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The University of Ottawa

The Actions/Artifacts of Historical Agents as Expressions of Rational, Purposive thought: R.G. Collingwood's own 'Absolute Presupposition'.

A thesis submitted to

the School of Graduate Studies and Research

of the University of Ottawa

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts

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RESUMÉ

Metaphysics is, for R.G. Collingwood, an historical science, one whose chief task is to uncover the 'Absolute Presuppositions' involved in the history of human thought.

Absolute Presuppositions are:

1. The metaphysical beliefs belonging to the people of a certain age that underpin the logic of any of their scientific (and ordinary) inquiries into the world and its detail. (Autobiography, p.66) e.g. the world is composed of one universal substance (Thales); all events have causes (Kant).

2. Neither learned from experience, nor arrived at by argument. They are instead part of the inherited 'cultural equipment' or 'mental furniture' of an age, without which argument and experience would be impossible. (An Essay on Metaphysics, p.60,173, 265). For example, 'every event happens according to some law' was not a generalization that 19th century physicists induced **from** experience. It was an Absolute Presupposition they brought **to** experience, one which they stood committed to before they could identify a single instance on the strength of which such a generalization might be constructed. (An Essay on Metaphysics, p.152, 217.)

3. Presuppositions that admit neither of doubt nor of verification: without their unquestioned acceptance as the standard or 'yardstick' of judgment, neither doubt nor verification would be possible. (An Essay on Metaphysics, p.194, 173)

The purpose of this thesis will be to defend Collingwood's claims about the existence, and the significance, of Absolute Presuppositions. This defense will fall into three main sections.

In the first section, I will provide a detailed critical examination of the method of metaphysical analysis prescribed by Collingwood for uncovering Absolute presuppositions in the first place: the 'logic of question and answer'. This method of analysis is to be found in its clearest expression in chapter IV of Collingwood's Essay on Metaphysics, entitled 'On Presupposing'. My examination of it will follow the format adopted therein, and will culminate in a critical analysis of Absolute Presuppositions as the product of this method.

In the second section, I will draw attention to what I take to be the main problem with the Essay on Metaphysics: the fact that this method of metaphysical analysis is never *applied* in any systematic, thoroughgoing way. **Collingwood fails to show it at work; he fails to show it actually revealing the logic of question and answer involved in a specific example of scientific/historical inquiry**. This failure, I argue, results not only in damage to the credibility of his method. Collingwood's larger (and more interesting) claims about the existence and the importance of absolute presuppositions are left completely unsubstantiated.

In the third and final section of the thesis I will try and remedy this situation. I will do so by applying the method of analysis prescribed by Collingwood to **his own** historical inquiries -- specifically, those contained in Roman Britain. This application will produce two important results. (1) It will provide a much-needed demonstration of Collingwood's method in an applied

setting. (2) It will reveal the operation of one of Collingwood's own absolute presuppositions, viz. the presupposition that the actions of historical agents and the artifacts left by them are expressions of rational, purposive thought. This presupposition, I shall argue, bears the weight of the theoretical contentions made about AP's by Collingwood in the Essay on Metaphysics.

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

The titles of the works of Collingwood referred to in this thesis are abbreviated as follows:

A	**An Autobiography** (Oxford, 1939)
EM	**An Essay on Metaphysics** (Oxford, 1940)
EPM	**An Essay on Philosophical Method** (Oxford, 1933)
RB	**Roman Britain and the English Settlements** (Collingwood and Myres, Oxford, 1937)
SM	**Speculum Mentis** (Oxford, 1924)
IH	**The Idea of History** (T.M. Knox, ed., Oxford, 1946)

All references to the above texts are to page numbers. Full bibliographical references for citations used may be found in the bibliography at the end.

ROBIN GEORGE COLLINGWOOD *was born at Cartnell Fell near Coniston, North Lancashire, on 22 February 1889. His father, W.G. Collingwood (1854-1932), was a close friend of and private secretary to John Ruskin (d.1900). The elder Collingwood was also a painter, amateur archaeologist of Roman Britain, and author of many books. Until he was 13 years old, at which time he entered Rugby, R.G. Collingwood was educated at home by his father. As a measure of gratitude the son dedicated the most important of his early works,* ***Speculum Mentis*** *(1924), to his father, describing him as his "first and best teacher of Art, Religion, Science, History and Philosophy."*

In 1908 the young Collingwood went up to Oxford from which he was graduated in 1912 with a first in ***Literae Humaniores.*** *The same year he was elected by the fellows of Pembroke College to be a fellow and tutor in Philosophy. From 1927-35 he served as university lecturer in Philosophy and Roman History and in 1935 he was appointed Waynflete professor of Metaphysical Philosophy from which he resigned in 1941 because of ill health. He died at Coniston on 9 January 1943 at the age of 53. In addition to having established a well-earned reputation as one of the major philosophers of the twentieth-century, R.G. Collingwood was generally regarded as one of the leading historians and archaeologists of Roman Britain.*

From Rubinoff, L. Collingwood and the Reform of Metaphysics. Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1970. xvi

Human history is more and more a race between education and catastrophe.

H.G. Wells

I.

1. Introduction.

'You cannot find out what a man means simply by studying his spoken or written statements,' says R.G. Collingwood. 'In order to find out his meaning you must also know what the question or problem was to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer.'[1] Let us apply this dictum to Collingwood's own work. Let us identify the problem that his own general philosophy of history was meant to address. This will prepare the way nicely for an introduction -- and, eventually, a defense -- of one of its central components: the Theory of Absolute Presuppositions.

Collingwood, in his autobiography, wastes no time helping us understand how the problems of history came to 'weigh' with him.[2]

> A war had just ended in which the destruction of life, the annihilation of property, and the disappointment of hopes for a peaceable and well-ordered international society, had surpassed all standards.[3]

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[1] R.G. Collingwood. An Autobiography. Oxford: Oxford U Press, 1939. p.31 To be referred to hereafter as 'A'.

[2] A, p.89.

[3] specifically, World War I. A, p.89.

Why had it happened? The answer, for Collingwood, was obvious: lack of human self-knowledge. The gigantic Baconian leap in man's ability to understand and control Nature had simply not been accompanied by a corresponding leap in his ability to understand and control human situations.[4] And things could, in his opinion, only get worse. For not only would the continued failure to control human affairs result in more widespread destruction as natural science added triumph to triumph. It would result, eventually, in the destruction of everything that was good and reasonable in the civilized world.[5]

How was this disaster to be forestalled? Through the study of history. History was the key to human self-knowledge. History could teach man to deal with human situations as skillfully as Bacon had taught him to deal with natural ones.[6] How? By making him more conscious of his relationship with his past, i.e. self. Man's past was not dead and gone, urged Collingwood. It remained alive unbeknownst to him, submerged or 'incapsulated' in the thought of the present.[7] To study history was to become aware of this. It was to become aware of the traditions

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[4] A, 91.

