate the element in question (the historical fact) into a totality, indeed a dynamic totality, and thence assess its meaning, our question becomes philosophical and the special science of history as well as the contemplation of life once again becomes philosophical."²

(iii) Methodological and Linguistic Analysis.

A conception of the philosophy of history which has be-

1. The contents of this bracket are my own.

2. Mannheim, K.; Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge.
(London, Routledge, & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1952) pp 87-8.

come of increasing interest to philosophers in the English speaking world in recent years is a study of the methods used by historians in their task and an analysis of the words employed in the writing of historical literature. Even those philosophers who think that significant philosophical problems concerning history are to be found over and above these traditional problems of empiricist philosophy, accept these problems as a valid field of inquiry.

If the task of the historian is to know the past, the minimal job of the philosopher is to make sure that the historian is talking sense, to understand the kind of thing that historians are doing, and to compare this with, for example, what natural scientists are doing. In neither case is the philosopher thought to be adding to the historian's knowledge of historical fact, but is, in the former case through a therapeutic analytic activity, making clear what the historian means in certain of the more ambiguous or confused passages of the historical narrative, in the latter case, through a comparative analysis of the logical structure of theories and techniques of inquiry, adding new knowledge concerning the similarities and differences between the actual methods of history and those of the social and physical sciences.

The analysts would argue that the philosopher can ask significant questions not within history but about history. One

of their members lists a few such questions; 'Is history a science?', 'How can we know historical facts?', 'Is there any such thing as an objective historical account?', 'Are there any historical laws?'¹ What is peculiar to the analytic approach to these questions is that their meaning as well as their solution must be understood in terms of a purely analytic method, no attempt to interpret the historian's task in terms of a metaphysical position, or to establish, by the transcendental method, certain substantive conclusions about reality, being thought permissible.

(iv) History as a Mode of Experience.

We have seen that the philosophy of history in the sense of 'philosophical' history is, by universal agreement, just history itself. Speculative history is understood to be either just history or the attempt to establish matters of historical fact on a priori grounds, grounds outside the field of historical inquiry. Analytic philosophy of history is a minimal clarification of linguistic usage in history, and comparative methodology. Over and above these con-

1. Gardiner, P.; The Nature of Historical Explanation,
(Oxford University Press, 1955) pp X, XI.

ceptions there is one more which is metaphysical in the sense that it purports to go beyond a discussion of language to say something about reality, yet it does not pretend to be able to add to our knowledge of historical fact by a priori reasoning. It is a consideration of the historian's activity of knowing historical fact.

In this investigation the philosopher must be familiar with the activity of the historian qua historian, be armed with the techniques of philosophical investigation, and be familiar with the questions asked throughout the history of philosophy. He is trying to discover what is the precise nature of the historian's experience qua historian. How does this historical mode of consciousness differ in the relation of the mind to its object, from the modes of consciousness in aesthetic experience, religious experience, scientific experience, and philosophical experience?

The precise way in which a philosopher will go about answering this question and the type of answer he will obtain is largely dependent on his basic metaphysical position. Philosophy of history in the sense of an analysis of history as a mode of experience is in its very definition suggestive of the idealistic approach to philosophy. Any answer to the question what historical consciousness is, will depend on a more basic conception of the nature of thought. This conception does not have to be fully arti-

culated before one begins philosophizing about history. Rather the metaphysics emerges more and more clearly in the dialectical interplay of reflection on the various modes of experience and direct participation in them.

This conception of the philosophy of history has been fundamental to the work of Croce, Dilthey, Professor Oakshott and Collingwood, and it is clear that their philosophies are philosophies of experience in the Kantian sense. Philosophy is here understood to begin not with reality as such, nor with language, but with experience of reality in all its forms. A philosophy emerges out of experience, becomes clarified through experience of a certain kind, and is finally evaluated as a philosophy in the judgment of the adequacy of its categories in making experience intelligible.

The philosophers mentioned above, in their reflection on history as a subject of study concluded that history is an autonomous discipline, the expression of a distinct mode of consciousness of particular importance. Indeed both Croce and Collingwood in their final positions implied that it was the only genuine mode of experience, so that philosophy itself is a branch of it. But this historicism is not a necessary element in a philosophy of history which regards history as a mode of experience,

as Collingwood's middle position well proves. The main tasks in this conception of the philosophy of history ^{are} is to describe the characteristics of history as a mode of consciousness, to discover its relation to other modes, and above all to specify the nature of reality in which historical knowledge is possible. It is thus description, analysis, and criticism, and it claims to give substantive results. But it does not do so on the basis of a priori reasoning, for it must remain true to the facts of experience.

B. The Primacy of Metaphysics

Plato says in 'The Republic' that the thinker should approach the subject of philosophy only after he has become familiar with the other activities of human thought, with the methods and conclusions of the various particular sciences. But if we turn to it temporally last, philosophy, and in particular the central core of it, metaphysics, is logically prior, i.e. it provides the basic conception of reality on which the particular sciences, both theoretical and practical, are based. This is not to assert that a person has to be explicitly aware of his metaphysical position before any of the sciences will make sense to him. Rather it is to say that systematic thinking in any realm of inquiry presupposes a certain view of reality which must be brought to light and understood if the sciences based upon this view are to be understood fully. This view cannot consist of mere hypotheses about reality but must comprise substantive assertions in order that the sciences based upon them can have ontological significance. Now among the particular sciences which are based on a metaphysical position are the philosophical disciplines subsidiary to metaphysics, including the philosophy of history. However the philosophy of history be conceived, it

can only be made fully intelligible when considered in the light of a metaphysics underlying it.

Consider the various conceptions of the philosophy of history outlined above. Voltaire's 'philosophical' or comprehensive history is founded on the basic 18th century metaphysical assertions about the nature of human reason and the place of reason in the universe. The Romantic historian's over-zealous speculations about history were founded on a view of reality that gave greater scope to emotion and volition than the 18th century thinkers were wont to recognize. Hegel's philosophy of history by his own admission was founded on the non-historical metaphysically-grounded idea of Reason. The modern historicists also admit that their relativistic conception of the categories of human thought forms an historico-philosophical world-view which constitutes in fact a metaphysical position. The analytic philosophers have pleaded innocent to all charges of having any metaphysics whatever. They might concede a special study of conceptual revision¹, but this is too weak a conception to be classified under metaphysics as defined above. The analysts have seldom seen fit to formulate and justify their

1. This expression was used by Professor G. Ryle.

first principle, though this is less true now than it was twenty years ago. Professor Urmson in his recent history of the analytic movement¹, has shown that until the late 1930's analytic philosophy was closely associated with a particular metaphysics - that of logical atomism. It may now be asserted by an analytic philosopher that in its current form his philosophy has no metaphysical presuppositions, that in giving up the attempt to translate statements into other statements which more truly express the structure of the fact, and restricting his interest to the use of statements, he has avoided metaphysics entirely. He might say that the suggestion that he has a metaphysics would only make sense to a person already committed to the view that all thought has metaphysical presuppositions. This observation would be correct, but is it not the case that everyone must judge for himself when reflecting on his experience as a thinking being whether or not that experience can be made fully intelligible without making some fundamental assertions about reality itself?

Those who have understood the philosophy of history to be a consideration of the historian's experience have usually maintained that a metaphysical foundation is necessary for systematic

1. Urmson, J. O. Philosophical Analysis, (Oxford University Press, 1956).

thought. Whether or not their views on metaphysics are adequate is another matter, for the positions they have held are various, and some of the philosophers who at one time were confident in their metaphysical positions later accepted a position of philosophical scepticism owing to their analysis of history.

If it is true that metaphysics is logically prior to the philosophy of history, then any particular philosophy of history should never be considered in isolation from the metaphysics logically prior to it, and the consideration of the metaphysics should be of positive help in discerning the full meaning of the theory of history.

C. The Metaphysical Basis of Collingwood's
 Philosophy of History

Collingwood's philosophy of history has suffered perhaps unduly at the hands of critics because it has been considered in isolation from his other philosophical work, with the result that the meaning of his assertions has not always been precisely discerned. In order to understand Collingwood's philosophy of history it is necessary to see it in the context of his general conception of what philosophy is, and his metaphysical position concerning the nature of reality and the nature of man and human thought. Collingwood's metaphysics developed side by side with his reflection on the study of history. And yet it is not easy to say what that metaphysics is, for although Collingwood wrote a good deal about what metaphysics as a systematic study is or ought to be, he wrote very little actual metaphysics. It is therefore necessary to gather together his few metaphysical assertions and infer the rest from these and from his writings on history which are rich in metaphysical implications.

Because of the peculiarly close relationship between Collingwood's conception of what philosophy is, and his philosophy of history, a secondary theme of the Thesis will be the changing

relationship between philosophy and history in Collingwood's thought. The primary purpose of the Thesis, however, is to expound Collingwood's philosophy of history in the various phases of its evolution, and side by side with this to formulate those of Collingwood's changing views on metaphysics which are important for understanding his ideas on history, and to point out how an understanding of these metaphysical views makes much more clear and precise what he has to say in his philosophy of history.

In terms of this task his thought can be divided roughly into three periods: before 1930 when he formulated a philosophical position in opposition to the Oxford realists, and wrote several tentative papers on the philosophy of history, between 1930 and 1936 during which time he wrote his main work on the philosophy of history and developed a positive metaphysical position only part of which he put down on paper, and after 1936, the period of his historicist philosophy. These three periods form the main divisions within the Thesis. In the final chapter, as from time to time throughout the rest of the Thesis, a number of the main criticisms that have been brought against Collingwood's philosophy of history are briefly considered.

PERIOD I

CHAPTER 1

REACTION AGAINST REALISM

Collingwood's philosophical ideas took shape through his reflection on the realistic philosophy he was taught at Oxford. What were the factors in his experience which led him to question at certain crucial points, the adequacy of realistic philosophy? What constructive help did he obtain from his reading of other modern philosophers outside the Oxford philosophical tradition? To answer these questions it is necessary to review briefly his family background and education and his extra reading and interests while a student of philosophy at Oxford.

His parents were both artists who achieved only a modest success, but who had wide literary and historical interests. Through their work and the encouragement he received from an early age to draw, to play the piano and violin, and to write, he obtained an insight into the practical problems and values of artistic creation. His father, W. G. Collingwood was Ruskin's mentor and made a special study of his life and work. It was also through his father's interest in, and considerable aptitude for, archaeology, that Collingwood received a first-hand acquaintance with a

practical historical discipline which was to become his main non-philosophical interest, and indirectly the strongest influence on his philosophical thought.

Collingwood was educated in the classics and modern languages at home by his father up to the age of thirteen. He spoke and read French and German well before attending Rugby where he took classics. While still at school, under his own initiative, he taught himself Italian and read widely in English, French, German and Italian literature. He also furthered his interest in musical theory and composition.

These biographical references are important because they show that when Collingwood was elected to a scholarship to University College Oxford he had a grounding in the arts, particularly literature, and history, which was to form the experiential evidence on which he drew in his criticism of Oxford realism.

Collingwood began reading for the philosophy section of the Greats course in 1910, and before he had finished he had read not only the prescribed course which covered up to Kant, but also the major works in western philosophy since that time. In 1910 Oxford philosophers, with a few exceptions, were concerned to criticize the 'School of Green' which, though never dominant among professional philosophers at Oxford, had achieved considerable in-

fluence during the last quarter of the 19th century. The most important followers of T. G. Green were F. H. Bradley, B. Bosanquet, William Wallace and R. L. Nettleship. It was a school well read in German philosophy yet improperly called a version of German idealism because it had evolved out of a criticism of the English and Scottish philosophical traditions. After the turn of the century the influence of the school was waning, and younger adherents such as J. A. Smith and Joachim did not see fit to publish on current problems.

Collingwood was therefore taught by philosophers who, in opposition to the 'idealist' school of Green, called themselves 'realists', such as J. Cook Wilson, H. A. Prichard, H. W. B. Joseph and in particular his tutor E. F. Carritt. Collingwood as an undergraduate had a feeling of uneasiness concerning the realist philosophy, but he did not formulate his own ideas in opposition to the realists until after he became a tutor in philosophy at Pembroke College in 1912. When, after the First war, he eventually took a stand against the realists it was not as an adherent of the school of Green but as something quite different again.

Before giving an account of the ground of his criticisms, it would be well to pause at this point to discuss his reading and in particular the relation of Collingwood to Benedetto Croce whose

work he had been reading as an undergraduate and whose position he later came to approximate in many ways.

Collingwood read carefully the works of the 'idealists' because he found in them more of worth than the 'realists' were wont to recognize, and also because he detected inaccuracies in the accounts given of their work by the realist philosophers. But although the purpose of the 'idealists', their interest in moral and political philosophy, and their critical methods were probably congenial to Collingwood, they were hardly more adequate than the 'realists' when it came to history and art, the realms of experience which were to be central to Collingwood's own position. In Hegel also, Collingwood must have found a new understanding of the complexity and interrelatedness of events and the organic unity of reality, though he rejected the more speculative aspects of Hegel's metaphysics and philosophies of history and art. It is to Croce that we must turn to find someone whose philosophical sympathies and extra-philosophical interests were similar to his own. These two things, extra-philosophical interests and general philosophical sympathies are not unconnected, for it is largely the precise nature of these interests that to a large extent determines the general philosophical orientation a person will have.

Croce approached philosophy to obtain a general intellec-

tual orientation on which to base a consistent critical attitude to literature and art, an adequate moral theory, and a method of historical research. In the 1890's, when he had already done some original work in the history and criticism of Italian literature and had published a book on the relation of history to art, he became interested in Hegel through a critical reading of Marx and rejected the more speculative elements of Hegel's metaphysics. Vico, whose philosophy Croce has done so much to revive, and whom he called "The philosopher most akin to myself",¹ influenced his views on history and art profoundly. Shortly after the turn of the century Croce began publishing a series of books which must have come to Collingwood's attention in the years following 1910 and perhaps even before that time. The principal ones were: "What is Living and What is Dead in Hegel's Philosophy", 1906, "Philosophy of Practice", 1908, "Logic", 1909, and "Problem of Aesthetic", 1910. In 1912 appeared the first of Croce's essays on the theory of history which were later gathered together and published under the title "Theory and History of Historiography". It was in the same year that Collingwood began a correspondence with Croce. He must have felt at this time that here was a man

1. Croce, B.; Autobiography, tr. R. G. Collingwood, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1927) pp. 74-5.

actively engaged in literary criticism, publishing with Gentile the review "La Critica", an historian who had done original research on the relations between Spain and Italy, the history of Italy and Italian literature, who was asking philosophical questions of the greatest importance, and to which much of the current philosophy was unable to give satisfactory answers. Collingwood's interest in Croce continued. He translated Croce's "The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico" in 1913, and Croce's "Autobiography" which came out in 1917, in 1927. Collingwood met Croce in Oxford in 1923 when he was there to receive an honorary degree. In 1927 Collingwood visited Croce in Naples.

Although Collingwood was critical of Croce's position on many points during this period, as shown by his article "Croce's Philosophy of History" which appeared in the Hibbert Journal in 1921, nevertheless his reading of Croce must have been a stimulus to him in his reaction against Oxford realism. Guido da Ruggiero, an Italian idealist philosopher, was even better known to Collingwood than was Croce, and Collingwood translated his books on modern history and modern philosophy.

It is not our purpose in this chapter to give a full exposition of Collingwood's positive position which he developed later, but merely to indicate certain facts about art and history

and his reflections upon them, which led Collingwood away from the realist position in the early years of his teaching career. First of all it was his aesthetic consideration of the Albert Memorial while in London during the First Great War that convinced Collingwood of the inadequacy of realism. For the aesthetic judgment is not a simple statement as to the presence or absence of a special quality. In the aesthetic judgment it is necessary to know the purpose of the artist. Why was it that an earlier generation praised the Albert Memorial as beautiful, while his own generation considered it ugly? Because his generation had lost touch with the thought of the earlier age. They did not understand what the purpose of the artist was, and this lack precluded a sound aesthetic judgment.

The substance of this criticism of realism, Collingwood never wrote down in detail. However, he has in a number of places, particularly in his autobiography and in the articles written by him in the 1920's, pointed out the other reason for his dissatisfaction with realism, - "a philosophy which erred through neglecting history".¹ Collingwood thought about the

1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Autobiography, (Oxford University Press, 1939) p. 28.

nature of the historian's activity of knowing the past. He was here asking an almost Kantian question. Accepting the validity of well attested historical knowledge, what is the nature of mind which made this knowledge possible? Now it had been one of the main contentions of the realists that knowledge is a simple relation. Knowledge, for a realist, is just the compresence of mind and object where the mind intuits the nature of the object. Examples of such knowledge would be, "This is a red rose", and "My hand is resting on the table". Simple propositions such as these became the basic units of knowledge for analytic philosophy, an offshoot of the realist movement.

But historical research presents some singularly difficult obstacles to the conception of knowledge as ultimately simple intuition. For the object of historical investigation is never present to the mind, indeed cannot be so present, and hence the relation of mind knowing historical object is never a simple one. In Collingwood's own terminology at this early stage in the development of his thought, the past is not real, i.e. is not immediately present to be intuited, but has an ideal being as labor-

iously reconstructed in the mind of the historian.¹ This reconstruction involves a complex process of mind which will be analysed later but which can be referred to now as evidence of the inadequacy of a theory requiring that knowledge be conceived as a simple relation.

In another essay² Collingwood writes that the past does not exist and cannot be perceived. Our knowledge of it is not derived from observation and cannot be verified by experiment. The realist requirement for knowledge, that the mind intuit its object, is therefore completely inapplicable. Knowing is here an interpretation of data, mediated by a body of principles which constitutes the method of historical research. These principles form a complex in themselves, some being scientific in nature, others being philosophical, applying to all evidence whatever, the latter constituting the logic of historical inquiry. The philosophical principles, for example, would establish the nature

1. Collingwood, R. G.; Some Perplexities about time; with an attempted Solution, Aristotelian Society Proceedings, 1925-6, p. 149.

2. Collingwood, R. G.; The Philosophy of History, Historical Association Leaflet 79, (Bell & Sons Ltd. 1930) p. 13.

and set the limits of negative evidence, and delimit the usefulness of analogical argument.

Connected with the realist position is the assertion of Cook Wilson that knowing makes no difference to what is known. This was attacked by Collingwood on the ground that the positive assertion assumes that the object is known both with the condition of being known and without the condition of being known, and on comparison no difference is found. But this assumes that the object is known without the condition of being known which is absurd.¹ The positive position of realism is shown to be meaningless.

Realism in its simplest form assumes that the past is there to be known, and the job of the historian is to know as much of it as he can. But as Collingwood asserts, the past as past is wholly unknowable. It is the past as residually preserved in the present, that is alone knowable. "Historical realism involves the absurdity of thinking of the past as something still existing by itself a world where Galileo's weight is still falling, where the smoke of Nero's Rome still fills the intelligible air, and where interglacial man is still learning to chip flints".²

1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Autobiography, p. 44.

2. Collingwood, R. G.; The Limits of Historical Knowledge, Journal of Philosophical Studies, Vol. III, 1928, pp. 220-21.

What is immediately present to the historian is not the past but the present as result of the past, and thus the whole of the present is, in one degree or another, evidence of the past. For Collingwood the concept of evidence and the principles for its understanding and use are central. "For historical thinking means nothing else than interpreting all the available evidence with the maximum degree of critical skill. It does not mean discovering what really happened, if 'what really happened' is anything other than 'what the evidence indicates.' If there ever happened an event concerning which no shred of evidence now survives, that event is not part of any historian's universe. ... What really happened in this sense of the phrase is simply the thing-in-itself, the thing defined as out of all relation to the knower of it, not only unknown but unknowable, not only unknowable but non-existent."¹

Collingwood also criticized the realist view that all events are external to one another, that each historical occurrence was distinct and separate from all others. The historical process was therefore thought of as a simple succession of events. In 1925 Collingwood published an essay criticizing this view. In this

1. Collingwood, R. G.; The Limits of Historical Knowledge, Journal of Philosophical Studies, Vol. iii, 1928, p. 219.

essay he employed a concept which was to be basic in his idea of philosophical method, - the concept of overlap of events and classes. Historical events are not monadic, thought Collingwood, but overlap so that verbal distinctions made in the writing of history in some degree distort reality. "In actual history, events overlap, you cannot except by a confessed fiction state the point at which the middle ages ends, and the event called the modern period begins."¹ All sequences of events, he thought, show the same overlap.