[5] A, 91

[6] A, 115

[7] "If P1 has left traces of itself in P2 so that an historian living in P2 can discover by the interpretation of evidence that what is now P2 was once P1, it follows that the 'traces' of P1 in the present are not, so to speak, the corpse of a dead P1 but rather the real P1 itself, living and active though incapsulated within the other form of itself P2." A, 97-98, 100, 106, 141; Collingwood, R.G. The Idea of History. Edited with and introduction by T.M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946. p.225-26. To be referred to hereafter as 'IH'.

The reader will find strong similarities between Collingwood's doctrine of incapsulation and his theory about the 'recessive' element or 'strain' inherent in a civilization. See the Essay,

of (e.g.) political thought that man had unconsciously inherited; aware of the way they had affected his arrival at his present political situation; and aware, most importantly, of how they conditioned/limited his *thought* about that situation. Once this kind of historical self-awareness had been achieved, man could, for the first time, begin to control his destiny, said Collingwood.[8] He could reject inherited ways of approaching problems that were no longer valid for his present situation (and indeed, may have even **blinded** him to it). He could appropriate and incorporate strategies from history that were.[9] And he could do this consciously.

Collingwood's Essay on Metaphysics was designed (among other things) to be a tool with which to bring about this historical self-awareness.[10] It was designed to reveal the past

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p.75.

[8] "...by understanding it [the past] historically we incorporate it into our present thought, and enable ourselves by developing and criticizing it to use that heritage for our own advancement." IH, 230.

Had Collingwood gone into business for himself, the shingle he would have hung out might have looked something like this: 'Invest in your future by learning about your past.'

[9] "History never repeats itself; but its processes may resemble one another so closely that...it is not impossible to argue from one to another, and use Antiquity as a lantern to explore Futurity." Collingwood, as quoted in Van Der Dussen, W.J. History as a Science: The Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood. The Hague: Martinus-Nijhoff, 1981. p.429. See also p.369. See also Donagan's The Later Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1962. "What historical training can confer...is exact knowledge of the range of past responses to the profuse variety of past situations." p.237. See also IH, 230.

[10] It was also designed as a rebuttal against positivistic, realistic, and Aristotelian (mis)conceptions of metaphysics. This was demonstrated in my research paper, but is left out of the present thesis on the grounds that these are separate battles. Collingwood, R.G. An Essay on Metaphysics. Oxford: Clarendon

'incapsulated' in the mind of the present. How? Through a method of analysis known as the 'logic of question and answer'.[11] The 'logic of question and answer' made explicit the question-and-answer process internal to any piece of scientific inquiry, argued Collingwood.[12] It demonstrated that any piece of investigation (e.g. into the cause of AIDS) was actually a response or an 'answer' to some logically prior question, or problem, that existed in the investigator's mind ('What causes AIDS?'). It demonstrated, furthermore, that such a question contained -- in 'incapsulated' form -- a presupposition of which the investigator may have been quite unaware (i.e. AIDS has a cause).[13] This presupposition might, if examined closely enough, turn out to be the answer to some still previous question the investigator had asked (and transcended) in the course of his earlier inquiry.[14] But it might not, said Collingwood. It might turn out to be a presupposition that the investigator had never arrived at through any of his own efforts; one that he had, rather, inherited unconsciously from past thinkers as part of the 'furniture' of his mind.[15] If this was so, and if (as Collingwood urged) such a presupposition

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Press, 1940. To be referred to hereafter as Essay, or 'EM'.

[11] Essay, pp.21-33.

[12] By scientific inquiry, Collingwood means any systematic, orderly investigation of a determinate subject-matter. Essay, p.4.

[13] Essay, p.23, 25.

[14] e.g. the presupposition, 'This inscription means something' is the result of a question that has already been asked, and answered, in the affirmative, viz. 'Does this inscription mean anything?' Essay, p.27.

[15] IH, p.248.

really did underpin the logic of a present scientist's inquiry, then it was his duty to become aware of it. Here lay the value of the logic of question and answer.

The purpose of the following thesis is to defend Collingwood's method of metaphysical analysis, and to defend, more importantly, the sorts of presuppositions Collingwood says it can lead us to, viz. 'Absolute Presuppositions'.[16] This defense will take the following form.

First, I will provide a detailed critical examination of the 'logic of question and answer'. This method of analysis is to be found in its clearest expression in chapter IV of Collingwood's Essay on Metaphysics, entitled 'On Presupposing'.[17] My examination of it will follow the format adopted therein, and will culminate in a preliminary analysis of Absolute Presuppositions as the product of this method.

Second, I will draw attention to what I regard as the main defect of the Essay on Metaphysics: the fact that this method of logical analysis is never applied in any systematic, thoroughgoing way. Collingwood fails to show it at work; he fails to show it actually revealing the logic of question and answer involved in a specific example of historical/scientific inquiry. This failure, I argue, results not only in damage to the credibility of his method. Collingwood's larger, more interesting claims about the existence and the importance of absolute presuppositions are left completely unsubstantiated.

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[16] It is important to note that by metaphysical analysis Collingwood means the sort of analysis through which absolute presuppositions are detected. Apart from this special objective, it differs in no way from analysis 'pure and simple'. See EM, 40.

[17] It is also to be found in Chapter V of Collingwood's Autobiography -- but in a less systematic form.

Third, I propose to remedy this defect of application. I shall do so by applying the method of analysis prescribed by Collingwood to examples of **his own** historical inquiries -- specifically, those contained in Roman Britain. Doing so will produce two results. First, it will provide a much-needed demonstration of his method in an applied setting. Second, it will reveal the operation of one of Collingwood's own absolute presuppositions thereby, viz. the presupposition that the actions of historical agents and the artifacts left by them are the expressions of rational, purposive thought. This presupposition, I shall argue, bears the weight of the theoretical contentions made about AP's by Collingwood in the Essay on Metaphysics.

Let us begin now with an analysis of Collingwood's 'logic of question and answer'.

2. The Logic of Question and Answer and the Theory of 'Absolute Presuppositions': A Preliminary Analysis

Why is it important to look carefully at questions? Because, says Collingwood, good scientific thinking involves knowing that "Every statement that anybody ever makes is made in answer to a question."[18] In our casual, unscientific modes, we are usually ignorant of the fact that the thoughts we 'fish' up out of our minds are answers to questions at all. They come out of our minds like an anchor foul of its own cable, says Collingwood, 'hanging upside down' and 'draped in seaweed' with shellfish attached, such that -- far from being critical -- we "dump the whole thing on deck quite pleased with ourselves for having got it up at all."[19] Thinking scientifically involves being able to disentangle this mess. It involves being able to analyze an apparently simple thought -- such as "A caused B' -- and see that it implies and only makes sense as a response to the previous question, 'What caused B?'. To take another example, it involves being able to see that the question 'Where does God exist?', though unheard, is a distinct and essential component of the statement, 'He exists in heaven." Knowing the questions that are being tacitly answered in our everyday statements is, for Collingwood, extremely important: in his view we never find out anything except in answer to them.[20]

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[18] Essay, p.23

[19] Essay, p.22

[20] A, 31

The reason why Collingwood so emphasizes the importance of unearthing the questions inherent in our statements about the world is because he thinks questions themselves embody presuppositions.[21] For him, making presuppositions is of the essence of asking questions. The question, 'Where does God exist?', for example, involves the presupposition that God is the sort of object or entity which can (or ought) to be located spatially in some 'where'. Similarly, the question, 'Is the moon roughly round?' involves the presuppositions that there is a moon and that it is the sort of object to which the notion 'shape' applies.[22] The presuppositions of questions are, for Collingwood, what 'inform' them and give them their peculiar force (we will return to this notion later). Unless they are made, a question cannot be (intelligibly) asked, nor understood.[23]

But uncovering the presuppositions inherent in questions is important for reasons beyond simply being able to say that they are 'there'. It is important, says Collingwood, because each presupposition may **itself** have served as the answer to an earlier, unheard question. We need to be careful to understand this point.

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[21] Collingwood, Essay, p.25

[22] Armour, L. The Concept of Truth. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1969.

[23] Collingwood put this another way in his Speculum Mentis by saying that, "to ask any question, even the silliest or most irresponsible, we must already possess information. A mind which did nothing but question could not even frame its questions; the questions which it asked would be the mere marks of interrogation, the empty form of questioning, questions which asked nothing." Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924. p.79.

A question for Collingwood is a link in a chain which not only determines what kind of answer follows it, but is determined by the presuppositions latent in it. It marks off a certain range of possible answers as relevant[24], but does so under the direction of the presuppositions latent in it. It is these presuppositions that are worth a close look at, says Collingwood. For though not obvious as such, each of them probably served as responses to their own long-forgotten questions. In turn, these questions themselves may only have arisen due to the presence of still earlier presuppositions, presuppositions that were the result of the way still previous questions were answered, etc.[25] All this needs to be straightened out, says Collingwood. Only by discovering the precise logical sequence of the questions/presuppositions implicit in a given inquiry can the metaphysician see why the existence of one question/presupposition may have depended completely upon another, previous one.

Take, for example, the question, "Have you stopped teasing politicians about their inability to think yet?" For Collingwood, this one innocent-looking question is actually a confused mass of separate questions which needs to be 'disentangled' and arranged in logical order before we can even attempt to answer it. It can be resolved into its component questions:

(a) "Do you know at least one politician?"

(b) "Were you ever in the habit of teasing said person?"

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[24] But not necessarily correct. The answer, 'Captain Crunch' would be a relevant answer for the question, 'Which seagoing explorer discovered America?', in that it satisfies presuppositional demands that a person of a certain occupation be specified. Yet for all this it may still be incorrect.

[25] Collingwood, Essay, p.39

(c) "Do you think at all about not doing so in the future?"

(d) "Have you begun acting on this thought yet?"

What Collingwood is concerned to point out with this kind of example is fairly obvious. The question of whether one has stopped bothering politicians about their mental laziness yet cannot logically have arisen without a positive answer having been given to the previous question, "Did you ever consider doing so?" This question, in turn, could not logically have arisen without the prior supposition that he did in fact tease politicians at one time. And neither of these questions could have arisen were it not for the still previous supposition (embedded in question (a)) that said person indeed knows a thing called a politician.[26] This serves as the perfect example of the intricate logical relations that may exist within any one question, ones which need to be made explicit.

There is, though, something else that one notices after having 'unpacked' a complex question of this kind, says Collingwood. (This refers back to the point made earlier regarding the dual role that questions and their presuppositions can play in a 'chain' of inquiry.) Some presuppositions, like the ones latent in (d) ("Have you begun acting on this thought yet?") function not only to give shape and direction to the question they are in, but also as answers to previous questions, i.e. (c) "Did you ever consider stopping to tease politicians?", and behind that, (b) "Do you tease them?" That is, they function both *informatively* and *responsively*: informatively in the sense that

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[26] Wife-beating having fallen out of vogue in the present day, I have altered Collingwood's example somewhat (preserving, however, its force). For his exact words, see the Essay, p.38

they clue us in to the meaning of the question at hand, and responsively in the sense that they themselves (as propositions) are the outcome of some earlier question(s).

Collingwood's own example makes this clearer. Any inquiries we make about measurable things such as deskspace are governed by the presupposition that the tape we are using is in fact accurate. So that if there should later arise any doubt in our mind as to how much space is available, we have only to refer back to the tape and this presupposition that we make about it. This is the sense in which a presupposition might be said to 'inform' and direct the way we inquire.[27]

But this presupposition (about the accuracy of the tape) is itself a response to an earlier, unheard question: "Is the measuring-tape we are using really accurate?" Looked at in this way, it is no longer functioning to give meaning to a question, but instead is now an answer to one. And insofar as it can do two jobs, and can "...stand relatively to one question as its presupposition and relatively to another question as its answer", it can only be called a 'relative presupposition', says Collingwood.[28] A relative presupposition is the outcome of some logically prior question. It is precisely the sort of thing we (and the positivist) are usually after

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[27] Essay, p.29 See also his comment in Speculum Mentis, the comment that while questioning is the cutting edge of knowledge, "assertion is the dead weight behind the edge that gives it its driving force. Questions undirected by positive information [presuppositions], random questions, cut nothing; they fall into the void and yield no knowledge."p.78

[28] Essay, p.29 It is worth clarifying something here if it is not already so. A proposition for Collingwood is something Janus-faced. It may serve as an answer to a previous question, as a presupposition that gives meaning to a question and causes it to arise, or both.

when we speak of checking the presuppositions inherent in any question.[29] Any time we voice a demand that a certain presupposition be justified, it is really a request to see how this sort of presupposition is 'related' to what preceded it; what question it must have grown out of; and what its overall place in the 'chain' of inquiry is. And for Collingwood, metaphysics as a marriage of logic and history can normally be expected to provide such genealogical answers.

However, if Collingwood has sought to establish good reasons for thinking that some presuppositions are always relative, it is because all along he has been seeking a foil against which to make the following grand claim: that *some presuppositions we make use of are not answers to anything at all.* They do not stand 'relatively' to any previous question. No legitimate logical 'parents' can be found to justify their existence.[30] They are, hence, 'absolute presuppositions'.[31]

For Collingwood, this conclusion represents the painstaking result of all that has gone before. It is also, for us, the key point on which later critical debate will turn. Accordingly, care must be taken to interpret it correctly.

Absolute presuppositions are highly specialized kinds of presuppositions, says Collingwood. They are ones which

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[29] And **not** absolute presuppositions. Collingwood rails against the positivist who thinks that they, too, must either submit to a similar kind of analysis or be dismissed.

[30] **Translation: some presuppositions are real bastards.**

[31] Essay, p.31.