The notion that events and concepts overlap is not an easy one for anyone brought up on traditional logic and the new analytic view of language to swallow. The realists adhered to the statement or propositional logic, the basic unit of knowledge being the simple statement in the indicative mood. It was this statement, intuitively understood in itself, to which was assigned one or other of the truth-values. It is important to understand Collingwood's reaction against this conception of truth and of the relation of language to reality, because his own position was not that of the 'idealists', the traditional opposers of the realists.

1. Collingwood, R. G.; *Some Perplexities about Time: with an Attempted Solution*, Aristotelian Society Proceedings, 1925-6, p. 144.

Collingwood mentioned once that philosophy is that which conceives its object as activity, whereas 'empirical thought' is that which conceives its object as substance or thing.¹ For Collingwood the object of philosophical thought is not the dead product of thought as put down in a series of statements but the activity of thinking itself. When one considers the activity of thought, especially if in the light of some practical activity of research, the intuitive view of truth breaks down, and thought is seen to be an interaction between mind and object. "My work in archaeology,... impressed upon me the importance of the 'questioning activity' in knowledge; and this made it impossible for me to rest contented with the intuitionist theory of knowledge favoured by the 'realists'."² In thus considering the unit of truth to be the statement together with the question it was put forward to answer, he thought he was making an innovation, supported in practice in historical research, of the same kind that Bacon and Descartes made in transforming the methodology of the

1. Collingwood, R. G.; Economics as a Philosophical Science, International Journal of Ethics, Vol. XXXVI, 1925-6, p. 162.

2. Collingwood, R. G.; An Autobiography, p. 30.

natural sciences in the 16th century.

The formal logic of the realists and analysts may be defined as the science which analyses and criticizes the rational reconstruction of the results of our thinking. Collingwood's logic of question and answer was something quite different, - a critical study of the process of thought itself in its concrete reality. The examples he used to illustrate this activity of thought he drew primarily from historical research in archaeology. Between 1910 and the 1920's Collingwood became an expert in this branch of historical research. He published his first article on archaeology in 1913, the beginning of a series of articles and accounts of investigations which lasted through most of his life. What impressed him in his research was the fact that no progress could be made unless specific questions were asked. The results of inquiry were valuable in proportion as important questions had been asked. In developing this theory, Collingwood concluded that question and answer are strictly correlative. A proposition could not be the right answer to any question that could have been answered otherwise. It follows that the generality of a question must correspond to the generality of its answer, and that two propositions cannot contradict one another unless they are answers to the same question. The main concepts of logic; meaning, agreement, contra-

diction, truth and falsity, take on a new meaning when applied to propositions understood as answers to questions.

Certain difficulties arise in this theory which will be discussed below. It is sufficient here to point out Collingwood's fundamental difference from the realists.

One further point turned Collingwood from the realists at this early stage. The realists tended to consider philosophical problems as timeless, i.e. non-historically. Philosophical problems, they thought, are the same now as they were for the Greeks, and always will be the same. They are in principle capable of final and absolute solution, the solutions remaining valid for all time. Hence they considered the major figures in the history of philosophy as giving a succession of answers, either true or false, to essentially the same questions. Collingwood, both as an undergraduate listening to the lectures of the realists whom he thought misrepresented figures in the history of thought, and as a teacher of philosophy, thought that not only did philosophical theories differ from age to age and from person to person, but also that the very problems faced and the questions asked were subject to development and change. Therefore although two philosophers such as Plato and Hobbes might discuss 'the State', they were really talking about things quite different from one another. Not only

were the political and social realities obviously different, but also the political ideals worked out by the two thinkers, were different responses to fundamentally different questions. Consequently the realists erred in saying that the history of philosophy is, qua history of philosophy, of no use in answering philosophical questions, and their error stemmed from an inadequate idea of the nature of history itself.¹

1. Collingwood, R. G.; *op cit*, p. 59.

CHAPTER 2

EARLY PHILOSOPHICAL SCEPTICISM

Collingwood's philosophical method, like the method of Plato's 'Republic' he so much admired, is not so much to build block by block a theoretical edifice out of distinct and separable units, as to develop dialectically a concept. First he gives a formulation of an idea as it appears in common sense and everyday discourse. Then he proceeds, by drawing out various aspects of that idea, and taking them to their extreme limits, to a more and more sophisticated, concrete, and adequate formulation of the concept. Therefore it would be an injustice to Collingwood, an injustice which few of his critics have recognized, to take single statements and paragraphs from his works and subject them to analysis in isolation from the rest of the thought to which they are organically related and with reference to which they alone can be fully understood.

It is with a clear realization of this that there are pointed out in Collingwood's two earliest books, "Religion and Philosophy" and "Speculum Mentis", certain trends of thought which, if pursued to the end, would lead to philosophical scepticism. In

"Religion and Philosophy" first of all, Collingwood's philosophical views are not in the last analysis sceptical. He certainly would have denied it, and it is not difficult to point to passages explicitly asserting the possibility of metaphysics, for example the passage in which he asserts that proof is possible concerning ultimate truth where this truth has some positive content.¹ Nevertheless there are passages in this book, particularly those dealing with the relation of philosophy to history, which are not at all clear, and which give evidence of that confusion of thought which finally led to the conscious identification of philosophy with history, resulting in the obliteration of the former, which characterized the last stage in his thought.

The relevant passages in "Religion and Philosophy" deal with a different question, the relation of history to theology conceived as a philosophical subject. In answering this question, he concluded that history and philosophy are in a sense identical, and it is his justification of this conclusion which, if clarified, would tend to lead to a position of philosophical scepticism. Collingwood begins with an elementary and therefore inadequate dis-

1. Collingwood, R. G.; Religion and Philosophy, (London, Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1916) p. 64.

inction between history, the study of fact, and philosophy, the study of theory. This is an attempt to give a statement of the essence of each discipline as seen on a primitive level. History deals with the temporal, philosophy with the eternal. They appear, superficially, to be at opposite extremes. If we reflect on even our common understanding of these, however, their close relationship becomes evident. "The attempt to dissociate philosophy and history breaks down because, in point of fact, we never do so dissociate them. One simply cannot make general statements without any thought of their instances."¹ Collingwood has now passed from an attempt to distinguish philosophy and history to the higher realization that one can only be defined in terms of the other. History and philosophy are conceived as two polar limits of one reality; - thought, understood as a purely cognitive activity, that is, as a form of knowledge more concrete than art, religion and science.

Several lines of argument now force Collingwood to conclude that history and philosophy are identical. First of all, he had argued at the beginning of the book that philosophy does not comprise several different disciplines such as philosophy of art,

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 46.

of religion, of science, and of history. All of these supposed branches use the same method which can be applied to any object, and therefore there is only one comprehensive study, the free activity of critical thought.¹ Therefore philosophy is identical with the philosophy of history.

Secondly Collingwood describes the dialectical inter-relation between reality as eternal and reality as temporal. The philosophical mind is flexible and can deal with the eternal and temporal at once. For mind is not static but is itself a process. "The mind is what it does; it is not a thing that thinks, but a consciousness; not a thing that wills but an activity."²

The mind deals simultaneously with the eternal and temporal. To conceive philosophy and history as separate therefore, would imply a metaphysical dualism. "This attempt to distinguish philosophy and history suggests a dualism between two complete worlds; the one unchanging, self-identical, and known by philosophy, the other subject to change and development, and known by history. But a world of mere self-identity would be as inconceivable as a world of mere change; each quality is the reverse

1. Collingwood, R. G.; Religion and Philosophy, p. 16.
2. ibid p. 34.

side of the other. To separate the two is to destroy each alike."¹

Collingwood reinforces the identification of the eternal with the temporal by showing that the distinctions between the elements of each, particular - universal, contingent - necessary, are 'fictitious' for each element is comprehensible only in terms of its opposite. The final dialectical synthesis occurs in recognizing that what was thought to be history, the determination of pure fact, requires the application of universal categories. Similarly the universal categories without their relation to reality or fact, are empty. "Abstract philosophy becomes meaningless, because in eliminating the historical element it has unawares eliminated the philosophical element too. ... Each in being itself is also the other."² Hence history and philosophy are identical.

The historical judgment is the determination of the contingent fact by the application of the universal principle. The philosophical judgment is the same, and the object of the knowing mind is the same in each case, - concrete reality as such. At the beginning history was thought to consist of particular judgments

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 50.
2. ibid pp. 51-2.

only. Now, however, the particular and the universal are seen to overlap and the result is philosophical history. But here Collingwood is in danger of furthering that confusion of thought discussed in part A(i) of the Introduction. In the 18th century Voltaire called 'philosophical history' what in effect was only history itself. Similarly Collingwood implies in "Religion and Philosophy" that there is no such thing as philosophy understood as a separate study in its own right. What has been called 'philosophy' is really only one moment of the historical judgment. In his description of philosophical history he has merely described what we normally call history, and by calling it philosophical, he excludes philosophy from its rightful autonomous position.

This argument involves certain metaphysical presuppositions which it may be illuminating to point out; the theory of internal relations, of the absolute, and of reality as creative development. Any philosophical position which accepts the overlap of events and concepts and the understanding of ideas and things in terms of their opposites, logically implies that all elements of reality are internally related to all other elements. Collingwood would probably have agreed that the reality of all things consists in just such relations. F. H. Bradley followed this argument through to the absolute which it implies. If relations

are all internal, no segment of knowledge is complete until seen in the light of other segments. Ultimately knowledge as such is of the absolute. But knowledge of this kind must be qualitatively different. It cannot consist of distinctions because plurality is based on the idea of external relations. It cannot even posit a dualism of mind and God, for here the dialectic would be incomplete. Knowledge of the absolute must be an identification of subject and object in a rationally justified mystical union.

Collingwood would not have agreed entirely with this essentially Bradlean argument. For Collingwood conceived reality as developmental, as essentially temporal, and not just a logically interrelated non-temporal whole. And this development was not considered deterministically, because mind is free, and thus for example present philosophy, though a corporate activity with a history, is not a mechanical product of temporally preceding conditions. According to Collingwood reality is what has occurred, past events, development. There is nothing transcendent. Hence the science of reality is history, and he does not in "Religion and Philosophy" give any reason why we should not therefore conclude that there is no ultimate truth to be known by an autonomous philosophical discipline.

The metaphysical presuppositions in "Speculum Mentis"

are similar to those of "Religion and Philosophy" outlined above, though the conception of philosophy has changed. "Speculum Mentis" is a phenomenology of the historical development of philosophical consciousness. The idea of philosophy expressed in it is not ultimately a sceptical one as will be shown in Chapter three. However, Collingwood's discussion of the relation between history and philosophy is again not clear. There is a marked reluctance on Collingwood's part to separate the two at all and in many ways the separation he develops is a false one because the philosophy he describes appears on reflection to be a branch of history. If this interpretation of Collingwood's statements is pushed to its limits, philosophical scepticism is implied, where there is no autonomous discipline called philosophy at all. This scepticism is overcome in the best parts of the same book and in subsequent works written up to 1936, only to reappear in a more rigorously argued extreme form in his later works.

Carrying through his method of considering art, religion and science as forms of consciousness, Collingwood comes to that most basic form, history. History is that mode of consciousness which conceives its object as concrete fact. Here, as in perception, mind is in touch with reality, for history must be understood not as an abstract recounting of monadic events, but

as the rational grasp of historical development in all its multifarious interrelations. Indeed it is the essential work of history as a mode of consciousness to demonstrate in detail the necessity of every individual to the whole of reality.¹

The object of history is concrete fact. But if this theory of the interrelatedness of historical events is taken seriously, the historian's work is never done. His object expands as his investigation progresses, and is seen in the end to be the concrete universal, or reality as such. "Everything in it is as unique as the whole, and the uniqueness of every part is based upon the uniqueness of every other. The principle of its structure is not classification, the abstract concept, but the concrete concept, which is relevance, or implication."² For Collingwood, in the historical consciousness, there is a revelation of the nature of reality, - that which is supremely knowable in itself. His description of it throws light on the relation of history to other modes of consciousness. "It must be an object not merely of imagination, like the work of art, but of thought; but, like the work

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1. Collingwood, R. G.; Speculum Mentis, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1946) p. 300.
 2. Collingwood, R. G.; Speculum Mentis, p. 221.

of art it must be concrete and individual. It must be, like the object of religion, absolute and eternal; but unlike this again, it must be a real object and not the imaginative or metaphorical presentation of an object. It must be conceived, like the object of science; but it must not be an abstraction. And like the object of history it must be a fact, an absolute concrete individual; but it must be accessible to the knowing mind.¹

The last phrase in the above quotation is the key to the transition from history to philosophy. History recognizes its object but it cannot know it. The reason for this is not only that the historian must specialize and thus, in part, fabricate his object, reducing history to art,² but also the more basic one that the progressive alienation of subject and object which began in art and was carried through religion and science, in history becomes complete.³

Collingwood maintains that because of this dichotomy between subject and object, the historical consciousness is unsatisfactory and must be superseded in the dialectic by the phi-

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1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 239
 2. ibid p. 234
 3. ibid p. 238

losophical consciousness. Now it is just in Collingwood's description of the philosophical consciousness that a trend to philosophical scepticism is evident. Philosophy is the progressively more complete identification of subject and object. Philosophy is that which conceives its object not only as a concrete universal whole, but also as thought. How does the identification of subject with such an object come about? Philosophy is the history of the dialectical process by which the concrete object as thought gradually rises through different levels to identification with the subject. Its methods are therefore historical. Indeed it is just higher order history, the history of thought. The dichotomy between subject and object has been overcome by the mind becoming conscious of the unity of its object and itself, of itself as a self-critical historical activity. Philosophy then is nothing but history conscious of its own nature. A genuinely new principle has been added here, because in mind becoming conscious of itself, the whole of reality is changed. "The universe of fact which is implicitly known becomes objectively different by being explicitly known, because our knowledge is part of it."¹ For this reason truth is not something

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 241

simply there to be known but is rather an achievement of mind considered as activity.

But the question still remains open, is philosophy just a moment of history, which raises history to its greatest achievements? or is it an autonomous discipline which can ask significant non-historical questions about reality? If the former, then further questions about the presuppositions of historical method and the means of their justification must be met with the silence of scepticism, for no answer to these questions can be found within the framework of Collingwood's thought at this stage. If the latter, these sceptical tendencies must be overcome by an account of philosophy which distinguishes it more clearly from history.

CHAPTER 3

PERIOD OF TRANSITION

It would be wrong to try to find some definite period at which Collingwood put away the philosophical scepticism mentioned in the last chapter and took up the more positive attitude towards metaphysics which resulted in the "Essay on Philosophical Method" and gave the basis to the argument in "The Idea of History". These were two divergent trends that ran through his thought from 1913 to the late 1920's, giving to his writings of that time an inconsistency or at least a confusion of thought in the arguments concerning the relationship between history and philosophy. To give one further example; in his essay "Croce's Philosophy of History," he criticized the 'naturalistic' final philosophical position of Croce that philosophy is the methodological moment in history, which in relation to philosophy is ultimately transcendent. Yet there are passages in "Speculum Mentis" which would seem to entail a similar swallowing up of philosophy in history. In this same essay Collingwood favours the position of 'pure idealism' adhered to by Gentile and Ruggiero and implied by Croce's work on history, that philosophy and history, though distinct and contri-

buting to one another are really identical.¹ There are some passages written during this period, however, in which Collingwood seemed to realize that if an ultimately satisfactory account is to be given of knowledge and in particular of history, then there must be a philosophical study, metaphysics, which transcends history, and which would give a fundamental view of reality on which an analysis of knowledge in the other spheres is based. And if a philosopher such as Collingwood, through long experience in the practical activity of historical research, concluded that reality is fundamentally historical in nature, it nevertheless remains true that if philosophy is to have any truth-value, the philosopher must in some sense transcend the reality he studies. Just as Collingwood asserts in a discussion on ethics that to call man a machine is implicitly to recognize that he is not one,² so to say that reality is historical and that philosophy and history are identical is implicitly to realize that philosophy transcends history, perhaps includes it, but is not reducible to it.

Collingwood allows for this in his most constructive

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1. Collingwood, R. G.; Croce's Philosophy of History, The Hibbert Journal XIX, 1920-21, p. 276
 2. Collingwood, R. G.; Speculum Mentis, p. 221.

work in the 1920's. The ways in which he argued for philosophy as a discipline separate from history are discussed under three headings.

(a) The Forms of Knowledge

One of the reasons why students have misunderstood Collingwood's discussion of activities such as art, religion, science and history, is that they fail to notice that Collingwood uses these words in a very special sense. In fact several different uses of, for example, 'history' are evident in his writings. Sometimes he is referring to the actual historical development itself. Sometimes he is referring to the historian's study of that reality in the sense of particular studies of short or more comprehensive periods in the history of man. Most frequently, however, in his discussion of the relation of history to philosophy, Collingwood is referring to a particular kind of consciousness which he wants to distinguish from other kinds such as art, religion, science and philosophy.

This is one of the characteristics of Collingwood's thought, - that he seldom carries on his discussion by referring to everyday and commonplace facts of, for example, historical in-

quiry, but rather approaches these directly experienced realities through a scheme of interpretation, and it is important to have clearly in mind exactly what this scheme is. The scheme of interpretation consists of the forms of knowledge or consciousness, which he derived from reflection on the various activities of the human mind, and the attempt to find the essential nature of each.

The formulation of such a scheme involves certain assumptions which Collingwood outlines at the beginning of "Speculum Mentis"; that each form is separate, is an activity of the whole self, and is a kind of knowledge.¹ The adequacy of the scheme will have to be judged by the student who has lived himself into each form in turn.

Only a cursory exposition of these forms will be given because our interest is mainly in the more specialized question of the specific nature of the relation between them, and in particular between philosophy and history.

Art as a form of consciousness, is the concrete activity of pure imagination. Hence this consciousness is not concerned

1. Collingwood, R.G.; Speculum Mentis, p. 39

with the reality or unreality of its object. And art is not one facet of man's experience but his whole activity in so far as he functions imaginatively. The product of this consciousness does not present any unified view of reality, for each act of imagination, though a concrete unity, is monadic by reason of the fact that it asserts nothing about the existence of its object. On the other hand it is in a sense a cognitive activity, for it is an activity of mind. But it frames its concept of reality in a way radically different from those forms of consciousness which we usually think of as more strictly cognitive. To art as a form of consciousness reality appears under the concept of beauty. "To the artist, beauty is what God is to religion, what truth is to science; it is his 'definition of the absolute'."¹ The artist has an oppressive meaningfulness which is resolved in being objectified in the act of expression. But for him to know what he means would require a qualitatively different kind of knowledge and consequently a different form of consciousness.

The religious consciousness goes beyond the artistic

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 67.

ducible to it because its assertion is a conscious one, not under the guise of symbol. But although science is in contact with reality, it asserts the abstract concept. That is to say, the scientific judgment does not comprise the concrete fact but only an abstraction from it. The scientific assertion is hypothetical and the body of scientific thought consists of an interrelated scheme of hypotheses. But its very hypothetical nature puts science at one remove from reality as such because "a tissue of hypotheses cannot be a self-contained and autonomous organism, for hypothesis as such refers beyond itself, and is relative to something which is not hypothetical but categorical."¹ The scientific consciousness through the development of its own dialectic comes to realize this dependence on the categorical and in doing so gives birth to a qualitatively different kind of consciousness, - history. In this dialectical development the relationship between forms of consciousness again becomes clear. As soon as the abstractness of science becomes explicit, it is transcended. "A conscious abstraction is not a real abstraction, for it implies the recognition of a concrete

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 183

truth underlying the abstraction itself.¹

History retains the concreteness of art and sees its object as a unified whole. But it is more than art because, like religion, it asserts reality. Yet it is more than religion because it knows it asserts reality and like science takes its statements literally. Unlike science however, it does not abstract from reality but comprehends reality as concrete fact presupposed in any hypothetical reasoning. The historical consciousness is pure objectivity. Reality is seen as something completely other than self. The alienation between subject and object is here complete. In history man encounters reality, that which is supremely knowable, and recognizes it for what it is. But in the practical activity of historical investigation he is forced to realize his own inability to achieve knowledge of it.