> "...a man takes as fundamental and incontrovertible, which he assumes as true in all his thinking and acting. These principles form, as it were, the nucleus of his whole mental life: they are the centre from which all his activities radiate. You may think of them as a kind of ring of solid thought -- something infinitely tough and hard and resistant -- to which everything the man does is attached."[32]

Collingwood is **most** concerned to point out that these Absolute Presuppositions just aren't the kinds of things that one could provide evidence for. Strictly speaking, there is no reason for us to hold fast to them (e.g. the conviction that cause will always precede effect, or that this relation obtains in all realms of nature). This is because they do not exist relatively to any previous questions, and do not derive from any prior suppositions (e.g. in the way that the statement, "I will stop teasing politicians" derives from the presupposition that one had done so in the past). To think that they do (as the positivist does) is plain bad metaphysics, says Collingwood.

For how could this be done? What further standard would one make appeal to in order to judge the adequacy of our conviction that nature is accessible to the mind of man, for example? What would it be like to offer 'reasons' as to why a programme of reason-giving is sound and should be adhered to?[33] The point can be put another way. In using a measuring tape, one might legitimately question whether or not it had stretched over the years. Hence one might ask

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[32] from Collingwood's article, "Ruskin's Philosophy" (as reprinted in Collingwood, R.G. Essays in the Philosophy of Art. A. Donagan, ed. Bloomington: U of Indiana Press, 1964. p.5)

[33] "Reasons given in support of presuppositions seem to function the way reasons in aesthetic judgments do", says D.H. Whittier. "They articulate rather than establish a given position." (Monist, 48, 1964. pp.486-500) See also his comment that one cannot, because of the circularity involved, argue for presuppositions.

for its accuracy to be verified against the comparatively more reliable standard of a surveyor's chain.[34] But, asks Collingwood, how could this chain itself be questioned? Indeed, how did we learn the method for determining whether the chain sets the right standard or not? This is the problem!!! In response to a query about its accuracy, we could have it checked against other surveyor's chains. But -- even assuming these themselves are 'accurate' -- at what point would we be able to stop and say, "Yes, it appears that our chain is/is not accurate after all." After having checked it against five other chains? Twenty-five? One-hundred and five?[35] When do we have 'enough' evidence?

The obvious point to be made here, says Collingwood, is that asking for evidence is an empirical matter, and experience can never be the judge of the things we presuppose absolutely. For everything we do experience only makes sense because of the frame of reference that they (Absolute Presuppositions) first provide.

That this is so is shown by the following example for Collingwood. Suppose, for instance, that we did try to prove the truth of the generalization that 'all events have causes' by inducing it from past experience. On this view then, 'all events have causes' would therefore be an inductive generalization from the fact that E1 happens according to some law, as does E2, and so on. But look, says Collingwood -- wouldn't we already be assuming what we had set out to prove? Apparently, instead of using these instances as bases from which to establish our

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[34] Essay, p.29

[35] I am here drawing heavily upon the problem Wittgenstein has with the coherence theory of truth (On Certainty, p.12e/77) I do not make more of it here because it would lead me off track.

generalization, the generalization "all events have causes" is itself already being invoked to discover such instances. We find ourselves committed to it before we start, and necessarily committed too. For how else would the instances with which we seek to establish this generalization 'present themselves' as relevant?[36] How else would we have determined that they were 'alike' in some important respect?

Clearly then, Collingwood seems to be leading us to the conclusion that absolute presuppositions are not the kinds of things we may choose to hold. Evidently, we somehow just 'inherit' them as things which make the very concept of 'choice' itself intelligible. But does this then also mean that they are not the kinds of things someone might take from us? From Collingwood, we get an emphatic 'Yes.'

Suppose, for instance, that we tried -- like some well-meaning clergyman -- to quietly pry an unsuspecting person's absolute presupposition from them.

> "Thus if you were talking to a pathologist about a certain disease and asked him 'What is the cause of the event E which you say sometimes happens in this disease?' he will reply 'The cause of E is C'; and if he were in a communicative mood he might go on to say 'That was established by So-and-so, in a piece of research that is now regarded as classical.' You might go on to ask: 'I suppose

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[36] Essay, p.152. Collingwood puts this another way in his earlier Speculum Mentis: "...induction itself rests upon a principle, variously described as the uniformity of nature, the law of universal causation, and so forth, which, because induction rests upon it, induction is powerless to establish. Thus the whole of induction falls to the ground because it is found to assume that of which it is ostensibly in search." p.179

He is also quick to make note of a subtle kind of paradox: how are we to know which came first, the inductive generalization that 'all events have causes', or the particular instantiations of it? Which proceeded from which?

> before So-and-so found out what the cause of E was, he was quite sure it had a cause?' The answer would be 'Quite sure, of course.' If you now say 'Why?' he will probably answer 'Because everything that happens has a cause.' **If [however] you are importunate enough to ask 'But how do you know that everything that happens has a cause?' he will probably blow up right in your face, because you have put your finger on one of his absolute presuppositions, and people are apt to be ticklish in their absolute presuppositions.**[37] (emphasis mine)

The point Collingwood is trying to make in this much-quoted passage is that, far from being surprised, one should expect such a 'blow up' after having tried to pry someone from their AP's. It may be that in some objective sense what the above-mentioned pathologist is clinging to amounts to nothing more than a faith-committment. We **might** press him, like the positivist would, and force him to admit that he has no evidence for the principle, "all events have causes" by which he guides his work. Yet for all this, the pathologist would probably still find himself unable to work without it (or another of similar ontological status).

Why? Let us make this point in a more interesting way, taking the positivistic critic himself as an example. Any attempt to forcibly remove presuppositions requires a standpoint from which to do so. The critical charge that the pathologist has no grounds for believing that 'all events have causes' is no exception. It requires as its basis the supposition that grounds are in fact what are needed in order to establish such claims. And this is the ironic twist. The positivist who would strip the pathologist of his presupposition cannot do so without thereby reaffirming this one of his own. His work requires that which he finds most objectionable: the 'unquestioned

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[37] Essay, p.31

acceptance' of certain (in this case verificationist) principles. No systematic inquiry of any kind can proceed without making this allowance, says Collingwood, not the pathologist's nor the positivist's.[38] This property of enabling inquiry (or doubt) to start in the first place is the reason, then, why absolute presuppositions cannot be let go of.[39]

As a last illustration of the tenacity of Absolute Presuppositions, let us show that if they cannot be 'taken' from an inquirer, then neither can they be shed in any voluntarily way. Stephen Pepper, in his book World Hypotheses, introduces a concept that is highly similar to the absolute presupposition, a concept known as a world theory or a world 'hypothesis'.[40] World hypotheses are simply hypotheses about the nature and structure of the world around us, says Pepper.[41] They purport to explain it in all its detail, by offering sets of categories and

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[38] "The mutual independence of departmental specialists in modern science depends for its very existence on the presupposition that one and the same set of laws hold good throughout the entire world of nature. Unless it were thought an absolute certainty that in this sense nature is one, and therefore that natural science is one also, relations between the various departmental sciences would be...chaotic..." Essay, p.200

[39] Collingwood, in the Autobiography, trounces scepticism of the kind that pats itself on the back for needing no method as being nothing other than covert dogmatism. 'A fox who preaches his own tail-lessness cannot but appeal to positive theories about nature, method, &c., says C. Since he must, full-blown scepticism is self-referentially incoherent. More than that, it is dangerous to civilization and progress. (see the chapter entitled, 'The decay of realism' in his Autobiography, and the Essay on Philosophical method, p.140).