The mind in becoming aware of its own limitation in history transcends history and thereby becomes philosophical, something qualitatively different. Philosophy contains history because it sees its object as concrete. But it is more than history because it recognizes that object and subject are identical and that knowledge is of the knowing mind by itself. In this self-critical ac-

1. Collingwood, R. G.; *op cit* p. 180

tivity philosophy transcends history as surely as history transcends science, science religion, and religion art.

At the beginning of "Speculum Mentis" Collingwood states that in showing the possibility of the forms of knowledge he would be proving their reality. If so then he has shown that philosophy is an autonomous activity in its own right. What then is the precise relationship between history and that part of philosophy which deals with history, that is, the philosophy of history? One of the characteristics of history as a form of knowledge is that it does not, indeed cannot, qua history, turn in upon itself, it does not ask how it knows. For it is of the essence of history that it conceives its object as other than self. Therefore it is the job of philosophy as the form which conceives its object as the activity of thought, to study historical thinking, to criticize its methods and techniques, its standards of truth, and to establish its nature as a form of consciousness from the vantage point of a mind at the same time participating in the historical consciousness and transcending it. Philosophy is not an attempt to do better what history is trying to do. Its function as a form of experience is different in kind from that of history. "If there is to be a philosophy of history, it can only be a reflection on

the historian's effort to obtain truth, not on a truth which has not been attained."¹

(b) Universals, Particulars and Individuals

During the three years preceding the publication of "Speculum Mentis", Collingwood wrote several papers in which he attacked this problem of the relation of history to philosophy from a somewhat different point of view. He discussed the question of universals, particulars and individuals and rejected the view that Croce had on several occasions expressed that history deals with the particular while science deals with the universals. For this argument assumes either a metaphysical dualism in which there are two kinds of entities, particulars and universals, known by separate sciences using different methods, or that one or other has no reality but is mere appearance. The latter alternative would appear to be Croce's position because he always claimed that history alone knows reality which is concrete, particular fact,

1. Collingwood, R. G.; The Nature and Aims of a Philosophy of History, Aristotelean Society Proceedings, 1924-25, p. 161

whereas science is pragmatic - a practical activity utilizing various means, such as general principles or laws, to attain certain ends, but which is in no sense knowledge. Croce therefore concluded that what is characteristic of history is the particular judgment whereas the universal judgment is essentially scientific.

Collingwood used this distinction in his description of the forms of consciousness. At the same time, however, from another point of view, the distinction is quite inappropriate and misleading. Reflecting on the actual methods of reasoning used by practicing historians and scientists, it was obvious to Collingwood that no significant distinction between the types of propositions used in each field could be drawn. From the point of view of epistemology, history and science are much the same, both using particular and universal propositions. Hypothetical reasoning must contain reference to fact if it is to have any empirical meaning at all, and significant determinations of fact cannot be made without the use of universal statements. "To possess or think a concept is to interpret a fact in terms of it; to possess or observe a fact is to interpret it in terms of a

concept."¹ This is particularly important with regard to history, the specific methods of which have up to this point been ignored. "Within the body of historical thought itself, not erected upon it as a superstructure but contained within itself as a subordinate but necessary element, generalization and inductive thinking have an important place."² Both science and history, on this analysis, know the individual which is the universal in the particular, and not abstract universals and particulars in themselves.

In a similar way Collingwood criticized the old empiricist position that universals are objects of thought whereas sense data are objects of sense. For all knowledge is both sensation and thought at once. Nothing is an object except to knowledge as a whole.³

Now since Collingwood in this discussion has mentioned only science and history it may be inquired what the relevance of the argument is to philosophy and its possible transcendence. Art

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1. Collingwood, R. G.; Are History and Science Different Kinds of Knowledge, Mind Vol. XXXI, 1922, p. 447.
 2. Collingwood, R. G.; The Nature and Aims of a Philosophy of History, p. 152.
 3. Collingwood, R. G.; Sensation and Thought, Aristotelian Society Proceedings, 1923-24, p. 57.

and religion can be excluded from these epistemological considerations because they are not directly cognitive and view reality through a veil of pure imagination, or metaphors and symbol. But philosophy purports to know reality and if both history and science in a greater and lesser degree respectively know concrete individual reality through the interplay of particular and universal assertions can we not group philosophy with history and science and say that epistemologically they are the same?

It is not until the appearance of the "Essay on Philosophical Method" that Collingwood explicitly answers this question in the negative. But in the papers written in the 1920's we can deduce from his other statements that epistemologically philosophy is not the same as history and science. But it is not easy to indicate and justify the exact difference. If Collingwood had maintained simply that historical propositions are particular and scientific propositions general because they both in different ways abstract from reality which is neither particular nor universal but individual, he could have maintained that philosophy is different because it has the individual as its object, and therefore its propositions are both particular and general. But Collingwood in one or two places specifically denied this distinction. The difference between philosophy and history and science, is based on the relation

between subject and object. In both history and science the mind sees the object as alien to itself, whereas philosophy realizes the identity of subject and object. Hence in science and history particular and universal propositions are used side by side. In science the particular is just of interest in so far as it is valuable in establishing a universal. In history the universal is only a means to the establishment of particular fact. Philosophy, the self-criticism of mind, understands that its particular and universal assertions do not exclude one another but overlap, so that one is both itself and the other. This theory is worked out fully in the "Essay on Philosophical Method", but it was present by implication in the early essays, and was a trend of thought making philosophy transcendent over history.

(c) Historical Judgment

Without anticipating chapter six in which Collingwood's views on the nature of history which he developed in the 1930's are considered, it should be pointed out that even in the articles of the 1920's complications arose in his notion of historical judgment.

It will be remembered that Collingwood, even in the 1920's understood statements in terms of the questions they were intended to

answer. This fact enables us to state more clearly the relation between science and history. The fundamental questions of science are general and although in answering these questions scientists must ask more specific questions, the results of scientific inquiry will be formulated in universal propositions corresponding in generality to the main questions asked. The fundamental questions of history on the other hand are particular. And if in answering these questions it is necessary to employ abstract concepts and general principles, the results of historical inquiry, historical judgments, will be as particular and specific as the fundamental questions asked.¹ The past is necessary but not actual. The future is neither necessary nor actual but possible. Hence basic historical questions will be particular and the answers particular, whereas scientific questions will be hypothetical and the answers hypothetical.

The evidence on which the historian relies in answering his basic questions about the past, exists in the present. The whole existing world is evidence for the historian because everything has come to be what it is and therefore has an historical aspect.² History as understood by the historian is a function of

1. Collingwood, R. G.; The Philosophy of History, Historical Association Leaflet 79, p. 14.
2. ibid p. 3.

present evidence. "All historical thought is the historical interpretation of the present. ... Its central question is, 'How has this world as it now exists come to be what it is?'.¹ In practice the historian's questions are limited in scope, and it is only limited histories that appear, not universal history. Each age therefore will rewrite history afresh, and will write from a different point of view.² Questions immediately arise, therefore, concerning the validity of historical knowledge. What guides, controls, or determines the particular questions the historian will ask? What factors govern the historian's principle of selection from the infinity of present evidence in confirming his account of the past? What are the criteria for judging the truth-value of historical assertions? To what extent do politics and current opinion influence the interest and judgment of the historian? These are questions which cannot be answered historically but presuppose a philosophical discipline whose duty it is to study the historian's activity and to clarify our ideas about the historian's craft and show the function of history in the total mental life of man.

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1. Collingwood, R. G.; *The Limits of Historical Knowledge*, p. 222
 2. Collingwood, R. G.; *The Philosophy of History*, p. 15.

PERIOD II

CHAPTER 4

PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY AS DISTINCT AND AUTONOMOUS

In 1933 Collingwood published "An Essay on Philosophical Method". In 1935 his Inaugural Lecture at Oxford, "The Historical Imagination" was published in leaflet form, and in 1936 his essay "Human Nature and Human History" was published in the Proceedings of the British Academy. These two essays together with material from his lectures on the philosophy of history delivered in 1936, constitute the main part of "The Idea of History", posthumously published in 1946. This last volume also includes a small portion of the unpublished manuscript "The Principles of History". Our thesis here is that in these publications, with the exception of the sections entitled "History as Re-enactment of Past Experience" and "The Subject-matter of History" in the second part of "The Idea of History", Collingwood successfully overcame the elements of philosophical scepticism in his earlier work which have been discussed in chapter two, and considered philosophy and history to be distinct and autonomous disciplines. In justifying this position, the evidence will be drawn entirely from the above publica-

tions because in Collingwood's later work the separation of philosophy and history breaks down and philosophy becomes one branch among others of historical inquiry.

If this thesis is to be justified, it must be shown that Collingwood believed that each of philosophy and history has a subject-matter and method peculiar to itself, for if they have, philosophy and history are certainly distinct. If it can further be shown that Collingwood thought that the historian can proceed in his task without the interference of the philosopher, and that the philosopher can philosophize without the help of the historian, then we have proved that Collingwood at this time considered philosophy and history to be autonomous fields of investigation.

In "An Essay on Philosophical Method", Collingwood expounds a theory of philosophical concepts and philosophical reasoning with very little reference to history. This is the theory of the overlap of classes and scale of forms, designed to give at once a description of the method used by the most profound philosophers of the past, and a precise formulation of the fundamental principles of method which should guide philosophical thought in the future. Collingwood explicitly states at the

beginning of the essay that the philosophical method he is about to consider is not the method of history nor the method of science. The prime purpose of the book is to answer the question "what is philosophy?" by giving an account of philosophical method. A secondary purpose is to show how this method differs from that of the sciences both exact and empirical. Both philosophical thought and scientific thought, said Collingwood, are concerned with universals in some sense of the word.¹ There is therefore a common ground on which to compare the methods of the two disciplines. But historical thought concerns itself with something individual.² History is not a science either exact or empirical, and therefore the book does not really concern history at all and it may be asked what is the relevance of "An Essay on Philosophical Method" to a discussion of the relation between history and philosophy. It is relevant in that the philosophical method expounded in it can be applied to the problem of the relationship between history and philosophy. In the introduction of "The Idea of History", Collingwood gives a preliminary statement of his view that history and philosophy are distinct,

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1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Essay on Philosophical Method, (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1950) p. 26.
 2. Collingwood, R. G.; ibid p. 26.

and says that history, like the sciences, proceeds in its work without criticizing the fundamental principles of its method. Therefore, Collingwood notes,¹ the theory of history and the theory of science, are not subjects that can be dealt with by history and science. They are part of the proper subject-matter of philosophy. Hence the problem of the relationship between history and philosophy is specifically a philosophical one.

Briefly Collingwood's view of philosophical method is as follows. Whereas in science the specific embodiments of a concept (genus) constitute mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive classes (species), in philosophy the classes of specific embodiments overlap and constitute a scale of forms such that the specific differentiation of the generic essence of the concept, differs in kind from one level of the scale to another. And there is also a variable attribute of the generic concept which differs in degree in the specific embodiments of the concept. In science the variable is extraneous to the generic essence of the concept. For example the variable attribute of temperature is extraneous to the generic essence of water, H₂O.

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 1.

In philosophy the variable attribute is identical with the generic essence and is not measurable in quantitative terms. For example utility and duty are two embodiments of the concept good. They are qualitatively different embodiments of the generic essence but they differ also in degree, for duty is a higher embodiment of good than utility, though the difference is not specifiable in exact quantitative terms. The variable is in this case identical with the generic essence and consequently duty and utility are two levels of the scale of forms which constitutes the structure of the concept good.

Collingwood's description of the relation between levels on any such scale is important. "The higher term is a species of the same genus as the lower, but it differs in degree as a more adequate embodiment of the generic essence, as well as in kind as a specifically different embodiment; it follows from this that it must be not only distinct from it, as one specification from another, but opposed to it, as a higher specification to a lower, a relatively adequate to a relatively inadequate, a true embodiment of the generic essence to a false embodiment; as true, it possesses not only its own specific character, but also that which its rival falsely claimed. The higher thus negates the lower, and at the same

time reaffirms it: negates it as a false embodiment of the generic essence, and reaffirms its content, that specific form of the essence, as part and parcel of itself".¹

The above is a summary of the first part of Collingwood's book on philosophical method. If it can now be shown that in fact history and philosophy have characteristics which would enable us to see them as two species of a generic concept in which the embodiment of the generic essence differs in kind and degree, then Collingwood's method will be further confirmed and history and philosophy can be understood as two different levels of a scale of forms.

Both history and philosophy, by common consent, are kinds of knowledge. Are they the same kind or different kinds of knowledge? Collingwood said that history as a science or systematic study has as its subject-matter *res gestae*, the past actions of human beings.² This distinguishes it from the sciences both natural and humanistic which ask questions equally specific about other things such as the biological organism, the magnetic field, uniformities in human behaviour, or man's relation to God. Natural history is interested in past occurrences in geological and biologi-

1. Collingwood, R. G.; *op cit* p. 88.

2. Collingwood, R. G.; The Idea of History, ed. T. N. Knox, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1946) p. 9.

cal development. But history as such limits itself to human actions in the past. The questions the historians ask are particular: What was the outcome of the Napoleonic invasion of Russia? What was the contribution of Garibaldi to the unification of Italy? What was Boethius' purpose in writing "The Consolation of Philosophy"? And the answers to these questions must therefore be particular also. Historical knowledge is of individual fact.

Philosophy, unlike history, is concerned with universals.¹ The universals which constitute the subject-matter of philosophy are concepts such as truth, beauty, goodness and knowledge. No one begins philosophy without a primitive understanding of these concepts, and thus the philosopher does not reason from assumed but asserted first principles to asserted conclusions. The philosopher examines concepts critically to discern the structure of each, which, as Collingwood shows, constitutes a scale of forms. The philosopher asks questions such as "What is truth?", "What are the various ways in which truth can be known?" He does not ask "What is the truth expressed in this particular picture?", but "What are the characteristics of art as a form of knowledge?",

1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Essay on Philosophical Method, p. 1.

or "What kind of truth is expressed in works of art and apprehended by the artistic consciousness?" In other words, philosophy does not concern itself with what an historian would call individual but with the structure of universal concepts. Philosophical knowledge is, in this sense, of the universal.

History and philosophy are both, by common consent, knowledge. And therefore they are embodiments of the same generic essence. But the manner of the embodiment differs in kind because, as shown above, history and philosophy differ in subject-matter. The truth apprehended in history is not of the same kind as the truth apprehended in philosophy because history is concerned with the individual, philosophy with the universal. History and philosophy are two species of the generic concept knowledge which differ in kind.

Do they also differ in degree? At the beginning of "An Essay on Philosophical Method", Collingwood asserts that history, like science, does not criticize its own first principles. The historian 'gets on with his job' of knowing the past actions of human beings. He does not, qua historian, analyse the logical structure of his thought, nor does he formulate the criteria of historical truth. Philosophy, on the other hand, Collingwood thought to be self-critical. Philosophy considers the activity

of thinking, including historical thinking. When the philosopher turns to the theory of history, "The fact demanding attention is neither the past by itself, as it is for the historian, nor the historian's thought about it by itself, as it is for the psychologist, but the two in their mutual relation."¹ That is, the philosopher considers the problem of how the historian knows the past, and seeks to relate historical knowledge to other kinds. Philosophy thus evaluates the first principles not only of itself, but also of history. It is therefore a more fundamental form of knowledge. It embodies the generic essence of knowledge to a higher degree than history.

It has now been shown that history and philosophy as conceived by Collingwood at this time, have characteristics which enable us to see them as species of the generic concept knowledge, philosophy being higher on the scale of forms of knowledge than history. Now as Collingwood pointed out in his description of the relationships between terms in a scale of forms quoted in this chapter, the higher of two terms is not only distinct but also in some sense opposed to the lower term, and the same views of Collingwood that led us to understand philosophy as higher in the scale of

1. Collingwood, R. G.; The Idea of History, p. 2.

forms of knowledge than history, leads us to understand them as distinct and autonomous fields of inquiry. Collingwood's notion of the "opposition" of terms in a scale of forms, when applied to history and philosophy, means that the nature of history, for example, is inherently outside the scope of historical inquiry. The historian qua historian denies that anything more is needed to deal with the problem, than to give a history of theories of history. But the philosopher is concerned with the truth of the theories, and the historical method is not sufficient to solve the problem. He therefore asserts what the historian qua historian denies, that there is a legitimate field of non-historical philosophical inquiry which considers among other problems, the problem of the nature of history. For these reasons Collingwood considered history and philosophy as autonomous disciplines.

The argument of this chapter may appear in some respects as a tour de force because it does not do justice to the complexity of Collingwood's thought and does not consider the difficulties that arise when Collingwood considers in detail the nature of history. But it gives a true representation of Collingwood's views as he expressed them in his introductory remarks to his works of this period. In the Epilegomena of "The Idea of History", Collingwood still has clearly in mind that natural science and history are

fundamentally distinct and autonomous. But in those passages in which he considers the nature of thought, and history as the history of thought, it is no longer clear what the distinction between philosophy and history is. A judgment on this question will have to wait until Collingwood's metaphysics and theory of history have been discussed.

CHAPTER 5

METAPHYSICS

It has been suggested that Collingwood's philosophy of history is best understood when seen in the light of his metaphysical position. But although he wrote books analysing metaphysical method and giving examples of metaphysical argument, he never expounded his own metaphysical position. It is therefore necessary to reconstruct the metaphysics implied, but not explicitly stated, in his writings, in an endeavour to find the root concepts for understanding his philosophy of history.

In the second chapter of this Thesis, three metaphysical concepts were pointed out which were basic to his philosophy of history propounded in "Religion and Philosophy", "Speculum Mentis", and his essays of the 1920's. These were: the principle of internal relations strictly conceived, the notion of the absolute as a self-knowing mind, and the idea of reality as essentially developmental or historical in nature. It is significant that these metaphysical principles do not figure largely in his writings after 1930. Although they are not explicitly denied, Collingwood took a more cautious and piecemeal approach to questions of a basic metaphysical

kind. That is to say, although he wrote little about the nature of reality, what he did write and what we can infer from his writings in this period, is less speculative than his earlier work.

The metaphysical principles outlined in this chapter are part of Collingwood's position as implied in the publications listed at the beginning of chapter four, that is, the metaphysics which he held prior to the historicism of "An Essay on Metaphysics", which was prepared in 1938. Data are also drawn from certain passages in "The New Leviathan" published in 1942, and "The Principles of Art" published in 1938, which throw some light on his view of the human mind.

Basic to Collingwood's discussion of history is his conception of the nature of man, and in particular of human thought. These ideas are perhaps best approached through a discussion of Collingwood's view of reality and its structure.

(a) Reality and Its Structure.

In the chapter in "An Essay on Philosophical Method" in which Collingwood shows that philosophy is categorical thinking, he refers to the ontological argument, and in his discussion of this argument we have proof that he considered metaphysics an autonomous

discipline whose purpose it is to study a definite object.

Anselm had argued that man has the conception of a perfect being. And in this he is conceiving a subject possessed of all positive predicates, including that of existence, so that in thinking of the being he is already thinking of it as existing. Collingwood points out that the traditional criticisms of this argument, that existence is not a predicate and that Anselm was trying to argue from mere thought to the existence of its object, misses the essential import of the argument, which is, as restated by Collingwood, "that in the special case of metaphysical thinking the distinction between conceiving something, and thinking it to exist is a distinction without a difference".¹

Collingwood was impressed not so much by the formal reasoning of Anselm's ontological proof, as by the fact that it is an argument that states indirectly, or implicitly assumes, what other philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza and Hegel have also recognized, that metaphysical thinking, as distinguished from non-philosophical thinking "is never devoid of objective or onto-

1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Essay on Philosophical Method, p. 125.

logical reference".¹ What the ontological argument proves wrote Collingwood is not "the existence of whatever God happens to be believed in by the person who appeals to it", but rather "that essence involves existence, not always, but in one special case, the case of God in the metaphysical sense: The Deus sive natura of Spinoza, the Good of Plato, the Being of Aristotle: the object of metaphysical thought. But this means the object of philosophical thought in general; for metaphysics, even if it is regarded as only one among the philosophical sciences is not unique in its objective reference or in its logical structure; all philosophical thought is of the same kind, and every philosophical science partakes of the nature of metaphysics, which is not a separable philosophical science, but a special study of the existential aspect of the same subject matter, whose aspect as truth is studied by logic, and its aspect as goodness by ethics".²

To illustrate what Collingwood means in saying that the ontological argument applies to philosophical thought in general, consider the nature of logic.³ Logic is concerned with

1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Essay on Philosophical Method, p. 125
2. Collingwood, R. G.; ibid p. 127
3. ibid pp. 126 ff.

thought in both a descriptive and normative way, describing how we actually think and giving an account of the ideal of thought, the criterion by which we judge the truth or falsity of our thought. How does it differ from mathematics which is also normative? Geometry for example, considers triangles, and the body of the science consists of propositions about triangles. But the body of the science of geometry is heterogeneous with its subject-matter. Geometry is valid irrespective of whether or not there are any triangles. But in logic the substantive body of the science is homogeneous with its subject-matter, both of which consist of propositions. "The propositions of which logic consists must conform to the rules which logic lays down, so that logic is actually (in part at least) about itself".¹ Therefore by existing, logic constitutes an actually existing subject-matter to itself and consequently the propositions which constitute the body of logic cannot be hypothetical but must be categorical. Logic is in this way committed to the ontological proof in that when its subject-matter is logical thought it cannot conceive its object except as existing.

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 129

What is important for our purpose about Collingwood's review of the ontological argument, is that we see him committed to the being of the ultimate reality, the One, the True and the Good. Indeed it would be difficult to know what it would mean to question the being of ultimate reality. For as Collingwood has shown, in any attempt to answer the question, in any thought about ultimate questions, whether in ethics, logic, or metaphysics, we are committed already to the being of the object of thought, reality as such. Collingwood did not go on to elaborate his conception of the nature of this reality. But he did outline his conception of the method by which philosophy is to proceed in its investigation of this reality, and this together with other comments, allows us to infer his conception of the structure of reality, which should help us in trying to specify the nature of man and the ways in which he can be known.

It does not follow from the being of reality that it has a structure which can be known by human reason. Bergson had concluded that ultimate reality is a unified mind, understood as a pure flow of consciousness identical with time. Intellect for Bergson, carves out of reality abstract concepts, a view of nature which, because the distinctions made have no basis in reality which is structureless, is purely fictitious and hence not an object of

knowledge. The distinctions drawn by reason have only a pragmatic justification because they are useful in practical life. According to Plato on the other hand, ultimate reality has joints or is structured such that understanding does not distort but gives knowledge. Yet understanding gives way to reason and a scale of forms of knowledge is recognized corresponding to the scale of being by which reality, though structured, is seen to be a unified whole. Bergson's reality is unified, but has no differentiation within itself, no structure. Plato's reality contains various levels and aspects. It has structure, but the various differentiations of reality are so related that they constitute an organic unity.

Collingwood, like Plato, conceived reality as structured. The main structural features of reality, are the radical differences between nature and thought, for example, each of which has an internal structure of its own. In "An Essay on Philosophical Method" Collingwood attempts to show that because of the nature of the reality philosophy studies, the structure of philosophical concepts consists of a scale of forms, exhibiting the various elements of reality interrelated in a particularly close way. But this structure is peculiar to that sort of reality studied by philosophy. As Collingwood explicitly stated, the method of philosophy is not that of science or history. Science has its own subject-matter, nature, and

therefore scientific thought, which Collingwood recognized as equally valid in its field as philosophical thought is in its,¹ has developed techniques appropriate to the study of nature. The main structural feature of nature, Collingwood agrees with Hegel, is the externality of each part in relation to every other.²

Thus reality is complex in its structure and it cannot be known by any one mode of thought. Each mode, philosophy, history, science, is valid in its own field because of the nature of the reality it studies. When the object of investigation is man, whose being is not exhausted on any one level of reality, several modes of thought must be employed to encompass his whole being.

Philosophy fulfils a synthetic function because part of its subject-matter consists of the other forms of thought, each in relation to its special object. The philosophy of history is a consideration of the historian's thought in relation to its object, the past actions of human beings. To understand Collingwood's position here it is imperative to understand his views on the nature of man.

1. Collingwood, R. G.; *op cit* p. 68

2. Collingwood, R. G.; The Idea of Nature, (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1949) p. 126

(b) The Nature of Man.

History is concerned with human actions in the past, and Collingwood's consideration of the different features of this study largely turns on his views on the nature of man. On this subject he left us not a few comments and some lengthy passages that form a kind of philosophical anthropology. These appear in "The Principles of Art", "The New Leviathan", and two sections of "The Idea of History", "History as the Re-enactment of Past Experience" and "The Subject-Matter of History".

Always an opponent of any suggestion of a dualism between mind and body, Collingwood asserted that "Man's body and man's mind are not two different things. They are the same thing, man himself, as known in two different ways".¹ This unity which we call man has been variously defined as a rational animal, a social animal, a symbol-using animal etc. But all of these definitions seem to attribute a certain faculty or quality to a being conceived essentially under the category of substance. Collingwood conceived man as activity. Man has no static essence. Man

1. Collingwood, R. G.; The New Leviathan, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1947) p. 11

is studied by various natural sciences, and the resulting knowledge is most useful. But it does not go far towards satisfying our desire to know and understand what man is. We are primarily interested in what man does, because man is what he does. That is, in our everyday life and in our reflection on man, we are interested in human action as an expression of his mental activity. Man as mind, then, is the primary object of our investigation, and if man has no essence, what man is can be found out only by studying the activities of the mind, what man does or has done.¹

Hence the importance of history as the study of concrete human action in the past understood as an expression of mental activity.

What did Collingwood mean by mind, and in what sense is human action an expression of mind? Collingwood did not use any uniform terminology in his discussion of these problems in his various publications. The three fundamental concepts here are mind, psyche, and thought. Psyche and thought are levels of experience which refer roughly to feeling and sensation, and

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 61.

consciousness¹ respectively. In some of his writings Collingwood uses 'mind' as synonymous with 'thought' or 'consciousness'. This is usually the case in passages in which history and science are considered as modes of consciousness, psyche being an object of the scientific consciousness, mind or thought an object of the historical consciousness. In other of his writings Collingwood uses the word 'mind' to refer to both psyche and thought, distinguishing them from the body. The context usually makes clear which sense of the word 'mind' he is using.

In "The New Leviathan" Collingwood states that man's mind is made of thought² or consciousness³ whether in its rudimentary form or in the various specialized forms. Psyche here refers to certain aspects of body, (in its 'psychological sense'⁴) for example sensation and feeling. Feeling is the object of simple

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1. The term 'consciousness' is retained in the following passages in fidelity to Collingwood's usage, though it is felt that he really meant what in ordinary language would be called 'self-consciousness', because, as he asserts himself, ("The New Leviathan" p. 37) no man can know that he has feelings of which he is unconscious.
 2. Collingwood, R.G.; op cit p. 5
 3. ibid p. 18
 4. ibid p. 16

consciousness and as such it is here-and-now and nothing more. One cannot argue about such objects immediately given to consciousness.¹ Argument can only begin when distinctions are made in the 'field' of feeling by selective attention. Feelings as such cannot be remembered, though propositions about them can.²

Out of this sensuous-emotional level of experience, which constitutes man's psychical life, emerges thought. Man's life of thought begins when he becomes conscious of a confused mass of feeling, and attends to some element or group of elements in this mass.³ Collingwood's discussion of appetite, hunger, love, passion, desire and aversion, is important. Each has a feeling element and an element of consciousness so that properly understood, each is an aspect of man's life of thought though of a fairly primitive kind. "Appetite is what thought makes out of feeling when thought develops by its own activity from mere consciousness to conceptual thinking. It is both a specialized form of consciousness (namely conceptual thinking) and a specialized form of feeling produced out of simple feeling by that form of consciousness."⁴

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1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 25
 2. ibid p. 34
 3. ibid p. 48
 4. ibid p. 52

Hunger and love as discussed by Collingwood are the two forms of appetite considered not as a physiological phenomenon, but as a phenomenon of thought. Passion also is partly feeling, partly thought, and it is significant for Collingwood's philosophy of history that he considered its two forms, fear and anger, usually thought of as irrational forces, as having intellectual elements. "Fear contains an intellectual element, an element not of propositional thinking but of conceptional thinking: the idea of the not-self. There is also the idea of myself and the idea of the contrast between them".¹ Desire and aversion are on a higher level of consciousness or thought than the above. Desire is appetite raised to consciousness of what is wanted. Desire, then, is a form of knowledge and can be true or false.²

Collingwood also asserted that both individual will and joint will belong to man's life of thought. Will is built on man's psychical life but is raised to thought by the intellectualising function of language. "Without language there is no thought. Without thought, and thought of a somewhat highly developed kind,

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 63
2. ibid p. 80

expressible only in a somewhat highly developed form of language, there is no will".¹ Both 'desire' and 'will' in ordinary discussion denote something belonging to man's emotion and feeling nature or psyche, which can be rationally or irrationally directed by thought. For Collingwood however, desire and will as such have a thought element which puts them on the level of experience of thought, which is essentially above the psychical level. The rationality by which the psychical elements are apprehended and taken account of in action is a constituent part of desire and will. Will is more completely a form of practical thought than desire because it is a function of mind based on rational thinking.

Reason, in its practical and theoretical forms, is further removed from man's psychical life and can be characterized simply as propositional thought, a form of consciousness, rational thinking, which seeks the ground or reason for its assertions.

In Book II of "The Principles of Art", Collingwood discussed some of these points at greater length. Those that concern us here are the relationships between psychical experience and thinking experience, and the distinction between pre-intellectual

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 212

thought and intellectual or propositional thought. In characterizing the psychical level of experience, Collingwood says that all feeling is simple and private,¹ emotion being the emotional charge on the corresponding transient sensation. Sensation is a flux which, as such, cannot be repeated or publicly known. Thought, on the other hand, is public, and is accompanied by the idea of success or failure.² Therefore, as Collingwood points out, "It seems that our sensuous-emotional nature, as feeling creatures, is independent of our thinking nature as rational creatures, and constitutes a level of experience below the level of thought".³ But if the sensuous-emotional experience is to be the basis of thought, then there must be some faculty which mediates sensation and thought. For Collingwood this is the faculty of imagination by which sense become ideas, making it possible for thought to study the relations between them.⁴ Regarded as an activity or manifestation of freedom, then, imagination seems to occupy a place intermediate between the less

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1. Collingwood, R. G.; The Principles of Art, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1950) p. 157
 2. Collingwood, R. G.; ibid p. 157
 3. ibid p. 163
 4. ibid p. 171

free activity of mere feeling and the more free activity of what is called thought".¹ This transformation of sensum or impression into idea is a creative function of consciousness and thus an activity of thought. But thought as imagination is not yet intellect. It only prepares data for intellect or propositional thought.

Collingwood's discussion of language is illuminating because it explains how emotion can be expressed unconsciously or psychically such as in involuntary facial expression and crowd reaction,² or consciously through the function of language understood as any controlled expression of emotion. 'Language' in the everyday use of the word refers to intellectualized language in which symbols enable thought to deal abstractly with its subject-matter.

The importance of this position is that much of man's activity is on the level of pre-intellectual thought. Artistic expression, for instance, Collingwood considered to be essentially an expression of thought, not of man's psyche, though on a pre-intellectual level.³ The content of a work of art cannot be put

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 197
2. ibid p. 229
3. ibid p. 273

into propositional form. But this content is not a feeling state, part of the flow of immediate experience, but a mental modification of it through the faculty of imagination. Because art is a product of thought, Collingwood attributed truth-value to it, though of a qualitatively different kind than pertains to intellect. "Art is essentially the pursuit of truth. But the truth it pursues is not a truth of relation, it is a truth of individual fact".¹

Human actions appear to be expressions of mind on three different, if not clearly defined levels, psyche, pre-intellectual thought, and propositional thought. Actions which are the expression of man's psychical life would include involuntary physiological reactions, and uncontrolled emotional behaviour such as might occur in instances of mob violence. Even the higher emotions, the side-product of life on a high intellectual level can be psychically expressed in actions devoid of conscious control and purposive direction. In other words any action in which consciousness plays no part, in which reason is inoperative or ignored, is an expression of the psyche.

Expressions of man's pre-intellectual thought would include all human activity in artistic creation and appreciation,

1. Collingwood, R. G.; *op cit* p. 233

in religious and moral practice, and in political struggle and economic pursuit in so far as these proceed consciously but without reasoned policies in mind.

Propositional thought is expressed in actions which exhibit conscious purpose, which are guided by rationally apprehended moral and religious truths, and by information collected through the processes of science.

If human action is an expression of mind, then it can only be really known by reliving the life of the mind which the action expresses. But complications arise here because only part of the life of mind can be re-enacted. In both "The New Leviathan" and "The Principles of Art", Collingwood refers to sensation and emotion as constituting the flow of immediate experience, and thought as something that works on this flux of experience, creating something qualitatively different. In the Epilogomena of "The Idea of History", Collingwood draws out the implications of these ideas. Transient and private acts of sensation and emotion are not themselves distinct and numerable except as selected by thought. But even as selected, these acts occur, then pass away forever. They cannot recur in the same person's experience or in anyone else's experience. Acts of thought are quite different. To think of them as numerically distinct is to think of them as if they were

mere sensation and feeling, part of the flow of consciousness. "But an act of thought is not a mere sensation or feeling. It is knowledge, and knowledge is something more than immediate consciousness. The process of knowledge is therefore not a mere flow of consciousness. A person whose consciousness was a mere succession of states, by whatever name these states are called, could have no knowledge whatever."¹ Thought is a reflection on the flow of immediate experience and as such it stands outside the flow. The relation of an act of thought to time is not the same as the relation of an act of immediate experience to time. The latter occurs and is gone forever. An act of thought takes place at a definite time, but it can recur because, in a sense, it stands outside time. "It is not only the object of thought that somehow stands outside time; the act of thought does so too: in this sense at least, that one and the same act of thought may endure through a lapse of time and revive after a time when it has been in abeyance".² This makes it possible for us to know our own past acts of thought and the acts of thought of others. An act of thought can never be

1. Collingwood, R. G.; The Idea of History, p. 287

2. ibid

a mere object because if we are to know the act of thought of another person we must re-enact it in our own minds. It must therefore be subjective. Yet we must recognize it as an act of thought of another person, and therefore it must be objective.

How is this possible if every thought is thought at a certain time? What is re-enacted, writes Collingwood, is not the thought in its unique context in the life of the individual thinker but that characteristic of the thought which enables it to be shared by others.¹ There is then, something common or universal about thought which enables it to transcend the different unique contexts in which it is enacted at various times.

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 303

CHAPTER 6

HISTORY

(a) History as a Philosophical Category.

What is meant by history as a philosophical category is history considered as one way among others of thinking about reality, a concept which, together with other concepts of the same kind, such as natural science and art, constitute a scheme for the philosophical interpretation of human thought. Perhaps enough has been said already about history as a form of consciousness, but mentioning it again at the beginning of this chapter fulfils at least two negative functions. Firstly keeping it in mind is a constant guard against placing philosophy under history, a mistake which Collingwood for the most part avoided at this point in the development of his thought. Secondly it is a guard against misconceiving Collingwood's purpose in "The Idea of History".

Mr. W. H. Walsh in chapter one of his "Introduction to the Philosophy of History", distinguishes between two conceptions of the philosophy of history; the metaphysical consideration of historical events, and the analytic consideration of historical

thinking. Collingwood rejected the first as impossible on the grounds that we cannot establish matters of historical fact by pure reasoning, and that the attempt to formulate laws of historical development with predictive power is a mistaken attempt to do the job which sociology has set itself to do. But 'analytic consideration of historical thinking' is ambiguous. It could mean the study of the actual techniques employed by historians in their work. Collingwood made a contribution to this study in his sections dealing with the interpretation of historical evidence, but this was not his prime purpose. Secondly it could mean an analysis of the words used by historians, comparing their usage with usage in everyday life and in science, and an analysis of the logic of historical inquiry. This kind of analysis is being carried on by certain of the 'analytic philosophers' such as Mr. Patrick Gardiner.¹ Collingwood has been criticized for not being successful in this kind of enterprise. "His (Collingwood's) implicit reluctance" writes Mr. L. J. Cohen "to distinguish the phenomenology of the historian's experience from

1. Gardiner, P.: The Nature of Historical Explanation,
(Oxford University Press, 1952)

the logical analysis of their theories leaves his position open to serious objection".¹ But Collingwood's purpose was quite different from that of the analysts. It is true that Collingwood deals at some length with the logic of historical inquiry, but what he meant by logic was something quite different from the meaning given to the word by the analytic philosophers. The latter mean by logic the analysis of statements and verification theories using the techniques of symbolic logic. Collingwood in his 'question and answer' logic considers the nature of the thinking process itself, not the results of this process as put down on paper. This leads us to the third possible meaning of 'analytic consideration of historical thinking', the one which describes adequately Collingwood's prime purpose. This is the analysis, based on a metaphysical position, of the historian's activity, a specification of the metaphysical conditions which must obtain if the historian's knowledge is to be possible.

(b) Psychologism.

Collingwood's criticisms of psychologism as an approach

1. Cohen, L. J.; A survey of Work in the Philosophy of History 1946-1950, in The Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 2, 1952, p. 173

to the problems of the philosophy of history were well thought out, and before going on to discuss these criticisms, it would perhaps be wise to comment on his views on psychology as such. Collingwood has been much misunderstood on this point. It has sometimes been mistakenly assumed that his attacks on certain applications of psychological principles of which he disapproved on sound theoretical grounds, were more general, and that he meant to discredit the science of psychology in toto. Such a misunderstanding was fostered by the fact that he was extremely sensitive about any encroachment of psychology in to what he considered specifically philosophical problems, and criticized the opposition in strong terms.

The fact remains however that Collingwood had a very high regard for psychology and was well read in its literature. In an essay that appeared in 1927 he wrote that in the 19th and 20th centuries, psychology had made a great contribution to thought, greater than that of technology in the same period.¹ Similarly in his Autobiography, written in 1938, he expressed

1. Collingwood, R. G.; Aesthetic, in The Mind, ed. R.J.S. McDowall, (London, Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1927) p. 236

admiration for psychology when limited to its proper sphere of inquiry.¹

In "The Principles of Art" Collingwood spends some time considering the contribution of psychology to various phenomena related to art, and this should be kept in mind when later he asserts that the contribution of psychology to aesthetics is nil. "Psychological science has in fact done nothing towards explaining the nature of art, however much it has done towards explaining the nature of certain elements of human experience with which it may from time to time be associated or confused. The contribution of psychology to pseudo-aesthetics is enormous, to aesthetics proper, is nil".² Why did he make this extreme judgment? Collingwood's position here is based on his metaphysics. Art said Collingwood, is an activity of mind or thought. The subject-matter of philosophy is thought. Aesthetics, therefore, is a philosophical discipline.

Psychology is a natural science and therefore it considers man under the categories of the scientific mode of conscious-

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1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Autobiography, p. 96
 2. Collingwood, R. G.; The Principles of Art, p. 36

ness. That is, it considers man abstractly as a part of nature. Physiology deals with what we normally call the body, psychology with what traditionally has been called the psyche, the functions of sensation and emotion, though there is perhaps no clear line of demarcation. This is the whole man as seen from the naturalistic point of view.