[40] Pepper, Stephen C. World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence. Berkeley: U of California Press, 1942. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

[41] Pepper, p.74. e.g. the world is made up of water (Thales). A group of world theories is roughly analogous to what Collingwood means by a 'constellation' of absolute presuppositions.

interpretative frameworks into which every element in it may be fit and made sense of. Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and Kant's three *Critiques* are prime examples of such hypotheses, says Pepper. All are unlimited in scope, (viz. nothing in principle is beyond their range of explanation).[42] All are autonomous and self-authorizing (viz. they neither admit of nor require judgment in terms of other world hypotheses).[43] And all are so intimate and so much a part of us as to be difficult if not impossible to 'stand back' from.[44]

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[42] Pepper, p.77.

[43] Pepper, p.98. Anyone who has read Collingwood's paper entitled, 'The Historical Imagination' will notice a startling parallel between this characteristic of 'world hypotheses' and Collingwood's description of the 'innate' idea or imaginary 'picture' of the past with which the historian approaches his work. This 'idea' -- the idea of history -- is, in C's own words, "self-dependent, self-determining, and self-justifying." It admits of judgement in no other terms. See IH, p.247-249.

[44] Pepper, p.2. Pepper regards Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things*, Descartes's *Meditations*, Spinoza's *Ethics*, Hume's *Treatise*, Dewey's *Experience and Nature*, and Whitehead's *Process and Reality* as additional examples of world hypotheses, in that all (a) purport to inform us about the structure of the world (p.74), (b) try to explain every last detail in it (p.1), (c) are autonomous and self-justifying, i.e. neither admit of nor require external justification (p.98), and (d) are so intimate and all-pervasive as to be difficult (if not impossible) to 'stand back' from (p.2).

I must stress that Pepper's theory about world hypotheses is much more involved than I have here let on. World hypotheses actually originate for him in common sense. Men like Thales, for instance, pitch upon some area of common-sense fact (viz. the ubiquity of water). Once having discriminated its structure and its characteristics, they then try and see whether other areas of experience can be explained in these terms. The original area then becomes a basic analogy, or 'root metaphor'. Its structural characteristics (e.g. those of water) become basic and universalized concepts of explanation and description. And this 'metaphor' is the foundation of world 'hypotheses', says Pepper. The theories of Anaximenes, Empedocles, Telesio and Spencer, for instance, all derive from it. All represent the same root metaphor or the same basic cosmological structure in varying degrees of

Now what is interesting in terms of present purposes is Pepper's idea of how we go about assessing the adequacy of our hypotheses about the world. In Pepper's view, a world hypothesis judges itself, and so is able to convict itself as inadequate and in need of replacement.[45] How?

> "By its own logic, or refined canons of cognition, it acknowledges its own shortcomings in dealing with certain kinds of facts, or in dealing with them consistently with its dealing with other kinds of facts....Theories which show themselves up as dealing much less adequately with the world-wide scope of facts than others are said to be relatively inadequate; the others, relatively adequate."[46]

Now there are two critical problems as far as the above position goes. The first concerns the notion of how a world hypothesis might 'fail' to deal well enough with the facts. If a world hypothesis were truly all-encompassing in the manner suggested by Pepper, and if indeed it defined what the 'facts' were, then how might any facts 'outside' the range of its explanatory power ever come to exist?[47]

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refinement. See p.96, 91-93 in World Hypotheses.

[45] Pepper cites bias as the reason for excluding man from the business of judging world hypotheses. But this stand is somewhat problematic, since it is clearly human beings that use world hypotheses. Mustn't they be involved in their judgment at some level then?

[46] Pepper, p.116 See also Pepper's insistence that "It is not what any author thinks about his theory that counts in determining its inadequacy, but what the theory itself in terms of its own logic thinks of itself."

[47] Collingwood's grasp of this point is clear: 'As long as you measure in inches and feet, everything you measure has dimensions composed of those units. As long as you believe in a

The second problem is more relevant to present concerns. It concerns the notion of a world hypothesis as being capable of rejecting itself. Rejection implies reference to some criterion or standard of judgment. This standard cannot, as we know, exist outside the world hypothesis in question; world hypotheses do not, for Pepper, admit of judgment in external terms. But neither, it seems, can this standard of judgment reside within the hypothesis in question. For clearly, the standard, in convicting the hypothesis, would in the process convict itself of inadequacy. And this is incoherent. It amounts to affirming what is denied. What does this mean in terms of the question at hand? It means, of course, that any attempt to completely reject\abandon\overturn world hypotheses\AP's must always end in self-defeat. For clearly, some basis of judgment must always be retained and insulated as a basis from which to do so.

There are other finer points to be made that flesh out Collingwood's theory of absolute presuppositions. These, however, can be better brought out in the critical discussion which is to follow. For now, suffice it to say that we have in front of us the framework of his theory, and some understanding of powerful kinds of presuppositions at the heart of it.

A brief recap before we move on: We indicated at the outset that the Essay on Metaphysics might be construed as a tool with which to achieve historical self-awareness. This self-awareness was, we stressed, a condition of the possibility of someday achieving control over the future of

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world of magic, that is the kind of world in which you live.' To suggest that experience might teach us otherwise is, for Collingwood, impossible. EM, 194.

human affairs. How was it to be achieved? According to Collingwood, it was to be achieved through a special method of metaphysical analysis, one that revealed the process of question and answer inherent in a given piece of scientific inquiry. This method we examined piece by piece. We tried to show the primacy of the questioning activity for Collingwood. Nothing, in his view, could ever be properly understood unless you understood the question that made it possible. But such questions themselves had to be 'unpacked', for if one took the trouble, one could see that they embodied various presuppositions, ones which were themselves answers to still previous questions. Once all this had been made explicit by a 'logic of question and answer', one could then see that while most statements only made sense 'relatively' to others previous to them, there were some that apparently had no logical antecedents whatsoever. We tried to explicate the fact that for Collingwood, these 'absolute presuppositions' are the necessary conditions for there being any argument whatever, yet at the same time not a part of any one.[48] They are above argument, and neither true nor false, for truth and falsity are notions which only make sense against the backdrop which they provide. We found it important as well that they can never be judged in any way by experience, since they themselves are the a priori conditions which make experience possible. And we tried to emphasize the fact that for Collingwood, absolute presuppositions -- since we are normally unaware of them -- are not the kinds of things we might ever choose to be rid of.

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[48] Louis Mink's eloquent way of putting it. Mind, History, and Dialectic. Bloomington: Indiana U Press, 1969. p.145.