But if it is thought that psychology is the science of mind, confusion will ensue.¹ For mind traditionally refers to consciousness, reason, will, and is therefore the proper object not of the scientific consciousness but of the historical consciousness, and philosophical consciousness. If psychology were the science of mind it would imply "the systematic abolition of all those distinctions which, being valid for reason and will but not for sensation and appetite constitute the special subject-matter of logic and ethics: distinctions like that between truth and error, knowledge and ignorance, science and sophistry, right and wrong, good and bad, expedient and inexpedient".²

Collingwood made this position clear again in "An Essay

1. 'Mind' is understood here as synonymous with 'thought'.
2. Collingwood, R. G.; An Autobiography, p. 94.

on Metaphysics", where he states that the sciences of mind have to be criteriological whereas psychology is not. In stating this he is developing his metaphysical conception of man and the nature of thought. "Any piece of thinking, theoretical or practical, includes as an integral part of itself the thought of a standard or criterion by reference to which it is judged as a successful or unsuccessful piece of thinking".¹ This is a consequence of thought conceived as inherently a self-critical activity. It is the specific function of the philosophical sciences of mind to consider the criteria used in the self-critical function of thought, and it is precisely this which psychology ignores.² For example a psychologist can analyse the feeling states that accompany a particular belief, and try to find the emotional background of the person in an endeavour to account for his holding the belief. But he will ignore the only questions that are important in the sciences of mind, "What does the belief really mean?" and "Is it true or not?"

These views on the mind, psyche, and psychology and the mental sciences, formed the basis of Collingwood's criticisms of the approach to history which has been called here psychologism. He

1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Essay on Metaphysics p. 107

2. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 115

found this misconception of the nature of history evident in the works of some historians including, among the classical historians, Thucydides.¹ Thucydides followed upon Herodotus, giving a narrative of current events. But Thucydides introduced into his account a new kind of analysis which he thought should play a large part in the explanation of the events. This was a concentration on the psychological states of human beings, when under certain kinds of stress such as might be created by plagues and wars. His description of war-neurosis especially in the Corcyrean revolution, Collingwood points out, by no means lacks penetration of thought, but his contribution is to something other than history. Collingwood maintains that such attempts to categorize psychological states and to find uniformities in the conditions of their occurrence, is a valid field of inquiry in psychology understood as a natural science, but should not go under the garb of history. Psychology abstracts from the uniqueness of persons and actions in the past and constructs abstract archetypes of feeling states and the conditions of their occurrence which may be useful in establishing hypothetical laws of psychological reaction. And these laws again may be useful in guiding human action in the future. But the whole process ignores his-

1. Collingwood, R. G.; The Idea of History, p. 29

tory, - what actually happened in the past, and throws no light on the past activities of man which must be understood or explained through the thought process expressed in them.

(e) Substantialism.

Another approach to the philosophy of history which Collingwood found untenable can be called substantialism, a metaphysical position which appears at different points throughout the history of thought asserting the primacy of the category of substance, and that what is knowable is the unchanging, or what remains the same throughout change. This approach was characteristic of Greco-Roman historiography. In almost every case, Collingwood maintains, the individual past actions of human beings are ignored or pushed aside as unknowable.¹ For Thucydides history is unknowable, but the laws according to which human actions happen which do not change are knowable. Livy took Rome as a given substantial entity, so that what is knowable is Rome, not the past actions of men which went into the historical creation of Rome. Tacitus, Collingwood claims, took each individual he considered as a sub-

1. Collingwood, R. G.; *op cit* pp. 42 ff.

stantial being who could not change and therefore had no history, but whose fortunes differed with external conditions.

Substantialism conceives its object as complete, whether it is a law of change, a person, or a large social entity. Thus it ignores the creative acts of human thought which in fact constitute history. History which is itself change, creates its own laws of development. If Collingwood is right on this point, any philosophy of history based on a substantialistic metaphysics is bound to be inadequate.

Christian philosophy introduced a healthy criticism of substantialism because it maintained that nothing is eternal or unchanging except God. But in modern philosophy the substantialistic trend reappears, for example, in Hume and the Enlightenment philosophers. Hume, the great critic of theories of substance, realized that mind cannot be separated from what it does. But he returned to substantialism as defined above in that he thought that the mind thinks according to fixed laws which could be known by a special natural science dealing with human nature. He did not realize that "by coming to think more truly about human understanding we are coming to improve our own understanding. Hence the historical development of the science of human nature entails an histori-

cal development in human nature itself".¹

The metaphysical category of substance must be put aside in favour of that of creative activity. History is the study of the concrete individual acts which constitute the change or progression by which mankind came to be what it now is.

(d) 'Positivist History'.

The 'positivist history' approach to the philosophy of history has much in common with psychologism and substantialism. With the latter it holds that what is knowable does not change. What is knowable is thought to be the laws of historical development which remain constant through apparent meaningless change. With the former it holds that the methods of history are those of natural science and that historical occurrences can be explained in terms of general laws inductively established.

Auguste Comte is, for Collingwood, the classic example here.² What we want, said Comte, is the extension of the methods of natural science beyond the biological sciences to the social realm. This is a useful ideal. But in his own investigations the

1. Collingwood, R. G.; *op cit* p. 84

2. Collingwood, R. G.; *ibid* pp. 128 ff.

scientific method was applied to the main body of factual data about society existing at that time, historical knowledge. He called his new science sociology, and its first product was a law of historical development, that is, a law which purports to specify the course of historical events. In this, Comte was involved in a confusion of thought which still pervades such thinking in the social realm. He thought, mistakenly, that his new science, sociology, was doing better the job which history had always set itself to do, to know the past.

Collingwood saw this confusion and criticized the attempt to replace history by such a 'positivistic History'. Sociology is a legitimate study in itself. It is a natural science, the product of the scientific consciousness. It abstracts from individual social events as psychology abstracts from individual psychological events, and inductively constructs laws which tabulate the uniformities in human social behaviour. The evidence or data for this enterprise can be contemporary and historical. But the end result, sociological generalizations or laws, do not constitute historical knowledge. They can be usefully applied in the future control of human behaviour. They are valid according to the rules of verification in science, and are as true of events in history as they are now and will be in the

future, though Collingwood questions whether they will transcend the historical period which produced them. But they are of no use in the attempt to establish what actions actually took place in the past. Comte's law of historical development was a mistaken attempt to give a law of social behaviour which has no specifically historical reference.

History is something quite different and should not be confused with sociology. The sociologist's interest in past actions is to find instances of general laws. The historian's interest is to find out what actions in fact took place in the past. He wants to know them in their unique individuality not as instances of an abstract law. If history is to provide evidence for sociology, the historical events first have to be established, and this is all that history is interested in doing. The method of science as it is used in sociology cannot begin to work on historical data until the work of history is already done.¹

1. This is the import of Collingwood's unusual remark at the end of "The Idea of Nature", that science as a mode of thought is dependent on another mode not reducible to it, - history. ("The Idea of Nature", p. 176). This must be understood in terms of Collingwood's metaphysics in which science and history are philosophical categories. Science as a form of consciousness abstracts from individual facts to form hypothetical laws. This logically presupposes history as a form of consciousness whose purpose it is to establish individual fact.

The work of men like Spengler and Professor Toynbee is evidence that this distinction between the proper object of history and the proper object of science is not generally recognized. For they try at once to know the past and to develop generalizations concerning the actual course of history with predictive power. In the latter a regression to the attempt at 'positivistic history' is evident.

(e) History as the History of Thought

It was on the basis of a particular metaphysics that Collingwood criticized the above three 'non-historical' approaches to the understanding of history, and it is on the basis of the same metaphysics that his assertion that history is the history of thought, must be understood. Indeed in its bare essentials it can be deduced from his metaphysics. It has been shown that, according to Collingwood, action is an expression of psyche and thought. On analysis it was found that the elements of psychical life cannot recur or be re-enacted by the same person or other persons, and that the flux of feeling and emotion is purely private. There cannot, therefore, be a history of actions which are the expressions of psyche. Such actions appear only as external events in natural history. They have no 'inside' which can be discerned, and there-

fore they cannot be known in any other sense than events in natural history can be known. Actions which are the expression of thoughts can be known in another sense because, as has been shown, acts of thought can in their universal aspect be re-enacted in different contexts, in different minds. For Collingwood, what is meant by historical knowledge is knowledge in the fuller sense, knowledge of an action which involves understanding the thought it expresses. Therefore all history is the history of thought.

That history could be the history of thought is a paradoxical assertion to anyone familiar with the broad scope of historical inquiry. It is less so on reflection. It has been recognised by many philosophers and historians that history has to do essentially with the creative part of man, thought, and that the historian's difficult task is to grasp it from within. According to Dilthey genuine historical knowledge is an inward experience of its object,¹ meaning a reliving of the mental life of the men of the past. Croce wrote in his autobiography that he could only understand the history of philosophy by going deeper than a reading of the works of philosophers, "by re-enacting their mental

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 172

drama in one's own person, under the stimulus of actual life."¹ Marc Bloch also, said that it is not so much the natural forces that impinge on man that are important but what man in his creative activity of thought, makes of them. His terminology is different from Collingwood's in that he refers to these acts of thought as 'psychological'. "Historical facts are in essence, psychological facts. Normally therefore, they find their antecedents in other psychological facts. To be sure human destinies are placed in the physical world and suffer the consequences thereof. Even when the intrusion of these external forces seems most brutal, their action is weakened or intensified by man and his mind".²

It is clear that the realities which, for Collingwood, confirmed his metaphysics and impressed him with a sense of the importance of the study of history were; the extent to which the destinies of men have been determined by their own capacities to think, that their culture is essentially a phenomenon of mind,

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1. Croce, B.; Autobiography, tr. R. G. Collingwood, (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1927) pp. 64-5.
 2. Bloch, M.; The Historian's Craft, tr. P. Putnam, Manchester University Press, 1954, p. 194.

that although mind operates within a framework of nature the history of man is the history of what men do with nature, how they conceive it in the first place, and how they progress in the knowledge of their own possibilities. For example it is not the geographical fact that a certain group of people live on an island that determines their historical development, but how they conceive their insularity.

Collingwood's exposition of the theory that all history is the history of thought appears in "The Idea of History" where he states that the object of historical knowledge is "not a mere object, something outside the mind which knows it; it is an activity of thought, which can be known only in so far as the knowing mind re-enacts it and knows itself as so doing".¹

Collingwood means here that when looked at externally, the historical character of an event is being ignored. An event cannot be historically understood either by abstracting from it something which is useful in reasoning inductively to a generalization nor by considering it as an instance of a scientific law. Merely to describe the physical happenings of the past is a travesty of

1. Collingwood, R. G.; The Idea of History, p. 218

history. What demands the consideration of the historian is the creative mental activity of which the physical occurrences are the expression. For example it is integral to the understanding of Garibaldi's invasion of Sicily, to understand the plan he made to utilize the resources available, and the plan of action and ideals defended by his opposition. This is not to assert a dualism of physical act and preceding mental act. Historical events are organic unities and for this reason it is less misleading to speak of historical actions rather than historical events. To understand the thought of the dramatis personae of history is to understand their actions historically and not as a succession of changes in natural history.

How does the historian know this activity of thought? By re-enacting it in his own mind. This is intelligible in terms of his metaphysics. When the object of mind is thought there is no spatio-temporal block separating the mind from the thought it re-enacts. It has been shown above that for Collingwood there is in an act of thought something universal which can transcend the unique context in which it first took place, and can recur, can be rethought, after a lapse of time, by another person in different circumstances. In thus showing the possibility of re-enactment, Collingwood has, in a Kantian transcendental fashion, proved

the reality of history as a mode of thought.

By re-enactment of past thought, Collingwood does not mean that there is an obliteration of the distinction between present and past and that re-enacted thought appears to the historian indistinguishable from his everyday thought about the present. The differences in context of the re-enacted thought ensures the distinction. To the person in history it was present thought. To the historian it is past thought living in the present but encapsulated, that is, "thought which, though perfectly alive, forms no part of the question-answer complex which constitutes what people call the 'real' life, the superficial or obvious present, of the mind in question".¹ "Historical knowledge is the re-enactment of a past thought encapsulated in a context of present thoughts which, by contradicting it, confine it to a plane different from theirs".²

At this point certain technical difficulties arise in Collingwood's theory of history. He had earlier asserted that the historian knows the individual, unique actions of the past. But

1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Autobiography, p. 113

2. ibid p. 114

his analysis of history as the history of thought led him to conclude that the historian can only re-enact a universal aspect of past acts of thought. For if he re-enacted the act of thought in its unique context, the present would become identical with the past, the historian would, in fact, be the historical personage. Is history, then, knowledge of the universal? Not at least in the scientific sense of the word 'universal', because that would mean that the historian abstracts from individual acts, and Collingwood has repeatedly stated that the historian must not abstract in this way. Collingwood, to be consistent, had to combine history as knowledge of the individual, with the possibility of re-enacting past acts of thought only if these acts are in some sense universal. He confessed to a certain vagueness in his own phraseology when he concluded that the universality that belongs to acts of thought, which enables them to transcend any particular context of enactment, is not an abstract universality, but concrete.¹ If so, then any act of thought can transcend a context yet remain individual. In specifying this attribute of concrete universality as a condition of the possibility of historical knowledge, Collingwood seems to be descri-

1. Collingwood, R. G.; The Idea of History, p. 303

bing something real. For example, all the historians working on the history of Italy are familiar with Cavour's hopes and plans for the unification of Italy, the practical problems he faced and the essential parts of his thinking process in dealing with them. Yet they have no difficulty, even in their most inspired moments of historical imagination in distinguishing themselves from Cavour. Cavour's thought is in a sense, common property for all those who have considered all the relevant evidence with the necessary amount of critical skill. Cavour's thought must therefore have transcended what Collingwood called the unique question-answer complex of his total mental life. In this sense only, is it universal, for historians also realize that in rethinking, with varying degrees of success, these thoughts, they are re-enacting the mental life of one and only one individual. The individuality of Cavour's thought cannot be universal in any other sense than that it can be known, and rethought, by any qualified person to whom the necessary evidence is available.

There are two conditions which must be fulfilled according to Collingwood, in order that the historian can get at the past thought to re-enact it. The thought must be expressed in the various activities and forms of action that constitute the progression of history, i.e. there must be evidence of it. Secondly the historian

must be capable through education in the broadest sense, of thinking the same thought himself.¹ If the historian does not understand the language used in the past, if the past conception of life has no parallel in his own culture, if, as Cassirer pointed out, the 'symbols' which constitute historical evidence hold no meaning for the historian, then he cannot rethink the thought of the past.² But if these are available and meaningful to him, the door is open to the understanding of history.

Certain complexities connected with these two conditions will be considered in the following sections of this chapter. But their mention is sufficient to raise two questions which can be considered here. Firstly, can re-enactment of past thought in the sense noted above encompass what Collingwood means by 'thought' in the broad sense? It is not difficult for us to conceive that the act of thought in which Pythagoras asserted that the sum of the internal angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles, had a universal element which enables us to re-enact it now. But is it possible for us to re-enact the thought, for example, of the ancient artist who

1. Collingwood, E. G.; An Autobiography, p. 111
2. Cassirer, E.; An Essay on Man, (Yale University Press, 1945)
p. 175

sculptured the Laocöon? Collingwood would say that we can, though the demands made upon the art historian in this case would be considerable, involving a familiarity with the history of that particular genre, with the aesthetic ideals of the period in which it was created, and with the relation between art forms and other aspects of Greek life. Lessing's criticism of the Laocöon, for instance, is in large measure, history, and his historical judgments have required correction in the face of new evidence and a reconsideration of old evidence, because it was found that he was reading his own Renaissance aesthetic ideals into the thought of the Greek sculptor. Collingwood's theory of art bears out the idea that the historian can, with difficulty, re-enact the thought of the artist. Even in the appreciation of present works of art, Collingwood claims, the audience must reconstruct the work of art in their own minds, this being conceived as a process of thought. The only thing distinguishing art from other kinds of purposive action, is that the artist does not formulate his problem intellectually before he creates. Rather the artist and the audience are not reflectively aware of the problem until the work has been achieved in each mind.

If we pursued this line of argument, we would conclude that all mental acts above the physical level have that universal aspect required for their re-enactment. Collingwood was ambiguous

on this point. In several places he would seem to suggest that historical knowledge is only possible when the past action is the expression of a particularly high level of thought. In "The Idea of History" he says that such thought must be self-conscious,¹ and going on to develop this idea, he claims that only purposive actions have historical significance, and further that only those actions whose purpose can be reconstructed from evidence can be historically known.² But this must be liberally interpreted if we are to understand what Collingwood meant here. Purposive action includes theoretical reasoning in attempting to answer specific intellectual problems, practical action of all kinds such as in the military, political and economic spheres, in which a plan or policy is being followed, moral action in which the agent is trying to attain an ideal, and artistic creation in which a problem is recognized in the attempt at a resolution of it. In fact any action for which the purpose is discernible such that by reference to it we can

1. Collingwood, R. G.; The Idea of History, p. 307

2. Collingwood, R. G.; The Idea of History, p. 309

The idea that Collingwood expressed in "An Autobiography" (p. 70) that only that plan or purpose can be discerned which was successfully carried out, is not adequate in the face of the realities of historical investigation, and he did not follow it in his practice as an historian. cf pp. 134-5.

Judge whether or not the action was successfully performed, is an instance of an historically significant purposive action. That Collingwood considered even artistic creation as consciously purposive is clearly shown in his autobiography where he says that he did not appreciate the Albert Memorial as a work of art until he understood the purpose of the artist.¹

If Collingwood's metaphysics is to be our guide, then, he wanted purposive activity to be so interpreted that the thought re-enacted by the historian would include all mental processes above mere perception and memory; the creative artistic impulse, political thinking on various levels of consciousness and self-consciousness, confused reasonings on a pre-intellectual level, will manifested in conscious planning, and desire manifested in a vague purposefulness only implicitly aware of the ends pursued. Croce had an equally broad conception and referred to relived experience rather than re-enacted thought.² Collingwood takes 'thought' in an unusually wide sense yet one easily enough understood if his metaphysics is kept in mind.

1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Autobiography, pp. 29, 30.

2. Croce, B.; Theory and History of Historiography, tr. D. Ainslie (London, Geo. Harrap & Co.) 1921, ch. IX.

The second difficulty that emerges is more serious because it concerns the very basis of Collingwood's theory of history. There is a discrepancy between Collingwood's theory of history and the actual work of the best practicing historians. Collingwood claimed that all history is of purposive activity. Yet a great deal of what is considered good historical writing is concerned not with purposive activity, but with forces which underlie or ignore reason. Much of what we normally call history is the story of man's folly, of his subservience to the drives of his animal nature, and more particularly of his failure to think effectively. Open any competent history of the later Middle Ages. To what extent is the account of the rise of national states the record of plans put into practice so that we can judge from our point of perspective whether or not this was done successfully? How much of the history of the social ills attending the industrial revolution in England, is an account of consciously purposive action? Collingwood seems to have realized at times the extent to which non-rational forces effect the destinies of men. "It is only by fits and starts, in a flickering and dubious manner, that human beings are rational at all. In quality as well as in amount, their rationality is a matter of degree: some are oftener rational than

others, some rational in a more intense way".¹ Nevertheless there seems to be a realm of investigation concerned, for example, with the evolution of political, economic, and social institutions, i.e. with certain realities which were, in their time, beyond the control and even the comprehension of contemporary men, which is a genuine part of historical inquiry, but which cannot be forced into Collingwood's conception of history.

Collingwood's distinction between the inside and the outside of an historical event has been thought to imply a dualism and an intuitionist theory of knowledge to enable the historian to get beyond the line where normal evidence would take him. But properly understood it is a useful distinction. It has already been pointed out that Collingwood at no time meant to assert a dualism. The distinction between the inside and outside of an historical event fulfils the double function of warning the historian not to consider historical action naturalistically as a spectacle of changing physical events, and of suggesting to the historian that the thought which determined an historical action can only be reconstructed on the basis of physical evidence. "His (the

1. Collingwood, R. G.; The Idea of History, p. 227

historian's) work may begin by discovering the outside of an event, but it can never end there; he must always remember that the event was an action, and that his main task is to think himself into the action, to discern the thought of its agent".¹ Up to the 19th century with few exceptions historians only regarded the outside of historical action, the result being annals and not history proper. Historians in the 19th century discovered that the proper explanation of historical events is always with reference to their 'inside' or thought aspect. For example, it is not enough for the historian to record that Caesar invaded Britain. He must go on, if he is fully to understand the action, to ask why he invaded Britain. And the answer would not be of the kind, because the weather conditions were propitious, nor because in social and economic conditions such as Caesar was in, energy must find an outlet in such actions as foreign invasion. The first would be an 'explanation' in terms of natural history, the second in terms of natural science. The historian only understands Caesar's actions if he re-enacts his thought about the political and social conditions which he evaluated in forming his policy, and reconstructs his plan of invasion.

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 213.

(f) Evidence and Historical Inference.

Collingwood's at times rather ambiguous and metaphorical language left his philosophy of history open to misinterpretation by those who did not relate it to his metaphysics. This is particularly true concerning the notion of history as the history of thought and of the inside-outside theory of historical action. Writers such as W. H. Walsh understood Collingwood to imply that the historian attains an intuitive grasp of the inside (thought aspect) of an historical event, and that historical theses are verified by such intuitive knowledge. A recent article has corrected this misapprehension showing firstly that Collingwood did not accept an intuitionist theory of historical knowledge, and secondly that his reflections on history did not comprise a theory of verification of historical theses but rather a formulation of the conditions which must obtain if the historian is to know the past.¹

To understand Collingwood aright it is necessary not to divorce the notion of the historian re-enacting the thought of the past from the equally important idea that historical knowledge, like

1. Donagan, A.; The Verification of Historical Theses,
The Philosophical Quarterly, July 1956.

that of science and philosophy, must be publicly demonstrable, i.e. must be the conclusion of an inference.¹ The object of historical thought is not one of the 'inside' or the 'outside' of a past event to the exclusion of the other, though the 'inside' is of peculiar interest to the historian, but rather the act itself, of which the 'inside' and 'outside' are different aspects. The historian knows the 'inside', not by intuition, but in the same way he knows the 'outside', as a conclusion of inferences from evidence.

This conception of historical knowledge raises certain problems because history purports to be knowledge of the past which is no longer with us. All the procedures of science which are based on observation of the object of knowledge are irrelevant, and it must be asked what is the ground of the historian's assertions about the past? and by what method of reasoning does he reach his conclusions? Collingwood's views on these questions are found mainly in his attack on the 'scissors-and-paste' type of history in which historical inquiry is conceived as a reconstruction of the past from recognized authorities, existing accounts of the period studied, whose validity

1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Essay on Philosophical Method, p. 137

is never questioned. The scissors-and-paste historians merely accept authorities in their capacity as testimony. The result cannot constitute knowledge, Collingwood notes,¹ because it is a necessary requirement of knowledge that the grounds for the conclusions be stated, and the process of reasoning correct. The result of scissors-and-paste history is a collection of mere opinions about the past.

In the 19th century a transformation in the use of authorities took place in the advance of critical history. The critical historian no longer took the testimonies as authoritative, but as a source, a group of statements which may or may not be useful in helping him to know the past.² Whereas previously the historian had only tried to make his various authorities internally consistent and consistent with one another, and asked himself what is the content of the statements in the authorities, the critical historian goes on to ask a further question, what light is thrown on his problem by the fact that the statements in the source are made at all.³ The transformation had now been made from consider-

1. Collingwood, R. G.; The Idea of History, p. 257
2. ibid p. 259
3. ibid p. 275

to the test of questions about the past in the same sense as Bacon had thought of putting nature to the test of questions in natural science. One example Collingwood cites¹ brings together several of these points. Few historians of Roman Britain have asked themselves what Caesar's purpose was in invading Britain, a question that must be answered if we are fully to understand his action. Although it is necessary to base any valid answer on evidence, there is very little evidence to go on beyond Caesar's own account. The scissors-and-paste historian would say that no more can be known about the expedition than what is already recorded in the contemporary accounts. But Collingwood was impressed by the fact that Caesar nowhere states his purpose, and apparently wanted to conceal it at the time. From his acquaintance with the 'Commentaries' Collingwood concludes that Caesar's purpose was not successfully carried out. These facts together with a comparison of the size of the forces of Caesar and of Claudius a century later, led Collingwood to infer that Caesar's purpose was to conquer the whole of Britain. Collingwood admits that the evidence is slight, but maintains that this is the only conclusion which the evidence will allow

1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Autobiography, p. 131.

him to hold, and must stand until a better answer to the question has been substantiated. It is interesting that Collingwood claims to know the purpose of an action that was not successfully carried out, which counteracts his unusual earlier contention that if a plan or purpose, for example that of Villeneuve at Trafalgar, was unsuccessfully carried out, it could never be known by the historian.¹

Historical inference, like scientific inference, Collingwood claims, must constitute a proof of the conclusion. But the historian unlike the mathematician, infers from fact, not from assumptions.² For the premisses of an historical argument are autonomous statements of the historian, not ones taken authoritatively.³ For example, if an authority states that Caesar's plan at a certain battle was X, the historian does not start his reasoning about some aspect of the battle from the authority's statement "Caesar's plan was X" because this always has the understood condition "if the testimony is correct", but from his own assertion "The source says that Caesar's plan was X". The historian can

1. Collingwood, R. G.; *op cit* p. 70.

2. Collingwood, R. G.; The Idea of History, p. 251.

3. *ibid* p. 276.

which leave no room for doubt. The argument of the historian proper, Collingwood maintains, proves the conclusion with the same compulsive force as an argument in mathematics.¹

Collingwood is not convincing on this point because he does not really substantiate his claim that history and exact science are rigorous in proof in the same sense. He appeals to the authority of practicing historians in this matter and says that if the reader is not satisfied with this he must engage himself in historical reasoning to find out if it proves its conclusions with the same compulsive force as mathematics. But this just avoids the problem. Collingwood does not distinguish the subjective feeling of certainty which accompanies mathematical argument, and may accompany historical argument, from the logical analysis of verification procedures which alone could be the basis of any comparison between the rigour of mathematical and historical proof.

(g) The Criteria of Historical Truth

The criterion of historical truth for the scissors-and-paste historian is the agreement of his conclusion with the content

1. Collingwood, R. G.; *op cit* p. 262.

of authoritative texts.¹ With the advent of historical criticism this criterion was cast aside, the 'authorities' were reduced to 'sources' the content of which must be judged by other standards. "So far from relying on an authority other than himself, to whose statements his thought must conform, the historian is his own authority and his thought autonomous, self-authorizing, possessed of a criterion to which his so-called authorities must conform and by reference to which they are criticized."² With the recognition of this fact, Collingwood asserts, a Copernican Revolution was effected in historical inquiry, which found its philosophical expression in England, in the work of F. H. Bradley. The criterion of historical truth no longer lies outside the historian but is supplied by his own thought. But although Bradley had this principle correctly in his mind, his particular development of the idea reverted to the scissors-and-paste conception of history. Bradley stated that the criteria which we apply in our criticism of authorities are the laws of natural science, and generalizations from our everyday experience. But these can only fulfil the nega-

1. Collingwood, R. G.; *op cit* p. 238.
2. *ibid* p. 236.

tive critical function of eliminating from our sources those statements which refer to impossible actions, retaining the rest on the same old grounds of being authoritative.

Collingwood maintained that the criterion which the historian supplies is not reducible to the laws of natural science. In practice the historian extrapolates from certain fixed points, an imaginative activity which fills in the gaps of an otherwise sketchy account, and gives continuity to history as reconstructed. Collingwood conceived this as a necessary process of inference which left nothing to mere caprice, and called the faculty of thought which performs this function the a priori historical imagination. But although in any particular historical inquiry there are fixed points, points of established knowledge from which the imaginative activity proceeds,¹ in theory, as the critical function of thought progresses, these fixed points are also brought under scrutiny, are seen to be questionable, and are judged according to the same criterion of truth that was applied to that which was inferred from them. Because there are no fixed points of historical knowledge from which the historian can start, the faculty of a priori imagination must provide its own

1. Collingwood, R. G.; *op cit* p. 244.

criterion of truth. The web of historical reconstruction is no longer judged by some certain fact outside the historian, but is itself the criterion by which the historian accepts or rejects a given fact as genuine.¹

This a priori faculty of historical imagination, says Collingwood, has much in common with artistic imagination as employed for example in the writing of novels. But it differs from the latter in several important respects.² The historian's picture must be localized in space and time, and must be consistent with all other historical reconstructions, whereas each individual work of art is a monad. Most important of all, the historian's reconstruction of the past stands in a certain relationship to evidence. Any judgment as to the truth of an historical account refers to this relation.

It has already been pointed out that in Collingwood's theory the whole perceptible world is evidence for the entire past by which the present has come to be what it now is. But how does one recognize it and judge its value as evidence? "Evidence is

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p.245.

2. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 246

evidence", writes Collingwood, "only when we contemplate it historically".¹ This quotation brings out even more forcefully that, for Collingwood, the ground for historical knowledge lies ultimately within the historian himself. Ultimately the criterion of historical truth "is the idea of history itself: the idea of an imaginary picture of the past. That idea is, in Cartesian language, innate; in Kantian language, a priori. It is not a chance product of psychological causes, it is an innate idea which every man possesses as part of the furniture of his mind, and discovers himself to possess in so far as he becomes conscious of what it is to have a mind".²

In order to show the influence of Collingwood's basic metaphysical principles on the development of this argument, it is necessary to point out the transition in the middle of it from an essentially descriptive analytic point of view to a transcendental analytic point of view in the Kantian sense. When Collingwood discusses the process of extrapolation from established fact, the function of imagination in filling in parts of an account on which the sources are silent, he is giving an analysis of the ways in

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 247.

2. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 248.

which practicing historians go about their work. When, however, he begins to question the status not of some piece of evidence in relation to another, but the status of evidence as such, when he asks on what grounds an historian accepts any evidence whatever, he is posing a question of a basic philosophical kind. He has made the transition to a metaphysical point of view in which he does not consider history as one among other fields of inquiry but as a mode of consciousness, a fundamental way of thinking about reality. When Collingwood refers to the idea of history as an innate idea, he is not stating that he can point out in the thought of the historian a particular idea, that of history as such. Rather he is saying that if history is a science the conclusions of which are publicly demonstrable, then reality must be such that a constituent faculty of mind is the capacity to see the world from an historical point of view. This mode of consciousness is the ultimate ground of any historical reconstruction, the criterion of historical truth.

meaning }

PERIOD III

CHAPTER 7

LATER TREND TO HISTORICISM

The purpose of this chapter is firstly to point out the sceptical and historicist elements which were evident in Collingwood's work of before 1936 but which did not become dominant or all-pervasive until after that date. Secondly, to articulate the main characteristics of his later historicism. This final historicist position is contained mainly in "An Autobiography" published in 1939, and "An Essay on Metaphysics", prepared in 1936 and published in 1940, but the fragments from the unpublished "The Principles of History" quoted in the Editor's Preface to "The Idea of History" also show this historicism in its extreme form. A special consideration of Collingwood's historical metaphysics, and a general evaluation of historicism, are given in chapter eight.

In chapter two it has been shown that there were elements of philosophical scepticism in Collingwood's work of before 1930 and notably in "Religion and Philosophy" and "Speculum Mentis" where there was an underlying tendency to consider philosophy as nothing more than the methodological moment of the historical judgment. This scepticism was for the most part overcome between 1930

and 1936, a period during which Collingwood developed an intellectual position which recognized the autonomy of both philosophy and history, (of chapter 4) and explicitly asserted that not all reality is historical.¹ There are times however, when Collingwood considers particular problems in the philosophy of history, when the scepticism seems to reappear in a fusion of his conceptions of history and philosophy. Before 1936 Collingwood was simultaneously carrying on research in history and philosophy, and there are passages in "The Idea of History", which was for the most part thought out during this period, in which Collingwood's characterization of history seems very similar to the way he had described philosophy on previous occasions, which would seem to indicate that the conceptions of history and philosophy were not clearly separated in his own mind. Consider the following three instances in which Collingwood uses much the same terminology in describing history as he had used in describing philosophy.

1. In "Speculum Mentis" Collingwood maintains that philosophy, as distinguished from art, religion, science and history, is self-critical thought and constitutes the self-knowledge of mind.² In the

1. Collingwood, R. G.; *op cit* p. 209.

2. Collingwood, R. G.; Speculum Mentis, pp 247 ff.

first section of the Prolegomena of "The Idea of History", Collingwood maintains that what Hume misconceived as the natural science of human nature is really an historical study of the activity of mind, i.e. of what mind has done. "Historical knowledge is the knowledge of what mind has done in the past, and at the same time it is the redoing of this, the perpetuation of past acts in the present. Its object is therefore not a mere object, something outside the mind that knows it, it is an activity of thought, which can only be known in so far as the knowing mind re-enacts it and knows itself in so doing. ... It may thus be said that historical inquiry reveals to the historian the powers of his own mind".¹ But this amounts to saying that history is the self-knowledge of mind which is how he had described philosophy.

2. In "An Essay on Philosophical Method" Collingwood states that history does not criticize its own first principles and that this is a function of philosophical thought.² In developing his conception of history as the self-knowledge of mind, Collingwood

1. Collingwood, R. G.; The Idea of History, p. 218.

2. Collingwood, R. G.; An Essay on Philosophical Method, p. 1.

maintains that history is the life of mind and that if mind is to exist at all it must be self-conscious.¹ "Thought therefore is not the presupposition of an historical process which is in turn the presupposition of historical knowledge. It is only in the historical process, the process of thoughts, that thought exists at all, and it is only in so far as this process is known for a process of thoughts that it is one. The self-knowledge of reason is not an accident; it belongs to its essence".² Mind, to exist, must be conscious of its own nature. But mind is the activity of thought. For anything to be an activity of thought, therefore, it must be conscious of itself as such. But there is no such thing as an act of thought in general, it must be an act of thought of a specific kind, for example of historical thought. Any act of thought is based on certain principles, and an act of historical thought is thought based on the principles of historical investigation. Therefore an activity of historical thinking, to exist at all, must be conscious of itself, i.e. of thought based on the principles of historical inquiry. Now Collingwood maintained that to discern thought

1. Collingwood, R. G.; The Idea of History, p. 226.

2. ibid p. 227.

is already to judge its validity. Therefore historical thought criticizes its own first principles, a task which he had earlier assigned to philosophy.

3. At the beginning of "The Idea of History", Collingwood maintains that philosophy is thought of the second degree, thought about thought.¹ But in one of the essays that appear in the same book Collingwood describes history in almost identical fashion. "Historical thinking is always reflection; for reflection is thinking about the act of thinking".² History is no longer limited to past actions of human beings but encompasses the study of thought in all its aspects.

These examples are not put forward to prove that Collingwood identified philosophy with history before 1936. It has already been shown that he did not. But they do indicate a certain unclarity in the distinction between history and philosophy. They imply also that Collingwood thought at times that history as a mode of consciousness is concerned not only with past actions but with all aspects of thought.

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 1.

2. ibid p. 307.

These points in "The Idea of History" bridge the gap between the historicist elements of "Religion and Philosophy" and "Speculum Mentis" and the consciously worked out, thorough historicist position of "An Autobiography" and "An Essay on Metaphysics". When the term historicism is used to describe Collingwood's final position it is important to understand just what it means. For it is not the same as the meaning given to 'historicism' by other contemporary thinkers. Mr. Karl Popper, for example means by 'historicism', "a methodology of the social sciences that emphasize their historical character and aims at historical prediction".¹ The historicists for Mr. Popper, try to apply the methods of natural science to history to discover the law of development of the actual historical process itself. Mr. Popper criticizes them not so much on the grounds that the historicists are wrong in maintaining that the methods of history do not differ in principle from the methods of natural science, but rather on the grounds that they misunderstand the nature of scientific method, and thus make the mistake of trying to formulate a predictive law of history on the basis of a single instance, the one historical process, taken as a whole.²

1. Popper, K.; The Poverty of Historicism I, Economica, 1944, p. 66.
2. Popper, K.; The Poverty of Historicism III, Economica, 1945, p.70.

What we mean when we call Collingwood's final position 'historicism' is not what Mr. Popper means by 'historicism'. Much of Collingwood's writing on the philosophy of history is an attempt to describe the differences between history and natural science, and he also criticized as unhistorical, the attempt to formulate a predictive historical law. Collingwood's historicism consists in his maintaining that all human life is historically conditioned, or in other words that all thought, without exception, proceeds on the basis of principles which are relative to the historical situation in which they arise, and have no validity, indeed no significance whatever, beyond the historical complex in which they function as the ground of thought. It follows that all systems of thought, which constitute knowledge at a given time, are only knowledge within the cultural tradition which is committed to the absolute presuppositions of those systems. Whereas before 1936 Collingwood thought there was something eternally true and something eternally good, after that time the true and the good refer merely to what, at any particular time and in any particular historical situation, are considered true and good.

This relativism is evident in Collingwood's treatment of the history of philosophy. In his autobiography Collingwood

maintained that there are not two separate judgments, one historical, discerning the thought of the past, and the second philosophical, judging whether that thought is true or not, but rather only one judgment, the historical one, which at the same time discerns, and judges the truth of, that thought. "The alleged distinction between the historical question and the philosophical must be false because it presupposes the permanence of philosophical problems".¹ In this final stage of his thought, Collingwood claimed that all philosophical problems are relative to the historical period in which they arise. Hence the job of the historian of thought is to reconstruct from the evidence available what the problems were in any particular age. Once the problem was recognized the validity of the solution could be assessed. But is this assessment a legitimate part of the historian's task or does an external criterion have to be used? The particular way in which Collingwood dealt with this problem is not very satisfactory because it leads to results which conflict with the practice of historians. The historian can only reconstruct the problems, Collingwood says, working on the evidence of the solutions given to the problems. Hence unless the conclusions were correct in the

1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Autobiography, p. 69.

first place, the problems could not be reconstructed. It follows that if a past philosophical theory is not a successful solution to its problem, it cannot even be understood, because the historian cannot know the problem for which it constitutes the attempted solution. This assertion is closely related to his view that the judgment which discerns the question to which a proposition is the answer, is at the same time a judgment of the validity of the answer. Nevertheless it would have been closer to the actual practice of historians, and indeed closer to his own practice as an historian, if he had maintained that a problem can be reconstructed on the basis of the evidence not only of the attempted solution, but also of other evidence not directly connected with the solution, such as the thinker's express statement of it, or another thinker's comment on it. In terms of Collingwood's theory of the nature of thought, it would still be necessary for the historian if he is fully to understand the past philosophical theory, to judge the adequacy of the theory in solving the problem according to the standard of validity accepted at the time the problem was raised and the solution propounded. That is, the only significant assessment of the validity of a past philosophical theory that an historian can make, must be in terms of the conception of truth which was fundamental to the historical complex in which the philosophical problem arose. Ad-

mitting this as a legitimate inquiry, there could be conceived a further intellectual function of judging the adequacy of past philosophical positions, both problem and solution, according to a more comprehensive philosophy which transcends in some sense, the historical situation. It is in denying the meaningfulness of such a further inquiry that Collingwood's historicism consists. He no longer considered it meaningful to ask questions of the kind what is knowledge?, what is art?, etc.¹ Questions must always be specific and historical, about a particular kind of theory, or form of art, which existed at some time in the history of thought. For example, Collingwood states in "The Idea of History"² that Kant proved that thinkers in the 18th century thought in terms of the category of causation though he did not ask the significant historical question why they thought in this way. Kant made a further contention that rational man must necessarily think in this way, but in terms of Collingwood's position after 1936 it would be meaningless to suggest a valuation of this contention, which would require a judgment based on a non-historical criterion.

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 122.