What remains for us to do now is to address some potential objections to the theory of absolute presuppositions, and see if it can withstand them.

The first problem is this: how do we go about identifying the Absolute Presuppositions involved in our own thinking, given that for the most part we are unaware of them?[49] If they are already being used in structuring the way we experience, and if they will not subject themselves to doubt, then how are we to stand back and identify when we are presupposing something like, 'All events have causes?' Collingwood could fall back to his distinction between identifying one's own AP's and those of another inquirer at another time, and argue that, comparatively speaking, a detached perspective would make these latter ones much easier to identify. This would likely hold true. But observe: wouldn't all this to some extent presuppose that the metaphysician had mastered the technique on himself first? Wouldn't Collingwood himself insist that any attempt to identify the AP's of a past process of inquiry is bankrupt from the start unless, to some extent, one has already found out firsthand what sorts of things to look for?[50] This does seem to be a necessary prerequisite. Thus Collingwood is obliged to explain how one goes about identifying one's own Absolute (but unconsciously made) Presuppositions.

The answer he gives seems to almost have anticipated the above-mentioned objection. AP's are to be uncovered by self-analysis.[51] No other option is available. The absolute

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[49] Essay, pp. 43, 48.

[50] There is reason for thinking that C would agree. He says in the Idea of History that "...unless a man could do this for himself [judge his own thought], he could not do it for anybody else." p.296.

[51] Essay, p.45

presuppositions of others (of one's own time) are not really examinable for the reason mentioned before: people resent the idea that they might be found to lack justification, and so 'blow up.'[52] And introspection is out too, says Collingwood, since "introspection can do no more than bring into the focus of consciousness something of which we are already aware", and we are not aware of our AP's.[53]

But -- leaving aside the perplexing issue of how Collingwood sees self-analysis to be different from introspection -- one still wants to ask how self-analysis can bring our AP's to light. If, as ordinary scientists, we are so imbued with the view that all events do have causes, and that there is order to the universe, how are we to stand back from them and see them for what they are, i.e. our AP's? Do we want to say that some further criterion of choice needs to be appealed to, a criterion which somehow aids the metaphysician in determining which suppositions are only relative and which are absolute?[54] Probably not, for all this would do is move the whole problem of identification one step back. We would need to undertake the even more difficult task of trying to describe new, 'super' criterion -- a task which in turn require even further standards of judgment.[55]

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[52] Though, of course, they are mistaken in believing the inquirer to be asking for this.

[53] Essay, p.43

[54] This, I think, is probably the sort of move self-analysis traditionally involves.

[55] Though this need not necessarily work against Collingwood. If he really wanted to he could interpret this kind of continual regress as a perfect example of what he means by the vaporous nature of absolute presuppositions, and thus why it is even more important that they be taken seriously.

The path Collingwood does choose in order to give the budding metaphysician something with which to proceed is one involving his logic of question and answer. Put simply, one knows when one is confronted by an absolute presupposition because one can discover no logically prior question to which it may have been an answer.[56] This is the test that separates them from relative presuppositions, says Collingwood. To this criterion of choice, however, there are two critical objections to be made.

First, it is not as impossible as Collingwood thinks to devise questions which might logically precede Absolute Presuppositions. "What do all events have?", and, "How many events have causes?" seem to be two obvious examples that make this point. They are questions that could be said to precede Collingwood's favourite example of an absolute presupposition, "all events have causes". And insofar as they are, they strip it of its status as an AP in Collingwood's definition. Many more such questions could probably be devised and put forth for the other examples he cites as well, (ie. the indestructibility of substance, the belief in the uniformity of nature). But the point has been made.

Second, even supposing that Collingwood dismissed our objection as trivial, there is an even greater objection to be made.[57] This is that Collingwood's logic of question and answer can

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[56] Essay, p.32

[57] And he could do this quite easily. He could quite forcefully argue that propositional knowledge of some sort is always required to 'inform' a question and give it meaning. Lacking this prerequisite knowledge (about e.g. God, freedom, or immortality) he could conclude that no meaningful questions using these terms could legitimately be formed. In other words, he might say that the question "is the universe accessible to human understanding?" cannot be put as the logical antecedent for that AP, since even to be posed it requires information of the kind that

be seen to work in a way that practically guarantees the existence if not outright creation of Absolute Presuppositions. Recall again Collingwood's dictum from the beginning of this paper, viz. 'the meaning of a man's statement cannot be fully grasped without knowing the question to which the thing he said was meant as an answer.' The metaphysician's job is the discovery of this question, as we have been so often reminded. Yet how can he discover it if -- as Collingwood implies -- he is not allowed to use the meaning of the statement to help him? When faced with a potentially limitless array of possible questions that the statement could have been in answer to, what, then, helps the inquirer to pick the right one? The puzzle is put more concisely by Louis Mink:

> "We cannot know what a statement means unless we know what question it answers, but we cannot decide what question it answers unless we know what it means."[58]

'I intend to catch the 12:30 train" for instance, is a statement that serves as an answer to the question, "When do you intend to go?" but also, "How do you intend to go?" Now how are we to decide which of these questions the statement really answers if we are barred, as Collingwood says we are, from invoking any of the statement's meaning in order to help? It would appear

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it is ostensibly after. In this way, Collingwood might be able to deny our apparent ability to phrase questions which preceded absolute presuppositions as legitimate. But again, he would have needed to spend more time elaborating this possible response.

[58] Mink, Louis. Mind, History, and Dialectic. Bloomington: Indiana U Press, 1969. p.128

that Collingwood's logic of question and answer makes it impossible for us to do so. It denies access to the very thing which would help us out of the problem. And insofar as it does, it is arguable that **this very inability to specify a determinate question is what conveniently enables Collingwood to draw the conclusion he does, viz. that a statement 'x' is in fact an absolute presupposition.** From the fact that a precise question cannot be located, he can conclude that no such question exists. In this underhanded kind of way, Collingwood's theory of Absolute Presuppositions is able to deliver/create exactly what it promised: the existence of a statement that is relative to no discoverable question.

Though not nearly as slick as the above, we can find a similar problem of criteriological denial in his discussion of the 'logical efficacy' of presuppositions. For Collingwood, propositions are what cause questions to 'arise'.[59] This means that if a question does arise, then at least one proposition is being presupposed by it, if not a number of them. (We referred to this as the way in which presuppositions may be said to 'inform' and give meaning to a question). If a number of them are presupposed, then all may have been jointly necessary for the question to have arisen (as with the question, "have you stopped teasing politicians about their inability to think yet?"). For example, the propositions that one smokes and that one intends to give it up are both necessarily presupposed by the question, "When do you plan to give up smoking?" The presupposition of both propositions is required for it to have arisen.

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[59] Essay, p.27 This point cannot be stressed enough. For Collingwood, a proposition may function as a presupposition that gives meaning (or 'teeth') to a question, as an answer to one, or both.

Collingwood, however, contends that "directly or immediately", any given question involves one proposition and one only.[60] While the presupposition of others may have been necessary, his claim is that only a certain one is sufficiently powerful enough to have caused a given question to arise.[61] Now the problem, at least in the above example, is this: how do we determine which proposition is the 'immediate', logically efficacious one that Collingwood speaks of? Which of the propositions was the one uniquely able to cause the question, "When do you plan to give up smoking?' to have arisen?[62] The strategy of 'disentangling' the propositions and logically rearranging them as with the earlier politician example is not open to us: this process itself would require knowledge of the very kind that we are in search of.[63] Yet neither, it seems, can we go forth with Collingwood's prescription and pick one proposition to the exclusion of the other. For there is more contained in the question of when one plans to give up smoking than can be obtained from the proposition that one smokes. Likewise, the question about when smoking will be given up contains more information than can be obtained solely from knowing that one intends to give "it" up. So that if our directive is to identify one **or** the

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[60] Essay, p.25 "It may be doubted whether any question that was ever asked involved one presupposition and no more. Ordinarily a question involves large numbers of them. But a distinction should be made between what a question involves directly and what it involves indirectly. Directly or immediately, any given question involves one presupposition and only one, namely that from which it directly and immediately 'arises'."

[61] Obviously, more is wanted on the subject of how a proposition may be 'powerful' enough to cause a question to arise. Regrettably, it is not provided.

[62] Louis Mink notices the same problem I have here.

[63] viz. knowledge of which proposition -- acting in the capacity of a presupposition -- gave rise to which question.

other of these jointly presupposed propositions as the one responsible for the questions' arising, we do not appear able (at least in this example) to do so. Collingwood offers us no criteria of choice. And because he fails to do so, his entire prescription for disentangling complex questions/presuppositions and rearranging them in logical sequence of what 'gave rise' to what seems to be a very difficult one to follow.

These then, are some of the more serious objections that might be made against the very possibility of a theory of AP's that Collingwood envisions. Others could be made. An obvious one would concern his claim that 'every statement anybody every makes is in answer to a question.' What kind of question is the statement, 'pick it up!' an answer to? This is a trivial example, one that Collingwood may have anticipated but decided not to spill ink on. The fact remains, though, that we, as users of his theory, need to know how to deal with such exceptions to his rule. And we do not.

Moreover, even supposing that the 'convenient' ability of his logic of question and answer to 'guarantee' the existence of AP's was not problematic, one might still object thus: Does it **really** follow, from the fact that we seem unable to discover the logically prior questions to the metaphysical statements we use, that there are none to be found? Perhaps the conviction that the universe is accessible to the human mind does in fact 'arise' from some previous question, one yet to be discovered? And if this is possible, then are there really any absolute presuppositions that exist in the way that Collingwood has claimed thusfar?

The bulk of the difficulty, though, seems to exist with the proposed method of how absolute presuppositions are to be arrived at. He provides no adequate criteria of choice; criteria by which

we might pick out the logically efficacious proposition in the way he asks, or the one question to which a given statement is a response to. So that Collingwood's very own methods block the finding of AP's in the way he prescribes to us (except in a kind of incidental, underhanded way), and block the resolution and reordering of propositions involved in a complex question.

Does all this mean, then, that we should abandon Collingwood's theory of Absolute Presuppositions? Not really. For while its shortcomings may obstruct it, and perhaps even (underhandedly) guarantee the existence/creation of AP's in the way we saw, the idea that such presuppositions exist remains a serious one. For clearly, some such things are involved in the supposal that a programme of reason-giving is a good way to proceed in life. Some such things must be involved in the conviction that the universe is accessible to human understanding, and that this understanding can be used to make a difference in it. Collingwood's metaphysics has the peculiar virtue of having tapped into these sorts of metaphysical beliefs. Rightly or wrongly, intentional or not, we can see that this insight that he does have is a powerful one indeed. For one sees that regardless of what kind of attack is made, and regardless of how 'true' it may be that his notion of 'absolute presuppositions' needs to be done away with, all such critics end up reaffirming his doctrine. In accordance with one of his primary claims, he can say to us and the positivist that, "It matters not a bit whether my claims about AP's are true or not, or even whether they are merely thought so". "Their efficacy -- their justification -- comes from the very fact that you, the critic, are yourself making appeal to them in the way you argue."[64] "Without

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[64] "The logical efficacy of a supposition does not depend on the truth of what is supposed, or even on its being thought true, but only on its being supposed." Essay, p.28

your criteria of adequacy as an unquestioned basis upon which to stand, and without your unflinching belief in the rationality of your own method, how might you even begin your attack?"

It would be hard (but interesting) to see how we could take away from what Collingwood is trying to say here without falling into his clutches. It would be hard to argue against him without arguing for him. And that, unfortunately, is the rub. If we need to say something for or against the whole notion of there being metaphysical 'moorings' in thinking, and if we wish to avoid circularity, how can say it?[65]

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[65] An interesting idea here is whether a way of thinking can be forcibly transcended. Can one voluntarily jump out of one's own frame of reference in order to assess it? Can the way of thinking that it forces upon us be completely transcended? It seems hard to imagine, for this very transition would seem to require some of the very presuppositions that one wanted to leave behind. Change seems hard to imagine in a vacuum.

II.

3. Absolute Presuppositions and the Logic of Question and Answer: The need for an applied demonstration.

Collingwood once argued that, "In general, if someone does not say something the reason may be either that he cannot make up his mind about it and has nothing definite to say, or that he thinks it so obvious that it does not need saying."[66] With regard to some of the ambiguities that remained after our preceding exposition of his theory of Absolute presuppositions, the former seems to be the case. Collingwood never tells us, among other things, how we are to identify the proposition from which a question 'directly' or 'immediately' arises; how we are to determine which question a given statement is an answer to; nor how we are to bring our own AP's to light if we are normally unconscious of them. These are crucial issues which we, as metaphysicians, must be clear on if we are to follow Collingwood's theory in the way he prescribes. He also leaves us puzzled about the criterion which supposedly marks AP's out from other presuppositions: the fact that they cannot be conceived as answers to any logically prior questions. We found ourselves able to fly right in the face of this and devise questions which could have logically given rise to his most prized example of an AP, viz. all events have causes. Does this then mean that we have destroyed his criterion of what constitutes an AP? Or have we merely committed some sort of schoolboy mistake which he foresaw but decided not to spill ink on? On these and other critical points, Collingwood is painfully silent. And because he is,

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[66] from his Idea of Nature. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945. p.119.

doubts grow in our minds. We begin to suspect not only that his whole theory of absolute presuppositions was not as clearly worked out in his own mind as it perhaps should have been, but we also wonder whether or not the general view of metaphysics which it drives is still tenable.