2. Collingwood, R. G.; The Idea of History p. 230.

Collingwood developed his historicist position mainly in his theory of metaphysics as an historical science which is considered in the next chapter. But he concluded in his autobiography that all branches of philosophy; ethics, logic, aesthetics, philosophy of religion, are in essence historical. "By degrees I found that there was no recognized branch of philosophy to which the principle did not apply that its problems as well as the solutions proposed for them, had their own history".¹ It might be suggested that this could be true and still leave room for a further philosophical analysis, for example, of the nature of reality that would make historical knowledge possible. In denying that this kind of inquiry has any meaning because it presupposes something transcending in some sense the historical process, Collingwood's subsumption of philosophy under his conception of history became complete.

Collingwood had a special interest in the relative nature of philosophical theories, but in his final historicism all thought is historically relative, and Collingwood carried through the implications of this for historical inquiry consistently in an unpublished manuscript

1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Autobiography, p. 67.

written in 1936. "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".¹

Even before 1936 Collingwood had recognized that the historian is conditioned by his own historical situation, not only in the area of history he will consider important and in the kinds of questions he will ask about the past, but also in the selection of events he will make to confirm his answers to these questions. In writings published in 1930² and 1935³ Collingwood states that it is for this reason that each generation had to rewrite history afresh and that no achievement in history is final. "God cannot change the past but historians can and do". But at this time he still thought that it is meaningful to ask if the accounts of the past are true or not. His later historicism does not allow for such a question, and

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1. Quoted in the Editor's Preface to The Idea of History, p. XII.
 2. Collingwood, R. G.; The Philosophy of History, Historical Association Leaflet 79, p. 15.
 3. Collingwood, R. G.; The Idea of History, p. 248.

in saying that of St. Augustine's and Gibbon's accounts of the Roman Empire, neither is more true than the other, what is usually considered the ground for rational historical criticism is taken away.

Collingwood concludes that every thinker is conditioned by the historical complex in which he lives and also that his conception of truth is integral to that complex, so that as the historical complex changes, the conception of truth changes also, and no conception of truth outlives the complex in which it is a constituent element. But just as in one of his early works Collingwood maintained that for thought to become conscious of itself as being conditioned in a certain way is, in a sense, to transcend that conditioning, and in so doing rise to a new level of thought, so Collingwood's very effort in putting forward his theory of the historical relativity of thought seems to suggest that he attributed to it that element of transcendence which he denied to other theories and by which his theory would not just be a description of how he himself thought but how men have always thought. If this suggestion is correct then the content of his theory is confounded by the claims he makes for it.

CHAPTER 8

HISTORICISM AND THE METAPHYSICS OF

ABSOLUTE PRESUPPOSITIONS

(a) Metaphysics as an Historical Science

Collingwood begins the exposition of his theory of metaphysics as a strictly historical science with a discussion of Aristotle's metaphysics. Aristotle's metaphysics, on Collingwood's interpretation of it, breaks down into two main sciences, the science of pure being and the science dealing with the presuppositions of the other sciences. The first Collingwood thought to be impossible, for a science is a systematic study of a determinate subject-matter in which distinctions can be drawn, and being, understood as the highest genus, is completely empty. Hence there can be no science of pure being. The second Collingwood thought to be an important philosophical science. Every particular science proceeds in the investigation of its subject-matter on the basis of certain principles which it does not question. Some sciences are more general than others, and the more general a science is the more it will question the basic principles of its subsidiary sciences. But even these more general sciences will have unquestioned basic principles of their own. There can, therefore,

be a special science which Collingwood called metaphysics, whose function it is to ascertain the basic principles of even the most general sciences. The most basic principles will be independent of one another and will not be deducible from any more general principle.

The fact that all thinking activity of the human mind proceeds on certain fundamental principles not always recognized by the mind that thinks, was recognized by Collingwood from the early years of his teaching career. Writing in 1919 about the set of basic principles which constituted Ruskin's approach to aesthetic criticism, Collingwood said that "it is the attempt to discover what people's philosophy (set of basic principles) is that marks the philosopher. Much as everybody has a brain, but only the anatomist sets himself to discover what it looks like and how it works, so everybody has a philosophy but only the philosopher makes it his business to probe into the mind and lay bare that recess in which the ultimate beliefs are hidden."¹ The possibility of reaching agreement between two sciences with conflicting basic principles, or between two minds whose basic orientations of thought conflict, rests on successfully

1. Collingwood, R. G.; Ruskin's Philosophy - An address delivered at the Ruskin Centenary Conference, Coniston, August 8th, 1919, pub. Kendal T.W. & Son 1922, p. 6.

analysing out the basic principles involved, for they are not usually expressed and therefore cannot be discerned without an effort. "Unless he is an egotist, a man is not unhappy when people disagree with his expressed opinions. But you cannot argue with people who dissent from your unexpressed convictions. You have no common ground on which to argue. The only cure is to turn philosopher and drag your convictions and theirs into the daylight."¹

If it is the function of metaphysics to discern the basic principles underlying systematic thought in every field, what is the status of these principles? and is it a further function of metaphysics to judge their truth or falsity with reference to some criterion transcending the historical period in which they were in fact accepted as the ground of scientific investigation? Collingwood's answers to this question exhibit the sharp difference between his earlier and later positions. Up to 1936 Collingwood would have said that metaphysics has the further function described above. For example in a pamphlet "Faith and Reason" written in 1928 Collingwood assumes that the absolute presuppositions or basic principles of

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit, p. 29

science are propositions asserted, which have truth-value. The particular truths within any science are known by reason Collingwood states, but the absolute presuppositions are known by faith. Faith is here understood not as something alien to reason but as a necessary complement to it in the Augustinian sense. For example the presupposition of all scientific investigation that the universe as a whole is rational, is known to be true by what Collingwood calls "theoretical faith."¹ All the fundamental principles of thought that concern the universe as a whole are known in this way, forming the ground of all the particular sciences. Deny the truth of the principles and you confound the sciences.

But after 1936, whether as a result of criticisms of the analytic or historicist philosophers it is hard to tell, Collingwood changed his mind and denied not only that the truth or falsity of such absolute presuppositions can be known, but also that they have any truth-value to begin with. In "An Essay on Metaphysics" Collingwood leads up to a consideration of the status of absolute presuppositions by developing his question-and-answer theory of logic, under-

1. Collingwood, R. G.; Faith and Reason, (Ernest Benn, London, 1928) p. 25.

stood as an inquiry into the relationship between the stages within the thinking process itself.¹ Every asserted proposition in science, writes Collingwood, is an answer to a question and can only be understood in terms of that question. The logical efficacy of any question lies in a presupposition whose scientific usefulness lies not in its being true, nor in its being thought true, but in its being supposed. Every question involves directly only one presupposition, indirectly perhaps more. Some of these presuppositions are also propositions. That is, besides being suppositions and as such the ground of questions to which they are logically prior, they are also true or false answers to questions logically prior to them. Some presuppositions however, are not the answers to prior questions and hence their only importance lies in their being supposed. These are what Collingwood called absolute presuppositions. Because they are not answers to questions they have no truth-value and therefore any science calling into question their truth-value is a pseudo-science.

Logic having established the status of the ultimate principles of scientific thinking as absolute presuppositions whose value

1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Essay on Metaphysics, pp. 21 ff.

lies in their being presupposed, Collingwood maintained that it is now the task of metaphysics, to establish by historical analysis of the facts of human thought what absolute presuppositions are held now and have been held in the various periods in the history of mankind. "All metaphysical questions are historical questions and all metaphysical propositions are historical propositions. Every metaphysical question either is simply the question what absolute presuppositions were made on a certain occasion, or is capable of being resolved into a number of such questions together with a further question or further questions arising out of these.¹ It would be a secondary function of metaphysics to consider how one 'constellation' of presuppositions is related to others held simultaneously and how all the presuppositions held at any one time are related to those held at a prior stage in the history of thought. Therefore although the subject-matter of metaphysics consists ultimately of statements whose importance lies in their being presupposed, the statements of metaphysics itself are propositions. They are asserted and are true or false according to the criterion of historical truth. The principle

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit p. 49.

mentioned in "Faith and Reason" that the universe as a whole is rational might now be shown in metaphysical inquiry to be an ultimate presupposition of modern science both in its 17th century and contemporary forms, but the metaphysician could not legitimately pose the question whether it is true or false, for this could be answered neither by a rational faith nor by pure reason because it has no truth-value, no significance beyond its being supposed.

(b) The Insights of Historicism.

Some non-historicist approaches to the study of thought both present and past, such as the realistic philosophy Collingwood was taught at Oxford, oversimplify the task of understanding the thought of past periods in the history of man. They claim that there are two simple acts, one of understanding the thought, and one of judging whether or not it is true. Collingwood and other historicists have pointed out that it is by no means easy to accomplish this first step. For example, to judge the correctness of a scientific theory in the past it is necessary to understand the exact meaning of the theory and this will require all the historical techniques at the disposal of the inquirer. As Collingwood so aptly pointed out, to understand a theory it is necessary to reconstruct the questions it was designed to answer, which can only be done on the basis of historical evidence. "The question 'to what question did So-and-so intend this proposition for an answer?' is an historical question and therefore cannot be settled except by historical methods."¹

1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Autobiography, p. 39.

The difficulties in this task are numerous because the basic questions in any particular period of history are frequently not explicitly stated owing to the fact that each writer writes primarily for his contemporaries who are asking the same questions. Further, some questions are treated exhaustively and to the satisfaction of all concerned at some period in the past and for this reason do not arise again. The importance of these points is that a written document cannot be taken at its face value in isolation from the constellation of problems and theories which constitute its historical context.

The historical philosopher can analyse out the basic questions being asked in any theory or constellation of theories, and understand that their logical efficacy rests in certain absolute presuppositions the meaning of which in turn can only be specified when their historical relationships to the presuppositions of previous periods have been established. This whole laborious process by which he comes to know what the thinkers of the past really meant, is a process of historical thinking.

Collingwood has not been alone in the 20th century in recognizing the importance of history in coming to know the precise meaning of past theories. Karl Mannheim and others interested in the sociology of knowledge have dealt with the same problem, though Collingwood's position differs from Mannheim's in several important respects.

Mannheim, like Collingwood, separated the natural sciences from the sciences of mind or social sciences as Mannheim calls them. Both thinkers were impressed by the fact that any system of ideas must be understood in its context in the historical process. Collingwood, unlike Mannheim, distinguished between the socio-historical genesis of an idea, a field of inquiry which he would probably have relegated to the natural sciences, and its historical relation to previous ideas and the existing broader constellation of ideas which forms its context. Collingwood's historicism maintains that thought can only be comprehended in terms of the history of thought. For Mannheim, history is important for understanding an idea, but it is the history of the social realities, not wholly understood in terms of consciousness, in which that idea was propounded. "The historical and social genesis of an idea would only be irrelevant to its ultimate validity if the temporal and social conditions of its emergence had no effect on its content and form."¹ This difference from Collingwood is reflected in the fact that Mannheim was interested in the problem of objectivity in the 'situationally-bound' thinking of the social sciences, whereas

1. Mannheim, K.; Ideology and Utopia, tr. Wirth and Shils, (London Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1936) p. 243.

Collingwood was interested in the historically relative absolute presuppositions not only of the social sciences but of all kinds of systematic thought.

Collingwood's metaphysics of absolute presuppositions is not what Mannheim would have called a social science, but an analytic philosophical science using historical methods as developed in "The Idea of History". Collingwood claimed that it is a secondary task of metaphysics to study the historical development by which one set of absolute presuppositions is replaced by a new set which is a modification of the old. In "An Essay on Metaphysics", Collingwood says that the inquiry into the 'strains' implicit in any constellation of historical facts, which periodically become too much for the intellectual framework of thought resulting in a change in the set of absolute presuppositions, is an historical inquiry.¹ When, however, the problem was pressed upon him of explaining why such changes take place and why any period holds the particular absolute presuppositions it does hold, he stated that men are not usually aware of their absolute presuppositions and that the process in which the presuppositions change

1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Essay on Metaphysics, p. 74

is not a conscious one.¹ This seems to be inconsistent with his view expressed in "The Idea of History" that history is the study of past events in so far as they are the expression of conscious thought. It could be, however, that Collingwood meant by 'unconscious' thought what, in "The Principles of Art" he called pre-intellectual thought or thought on a primitive level of consciousness, yet something qualitatively different from psychical experience. If this is the case, then Collingwood and Mannheim were asking ultimately two different questions. Collingwood asked "What absolute presuppositions of science in all its forms have been held in the past?", and "What is the historical process of thought by which one set changes into another?" Mannheim asked "What are the socio-historical realities (including what Collingwood called thought and what he called psyche) which explains the genesis of any particular set of ideas in the political and social realm?" Both understood that without some kind of historical inquiry modern thinkers could not understand what was meant by any particular set of ideas in the past.

1. Collingwood, R. G.; op cit, ft. note p. 48.

Collingwood's 'specimina philosophantii' at the end of "An Essay on Metaphysics" afford examples of how this works in practice. In his treatment of the concept of causation, for instance, Collingwood outlines the main stages in the historical development of the concept from its Aristotelian roots to the present day. To read the 17th century mechanistic concept of causality into Aristotle's work is a mistake of those approaching the history of thought from a non-historical point of view. Aristotle's complex notion of causality can only be known if his questions have been historically reconstructed. Similarly the current uses of the term 'cause' can only be fully analysed if the mediaeval and modern modifications of the Aristotelian conception have been considered. Historical investigation of this kind can explain why the Kantian notion of cause has passed from use in the physical sciences of the 20th century, and how the technological concept of cause as the alterable factor in a fairly stable situation evolved out of the primary meaning of cause, the motivation which elicits the free choice of a human mind.

(c) The Inadequacy of Historicism.

It is a mistake common to most varieties of historicism to confuse ideogenesis or the inquiry into the origin of an assertion, with the logical inquiry into the methods of verification by which the proposition can be shown to be true or false. Collingwood would have claimed that he did not make this mistake because his historical metaphysical analysis specified the logical steps of the argument leading to the assertion as conclusion. This clarifies the meaning of the assertion and he would have said that this clarification itself constitutes the judgment of the validity of the argument which, if positive, constitutes the verification of the proposition. Further, Collingwood would have said the doctrine of absolute presuppositions avoids analysis of presuppositions ad infinitum and sets the terminus of the verification procedure.

The real difficulties in Collingwood's historicism are concerned with the conception of absolute presuppositions, and in particular with the presuppositions of metaphysics itself. If the metaphysics of absolute presuppositions is a science with a determinate subject-matter, it must have presuppositions of its own, and an inquiry may be made as to their status. Collingwood faced this problem briefly stating that metaphysics as an historical science

shares the presuppositions of all historical investigation¹ which, like the absolute presuppositions of all the sciences, are absolute and as such have no truth-value.

Now the metaphysical theory of absolute presuppositions is an attempt to consider adequately the realities of systematic thought. And the conception of absolute presuppositions was Collingwood's attempt to specify the nature of the fundamental principles in any system of thought. Other philosophers have considered the same problem and it seems to be one of the most difficult for contemporary philosophers to solve. The logical empiricists have found it difficult to reduce all scientific statements to observation terms and this has led to doctrines about theoretical constructs which are in a sense a priori, and which set the framework within which experiments are carried on and laws confirmed, but which are not themselves called into question except when there is a breakdown of the whole system of thought. When this occurs the theoretical constructs are not so much proved false as considered to be less useful than others and are therefore discarded. These theoretical constructs, it would seem, have no truth-value, but set the framework within which other state-

1. Collingwood, R. G.; *op cit* p. 63.

ments have truth-value, and in this they are similar to Collingwood's absolute presuppositions. Concerning logical empiricism itself as a system of thought, - its adherents are usually confused when someone asks what their fundamental principle is which defines factual meaning, or what the status of that principle is within their system of thought. For the principle which establishes the factual meaning of assertions does not itself have any factual meaning according to the criterion established.

Similarly contemporary pragmatism has a special study which Professor Sidney Hook calls the metaphysics of leading principles.¹ Logic, Professor Hook claims, is the study of the methods of reasoning that have evolved in the history of man, and although there is no reason to believe that these methods will remain constant, they proceed on certain basic presuppositions about reality. One of the functions of metaphysics is to point out these presuppositions. Metaphysics generally is the science which describes and analyses the leading principles of thought, - the presuppositions about reality which underlie the sciences. But what is the status of the principle

1. Hook, S.; The Metaphysics of Pragmatism.

basic to the metaphysician's own inquiry?

The problem of the status of the presuppositions of thought becomes most acute when the thought in consideration is metaphysical thought itself, and few logical empiricists and pragmatists have dealt with it. Collingwood deals with it briefly as we have seen, and concluded that the presuppositions of metaphysics are the absolute presuppositions of historical thought, and have no truth-value. L. S. Stebbing in considering the presuppositions of philosophical analysis concluded differently.¹ The presuppositions of symbolic analysis, which constitute the axioms of a postulational system, she states, are mere suppositions, having no truth-value. Although the presuppositions of metaphysical analysis may have somewhat the same form as the axioms, they are different in that they are assumed to be true. For in metaphysics we do not just see what follows from assumptions, but use them while paying attention to a determinate situation.² Miss Stebbing is saying here that philosophy cannot proceed on mere suppositions. It must assert its presuppositions. She claims that the truth of these presuppositions cannot

1. Stebbing, L. S.; The Method of Analysis in Metaphysics, Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 1932.
2. Stebbing, L. S.; ibid p. 83.

really be established, but as they must be true if metaphysical analysis is to have any validity, they should be dogmatically asserted.

Before 1936 Collingwood would have agreed that the presuppositions of metaphysics must have truth-value. In "An Essay on Philosophical Method" in his discussion of the lasting significance of Anselm's Argument, he claimed that all philosophical thought has the characteristic that its fundamental propositions are never mere suppositions but always have ontological reference and therefore are true or false assertions.

Collingwood maintained consistently throughout his philosophical work that knowledge is not contained in a set of propositions, but in a complex of questions and answers. Questions arise because certain presuppositions are made, and after 1936 he would have added that the ultimate questions arise from pre-suppositions which say nothing about reality and therefore have no truth-value. But many of the sciences, and certainly metaphysics, claim to arrive at substantive conclusions, conclusions which assert something about reality. Now that which sets a question's relation to reality, that which makes it significantly a question about reality, is its presupposition. Therefore if the basic questions of any system of thought, including metaphysics, are to ask anything about

reality, then what Collingwood calls absolute presuppositions must have ontological reference, must have truth-value. This Collingwood admitted before 1936 but denied after that time, and in denying it he left himself open to the charge that his own historicist philosophy cannot claim the adherence of anyone who does not want to accept Collingwood's presuppositions, for there is no rational justification for them as they assert nothing about reality.

And even if suppositions at the foundation of his reasoning were sufficient for the philosopher to achieve substantive results in his analysis, how would he justify metaphysics as an objectively valid science? The significance of the philosopher's initial (i.e. logically first) assertion that "It is absolutely presupposed by me that the absolute presuppositions of metaphysics are merely those of history," is only that he is committed to proceed in his reasoning on the presuppositions of historical inquiry. If another thinker disagrees with him he can only say that if he appreciates civilization he will accept as the absolute presuppositions of metaphysics those of historical inquiry, though he can give no justification for them.

The fundamental criticism that is being leveled against Collingwood's historicism can be put in another way, - on the grounds that a total relativism is self-destructive. In his criticism of psychology understood as the science of thought, Collingwood said

that the attempt to reduce thought to psyche, to explain all mental phenomena by reference to the feeling and emotional states of the individual thinker is destructive of the very essence of thought, - the distinction between truth and falsity. If this view is pushed to its logical extreme, all 'thought' is determined by psychical states and no thought is any more true than any other thought. Therefore the results of psychological investigation are also determined by the psychical states of the psychologist, and he can claim no more truth for his theory than his adversaries, thus destroying the very foundation of psychology as a science. Collingwood had taken a strong stand against this position, but his later historicism has much in common with it. For if all systems of thought are historically relative, if one set of absolute presuppositions is no more true than any other set, then no system of thought can claim to be more valid than another. Now the theory of absolute presuppositions is such a system of thought, and because its basic principles are historically relative absolute presuppositions, it cannot claim to be any more valid than a theory with radically different absolute presuppositions. On Collingwood's terms these sets of absolute presuppositions cannot contradict one another because this could only be the case if they had truth-value. In this way the distinction between truth and falsity is again destroyed. According to its own

criterion then, Collingwood's account is no more valid than any other account. Yet Collingwood obviously did think his theory was more valid. He tries to persuade the reader that it is a more valid account by appealing to the authority of Aristotle and inviting the reader to try this kind of metaphysical reasoning to see if it is not the genuine thing.¹ This implies that the reader will judge the theory by some standard transcending the theory, but to admit this would undercut the theory itself.

The fact that Collingwood explicitly points out² that he agrees with Mr. A. J. Ayer's negative criticism of any metaphysical position which attempts to justify absolute presuppositions would tend to suggest that the doctrine of absolute presuppositions was developed under the stimulus of the criticisms of the logical empiricists. Among the metaphysical positions criticized would be Collingwood's own position before 1936 when he thought it possible to know the truth of ultimate principles by a theoretical faith or by an a priori or innate idea of history inherent in the human mind.

As far as a metaphysical basis for a philosophy of history

1. Collingwood, R. G.; An Essay on Metaphysics, p. 41.
2. ibid pp. 163 ff.

is concerned, the metaphysics of absolute presuppositions is hardly more adequate than the positivist position. The positivist would deny that it is significant to question the truth of general principles of historical thought beyond a certain point. Collingwood went beyond this to say that the ground of these general principles of history lies in certain historically relative absolute presuppositions. But Collingwood before 1936 would have said that these positions miss the point. All are agreed that the philosophy of history analyses historical methods and techniques, but it is the special significance of a metaphysical foundation to the philosophy of history that it answer the further question "what is the nature of reality which makes historical knowledge possible?" It is only the Collingwood of before 1936 who tried to answer this question in the papers that now appear in "The Idea of History".

ADDENDUM

CHAPTER 9

COLLINGSWOOD AND HIS CRITICS

Chapters one to eight of this Thesis constitute an attempt to expound what Collingswood really meant in his various writings on the philosophy of history, by seeing them in the light of his metaphysical positions. The problem was approached more or less chronologically because his thought was not static but developed through several stages.

In the first period of his work, before 1930, Collingswood broke away from the realistic philosophical tradition, and his various papers and books appear as tentative steps, sometimes dealing with particular problems, sometimes with larger philosophical issues, to formulate an alternative position. His experience in history and the other particular studies such as art, religion and the history of science interacted with his conception of what philosophy ought to be and his basic metaphysical position. During this period the metaphysical principles of internal relations, of the absolute, and of reality as developmental, were most significantly the basis of his philosophy of history, which was a position genuinely new in English philosophy, - a reaction against realism,

yet not having a great deal in common with English idealism. It was a philosophy of history which left no room for speculation about the historical process itself, for the object of the philosopher's attention is not the past by itself nor the historian's thought by itself, but the two in their mutual relation. It was a position in which Collingwood tried to remain scrupulously true to the facts of the historian's experience. But the metaphysical basis of this philosophy of history was not entirely satisfactory, for it tended on occasion to break down into a position of philosophical scepticism.

In the second period of his work, between 1930 and 1936, Collingwood was more cautious in his metaphysics. His metaphysical views on the structure of reality and the nature of man and human thought were not written down in any one place and it was necessary to bring them together and to study them in some detail in order to understand fully his conception of history, which was worked out at greater length during this time. Collingwood's writings on the philosophy of history from this middle period, which contain not only a study of the history of the conceptions of history, but also a study of the historian's activity of thinking based on a particular conception of reality that would make historical knowledge possible, are published together in "The Idea of History".

After 1936, Collingwood's metaphysics again changed, introducing a radical historicism. The implications of this for his philosophy of history were profound, for it no longer allowed for a philosophical discipline transcending in some sense the historical situation whose function it would be to establish criteria of historical investigation which would command, on rational grounds, the assent of all those interested in an objectively valid historical discipline.

If Collingwood's later view of metaphysics has been of interest to many because it has broached from a new point of view certain problems of great contemporary interest concerning the foundations of thought, that part of his work on the philosophy of history which has received critical attention was written for the most part during the middle period, the years between 1930 and 1936. "The Idea of History" particularly, has been the object of much discussion in articles and books dealing with the philosophy of history, and it remains to refer to three or four of the most penetrating criticisms of Collingwood's work to see what the facts are to which the critics bring attention, and to judge to what extent and in what ways Collingwood's position is affected by them.

One aspect of Collingwood's philosophy of history that drew diverse comment was the extent to which he emphasized the

role of thought in history. "To hold that all actions are the autonomous product of human reason is scarcely plausible. To say that every action has a thought side, and thus that all history can be read in terms of purposes, is one thing; to say that it is therefore all rational, in the sense of the result of deliberate thinking, is quite another".¹ The facts to which Mr. Walsh is drawing attention here are firstly that actions which are partially the expression of thought are also partially the expression of non-rational forces, and secondly that much good historical criticism deals precisely with that realm of human action in the past in which, for one reason or another, man failed to think effectively. The first point Collingwood recognized, for he said as much himself. The point that Collingwood wanted to make was that in so far as action can be historically known it must be the expression of thought. The second criticism is more damaging because it shows that to some extent Collingwood's theory is inadequate to explain the practice of historians. The criticism becomes less damaging when it is understood how broad Collingwood's concep-

1. Walsh, W. H.; R. G. Collingwood's Philosophy of History, Philosophy Vol. XXII, 1947, p. 155.

tion of thought was, for he meant to include under that category both intellectual thought and pre-intellectual thought. A good part of chapter six has been devoted to elaborating this distinction in an endeavour to show that Collingwood meant by 'thought' something much broader than his critics have understood him to mean. If Mr. Walsh's criticism is to have any great significance then the onus of proof lies on him to show how action as the expression of psychical activity can be historically known, i.e. known in its unique individuality.

Professor Toynbee has criticized Collingwood for shifting from "acts of reflective thought" to "acts done on purpose" which would include acts of will¹, implying that this really is not allowed within Collingwood's theory and that Collingwood is unknowingly committing himself to the position that the non-rational element as well as the thought element in a particular action can be known. But in this Professor Toynbee was mistaken because, as has been shown in the chapter on metaphysics, Collingwood conceived of will as having an important thought component, thus bringing willful acts well within the scope of historical inquiry.

1. Toynbee, A.; A Study of History, (Oxford University Press, 1954) Vol. IX. p. 720.

Mr. Morris Ginsberg makes a similar criticism of Collingwood when he writes that Collingwood's theory is only satisfactory in explaining the history of individual actions such as diplomatic history, whereas the history of economic institutions and the history of languages, for example, are not concerned with individual actions, yet have a well established place in historical literature.¹ This is perhaps the most damaging criticism brought against Collingwood's position and there are only two partial answers to it. Firstly it could be said that on the basis of his conception of history as outlined in his various works, studies of the development of languages and economic institutions are simply not history, in which case his conception of history presents some grave shortcomings in the face of the practice of historians. But this would not tell the whole story. For secondly it could be said that languages and economic institutions have evolved only through the individual actions of human beings, and in so far as these actions were expressions of thought they can be known historically. That Collingwood would have pressed

1. Ginsberg, M.; The character of Historical Explanation, in The Aristotelean Society Supplement, Vol. XXI p.70

this second line of thought is supported by the fact that in his essay "Economics as a Philosophical Science", published in 1925-6, he considered economics always in terms of individual acts. The inadequacy of Collingwood's position here rests in the fact that competent studies have been made of those aspects of the evolution of languages and institutions in which the thinking activity of individuals has been minimal.

The mention of institutions brings us to the second set of criticisms, those concerned with historical explanation. Collingwood maintained that historical explanation means explanation of individual events with reference to the thoughts which they express. But Mr. A. M. MacIver observes that in fact historians explain past events on different levels of generality. Some are explained with reference to an individual person's purpose, others by group action, others by economic forces, and the periods of history that will be studied, and the turning points that will be noticed, will differ according to the level of generality on which the historian is working.¹ Historians will give different kinds of explanation of historical events when speaking on different levels of generality

1. MacIver, A. M.; The Character of Historical Explanation, in The Aristotelian Society Supplement, Vol. XXI, p.37

about history. Historical explanation will become confused, if there is confusion as to the level of generality on which a discussion is being held. Mr. Patrick Gardiner points out that one of the functions of the expression 'real cause' in any historical debate is to establish the context of the discussion by fixing the level of generality on which the discussion about history will proceed.¹ If faced with these points, Collingwood would perhaps have tried to show that supra-individual entities such as economic institutions come into history in so far as individuals construct them, or at least have some idea about them, and take them into account in their actions, and that it is not institutions that determine an individual action but how the person conceives the institution. Mr. MacIver recognizes this when he asserts that individual facts have individual causes.² Collingwood would have relegated all other kinds of explanation to natural history. It would seem that Mr. Gardiner and Mr. MacIver would have been more effective in their criticism if they had been able to attack directly the metaphysical base of Collingwood's position here, - his

1. Gardiner, P.; The Nature of Historical Explanation, (Oxford University Press, 1952) p. 106.

1. MacIver, A. M.; *op cit* p. 40.

theory of man and the human mind.

Mr. Ginsberg does make some statements that show that he is fundamentally not in accord with Collingwood's philosophical anthropology. He asserts that Collingwood's distinction between the rational and irrational forces in the human mind is invalid because thought, sense, and will, are intertwined.¹ If this were the case, Collingwood's distinction between psyche and thought would be invalid and the basis for Collingwood's distinction between history and sociology would be taken away. For if there is no distinction between action in so far as it is an expression of thought and action in so far as it is an expression of psyche, there can be nothing different in principle between history and sociology. In practice, says Mr. Ginsberg, the only difference is that the sociologist goes further than the historian in trying to establish social laws. But he does not dwell at any length on the idea of mind in which there is no separation of thought from psyche. What happens, for instance, to the distinction between truth and falsity which is maintained by what Collingwood calls thought, but which means nothing in terms of the activity of what

1. Ginsberg, M.; op cit p. 73.

he calls psyche? If, as Mr. Ginsberg implies, irrational elements are involved in this distinction, then, as in Collingwood's final historicism, the basis of scientific thought itself, is cut away. If Mr. Ginsberg's criticism of Collingwood's theory of mind is to have any weight, then he will have to point out the precise inadequacies of Collingwood's separation of self-consciousness from sensation and emotion, and present a theory of mind which will make more intelligible realities such as, the existence of systematic thought in its various forms, and emotional behaviour, realities which are reflected in the rough and ready distinction in common usage between reason and the irrational, consciousness and the sub-conscious. It might be said at this point that in practice no exact line can be found separating what Collingwood calls psyche from what he calls thought. Collingwood would agree, but add that this does not in itself make the distinction invalid.

Mr. Gardiner is ready to accept a distinction between two types of explanation of an individual event, one in terms of the agent's 'intentions' and 'plans', the other in terms of psychological and sociological factors, and he notes that if both kinds are allowed in historical explanation, history does not differ very

nach from other fields of investigation.¹ Collingwood would have said that there may be two kinds of explanation, but only the first is historical explanation. The second is a different kind of enterprise, a natural science, without any specifically historical reference, - i.e. without any importance in explaining why those actions took place which in fact did take place.

It is partly an attempt to show that these two kinds of explanation are not really separable that led Mr. Walsh and Mr. Gardiner to say that historical inquiry, like social science, involves the use of certain universals or generalizations in order to determine individual facts. Mr. Walsh claims that Collingwood is right in asserting that historical knowledge is contained in individual judgments, but wrong in that he does not recognize that generalizations about human nature are employed in justifying those judgments. "The judgments of history, as Collingwood rightly insists, are individual judgments, but unless I am greatly mistaken, there are pre-supposed in the making of them certain universal judgments, and it is these, only part of the raw material of which is provided by

1. Gardiner, P.; op cit p. 50.

history, which constitutes the science in question¹, - i.e. the science of human nature presupposed in the historical judgment. These generalizations according to Mr. Walsh are not necessarily or even usually the result of experimental psychology, but generalizations that emerge from close observation of human life on the part of poets, dramatists, novelists and historians. But what specific impact does this criticism have on Collingwood's theory? It has been pointed out that Collingwood did not deny the use of generalizations in historical inquiry, but rather specifically asserted that both particular and universal statements appear in historical argument. And Mr. Walsh has agreed with Collingwood that the substantive results of historical inquiry are contained in individual judgments. What Collingwood denied was something that the criticism does not mention, that the thought-aspect that constitutes the unique individuality of an historically significant action is not determined by the physical or psychic nature of the agent, so that to specify these physical and psychological factors does not help to determine the individual nature of the act. To give the sociological, psychological and physical characteristics of an event is to see it as

1. Walsh, W. H.; R. G. Collingwood's Philosophy of History, op cit p. 160.

a natural event, that is, to abstract from the unique event those factors by which the event can be classified as an instance of various universals. The historian, Collingwood said, wants to know the event in its unique individuality which means knowing the thought that is an integral part of human action. He did not deny that there is a unique psychological factor in the action also, (the 'psychological characteristics' discerned by science are abstractions from it) but he maintained that this factor cannot be re-enacted. Consequently the historian's knowledge of past action consists in re-enactment of the thought together with apprehension of the overt act which Collingwood called the 'outside' of the event. The historian's knowledge is knowledge as in natural history, but it is more than this, it is a re-enactment of the agent's self-conscious activity, which alone can be re-enacted. Collingwood argued at some length to show that this re-enactment is possible, in order to justify his claim that human action can be understood in its uniqueness, i.e. understood in a sense in which it is not considered as an instance of anything more general. If this theory is to be proven inadequate, then it must be shown that individual acts of thought cannot be re-enacted, or that emotion as well as thought can be re-enacted, or that the distinction between emotion and self-consciousness, psyche and thought, is invalid.

The last of these would entail the undesirable consequence noted above, the obliteration of the distinction between truth and falsity. None of the critics have really approached these specific problems.

Mr. Gardiner criticizes Collingwood on the grounds that to say an event is unique presupposes universal judgments. "When an historian says that an event is unique, his statement is incomplete until he states in what respects it is unique. The attribution of the term 'unique' to any event or thing logically presupposes prior classification".¹ Further, Mr. Gardiner claims that non-historical events are also unique. Mr. Gardiner sees an event as something having a unique combination of general characteristics. Collingwood would say that this position is based on the scientific mode of consciousness which ignores the thought-aspect of an event, because to classify thought is to treat it as if it were emotion. According to Collingwood, history requires a different mode of consciousness which, on the basis of concrete evidence, reconstructs the thought of the agent, and in doing so, re-enacts it. The fact that the inference from evidence

1. Gardiner, P.; op cit p. 43.

involves generalisations does not alter the fact that the thought of the agent cannot historically be viewed as an instance of a type of thought.

Conclusion

The great merit of Collingwood's approach to the philosophy of history is that he asked questions of a basic metaphysical kind. Other philosophers in the English academic tradition have tended to consider the surface aspect of the subject, asking questions about historical method or about the language of historians, without any general conception of what historians are trying to do or any conception of reality which would make the attempt intelligible. Few have had the practical experience of historical investigation which Collingwood enjoyed, or inquired with the same insistence into the historian's experience, the characteristics of history as a mode of consciousness, and the relation of this to other modes such as art, religion and science. This is perhaps due to the fact that Collingwood was trained in one way of philosophical thinking, became dissatisfied with it, and reacted against it, forcing him to think out his own approach to philosophy from its metaphysical basis to the various philosophical disciplines which have their roots in this basis. And it is significant also that whereas most philosophers approach the problems of history as they usually approached the problems of art,

only after their metaphysics and epistemology have become fixed through prolonged analysis of the procedures of natural science, Collingwood's metaphysics evolved under the direct stimulus of his practical work in history, and reflection on the philosophical problems involved in that activity.

It is true also that Collingwood's was a philosophy of experience, and for this reason his system or series of systems presents at once a position of unusual breadth, including within itself all the manifold activities of the human mind, and a degree of internal cohesion seldom found in the philosophical work of the 20th century. This unified approach to human experience taken as a whole allowed Collingwood to consider history both as one way of viewing the whole of reality, and as one autonomous discipline among others, giving rise to philosophical problems peculiar to itself.

One of Collingwood's contributions to thought is his forceful argument that history is a form of publicly demonstrable knowledge with a sound evidential basis, and that historical inquiry proceeds on principles which can be formulated with a reasonable degree of precision. History, then, cannot be placed in the realm of belief or opinion, outside the sphere of genuine knowledge.

But Collingwood's analysis also precludes lumping history together with natural science. Philosophers in the empiricist tradition who have always been sceptical about the claims of history to knowledge, can no longer ignore the problems presented by historical inquiry.

Passing from the general impact of Collingwood's thought to the particular theory of history which he developed, it can be said that it is most adequate in making intelligible historical accounts of actions of individual persons. Collingwood's analysis of individual actions together with his conception of the nature of reality which makes knowledge of them possible, forms the foundation of his contention that history is an autonomous discipline. The same analysis produced a theory of the nature of thought which, although it limited history to the study of individual past actions, yet broadened the usefulness of historical inquiry because it implies something that Collingwood only suggested but did not fully work out, that historical techniques are intimately related to, indeed are integral elements in, literary and artistic criticism, analyses of religious positions and moral codes, studies of political theories and systems of scientific and philosophical thought.

The weakness of Collingwood's position, as his critics

were quick to point out, though they attacked the surface of his thought rather than the metaphysical roots, is that it cannot explain why historians have included within the corpus of their work, accounts of the development of supra-individual institutions the generative force of which was not primarily the self-conscious activity of individuals. Concerning this realm of inquiry other philosophers, even some not very different from Collingwood in general outlook, have given more adequate accounts. Hegel, for example, said that both self-conscious activity, and what is ordinarily called irrational activity, as determining factors in history, could be understood by the philosopher. Owing to the cunning of Reason, the latter element as well as the former is used in advancing the plot underlying the facts of history.

Collingwood always thought that philosophy should in some sense be systematic, but he was well aware that no system is final. And if Collingwood has not said the last word on the nature of history, his thought is a major step in the attempt to understand historical inquiry, and is a powerful stimulus to all those interested in the philosophy of history.

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 - 1922 - Ruskin's Philosophy. An address delivered at the Ruskin Centenary Conference, Coniston, 1919, (pub. Kendal, T. Wilson and Son),
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 - 1924 - Speculum Mentis. (Oxford, Clarendon Press)
 - 1925 - Outlines of a Philosophy of Art Pp. 104 (London, Oxford University Press)
 - Plato's Philosophy of Art (Mind, Vol. XXXIV)
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- 1928 - Faith and Reason (a pamphlet in the Affirmations Series, London, Ernest Benn)
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- 1930 - The Philosophy of History (Historical Association Leaflet, No. 79, London, G. Bell and Sons)
- 1933 - An Essay on Philosophical Method (Oxford, Clarendon Press)
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- 1936 - Human Nature and Human History (proceedings of the British Academy, Vol. XXII. Reprinted in The Idea of History, Part V)
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- 1940 - An Essay on Metaphysics. (Oxford, Clarendon Press)
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- 1941 - The Three Laws of Politics. (L. T. Hobhouse Memorial Trust Lectures, No. 11; London, Oxford University Press)
- 1942 - The New Leviathan. (Oxford, Clarendon Press)

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- 1945 - The Idea of Nature (Oxford, Clarendon Press)
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- 1913 - B. Croce: The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico (London, Latimer, Later reissued in Allen and Unwin's Library of Philosophy)
1921 - (With A. H. Hannay) G. da Ruggiero: Modern Philosophy (London, Allen and Unwin's Library of Philosophy)
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- 1939 - An Autobiography (London, Oxford University Press)

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- Bradley, F. H.; The Presuppositions of Critical History, 1874, reprinted in Collected Essays (Oxford University Press, 1935)
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- An Introduction to the Philosophy of History (Hutchinson's University Library, St. Albans, 1953)