Yet for all that may be said against it, Collingwood's theory is still compelling enough to make us believe in the latter possibility too: namely, that he knew quite well what he was doing. The bluster, the belligerence, and the impatience with which the Essay as a whole is marked can certainly be regarded as a sign of this surety.[67] 'If a man cannot see for himself that, on the subject of absolute presuppositions, I am reminding him of what he already knows quite well, and if he requires trivialities explained for him, then I cannot help him. The best thing he can do is stop reading here and now.'[68] Collingwood plainly had no patience for those who could not grasp what he thought obvious on the subject of AP's.[69] He charged ever onward, assuming

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[67] or alternatively, as the mark of a man who knew that, because of strokes, he only had a very short time left in which to say what he had to say.

[68] This sentiment actually comes from p.256 of his Idea of History, in which Collingwood is railing against the historian who is ignorant of, and hence forfeits, the autonomy that is rightly his in doing reconstruction. But it captures perfectly Collingwood's general disdain for 'low-grade', 'unscientific' thinking, and his intolerance for people who are satisfied with 'what swims into their mouths'. These feelings permeate all of his work, but are most pronounced in the Essay on Metaphysics and the Epilegomena of his Idea of History.

[69] This would account for the 'shrill' overtones and general marks of 'haste in composition' that commentators like Eugene Bertoldi find in abundance in the Essay. See his 'Absolute Presuppositions and Irrationalism'. Southern Journal of Philosophy, 27(2), 1989. p.157.

that the reader was 'intelligent enough and enough accustomed to this kind of literature to fill in any necessary detail for himself'.[70] If we take this impatience to be the mark of a mind that knew what it wanted to say and merely wanted to get on with saying it, then perhaps impatience -- and not unfinished thinking -- is to be held responsible for the sorts of ambiguities that Collingwood seemed to have left for us above.[71]

Even without this consideration, though, there is still something very compelling about the whole theory of absolute presuppositions that he presents. This seems connected with the fact that -- though perhaps unconvincing at the technical and methodological levels -- the theory about AP's seems undeniably 'right' or 'on target' at the intuitive one.[72] When we think about examples like the surveyor's chain, we are forced to nod and agree that there are certain things that we, as systematic inquirers into the world around us, must presuppose 'absolutely' in order to begin.[73] We concede that these presuppositions (e.g. about 'correct' chain-length) cannot

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[70] Essay, p.56.

[71] "At least it sometimes seems to me that the arrogance and dogmatism with which he has been charged by his critics were most often the joyful wisdom of a man who is prepared to be wrong, as perceived by observers who are not." Louis Mink, Mind, History, and Dialectic, p.vii.

[72] Or do I only mean my intuitive one?

[73] For another of the innumerable examples he gives on this point, see his Essay on Philosophical Method. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933. "...**the propositions which constitute the body of logic cannot ever be in substance hypothetical**. A logician who lays it down that all universal propositions are merely hypothetical is showing a true insight into the nature of science, but he is undermining the very possibility of logic; for his assertion cannot be true consistently with the fact of his asserting it."p.130

themselves admit of analysis, nor of being treated with scientific detachment: without them as our stable frame of reference, we would have no standpoint to detach **from**, period.[74] Rather, if our inquiries are fruitful at all, it is because these presuppositions are already operating unbeknownst to us. Recalling the previous induction example, they are what allow us to 'notice' common instances of causal relationships in the first place -- something we do long before, and as a condition of, any later inductive generalization we might articulate to that effect. The body of AP's involved in thinking might thus be said to be the 'disk operating system' of human intellectual inquiry. For unless they were already up and 'running', it seems unlikely that any subsequent 'programs' (methods of inquiry) could function. And if this much is true, then we realize suddenly that Collingwood's subject has been more profound than we ever might have suspected. We realize that, like many before him, he has been struggling to get a glimpse of the things that form the very core of the human mind, and of the way in which these things give direction to what we do with our lives.

Yet however much we admire this goal (of articulating a method that can access these core suppositions), and however right we think he is in positing their existence, the fact remains that the theory of absolute presuppositions suffers from one main thing: a lack of good supporting examples. It is to this problem that we must now turn.

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[74] "That is to say, the **questions** that we raise and our **doubts** depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn." 342.44e Wittgenstein, L. On Certainty. Oxford: Basil-Blackwell, 1969.

The Essay on Metaphysics can, again, be regarded as Collingwood's attempt to fashion a special kind of tool, or science, with which to bring about historical self-consciousness. The first half of the book is devoted primarily to explaining how this new science is to be understood: as an historical science, a science whose object is to determine (via a logic of question and answer) the things presupposed 'absolutely' by past scientific inquirers. The second half of the book is meant to provide examples of this new science actually at work.[75] **The problem, though, is this: none of these examples really bear the weight of the theoretical points Collingwood is trying to make.** Several absolute presuppositions are listed. But none appear to have been arrived at via the logic of question and answer Collingwood prescribes. Moreover, none are presented in a way that really shows why they were 'absolutely' necessary for a phase of scientific inquiry to have travelled the course it did.

For instance, recall again Collingwood's most prized example of an Absolute Presupposition, 'all events have causes'. It would not be too much to say that the bulk of the weight of his theory of metaphysics rests on this example.[76] Yet Collingwood's development of it in the last

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[75] "...I have offered to the reader's attention a few examples of metaphysics itself, in order to show how metaphysical inquiry will be conducted if the principles laid down in the opening chapters are taken as sound." Essay on Metaphysics, preface.

[76] I make this claim with a fair amount of certainty, since (A) Collingwood uses universal causation to first introduce us to his notion of AP's in Chap.IV; (B) he uses it to help make his point about the historical (as opposed to transhistorical) character of AP's in Chap.VI; and (C) he uses it to make the point that scientists (such as J.S. Mill) pretend to establish -- but are in fact already committed -- to their AP's (p.149-152). The whole subject of causation also figures greatly in part IIIc.

half of the Essay does very little to justify this.[77] If anything, it shows only that Kant's arrival at this axiom was influenced by Newton, Bacon, and Hume. Nowhere does Collingwood show how this presupposition formed such an integral part of nineteenth century physics, in the sense of showing how it went about determining 'the entire structure of that science by determining the questions that arose in it, and therefore the possible answers.'[78] And nowhere does Collingwood bear out his interesting thesis about truth: that as far as past researchers were concerned, it did not matter whether the AP's they used were true, or even only thought so, only that they were supposed. To have used the 'all events have causes' example to demonstrate these theoretical points would have substantiated Collingwood's work nicely. But because he fails to do so, the reader's confidence in the workability of his new method of metaphysical inquiry is radically undermined.

A similar point can be made with respect to the example of the 'indestructibility of substance'.[79] Normally, says Collingwood, if you hit a golf-ball into the rough and can't find it, you encourage yourself to go on searching for it by saying, 'it must be around here somewhere'. But what you are really doing in saying this is holding firmly to the idea that the substance of which the golf-ball is made is indestructible.

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[77] see pages 328-337 of the Essay.

[78] P.52, Essay. Note that two pages earlier Collingwood promises to say more about this in the concluding chapters.

[79] see p.262-3, Essay. Otherwise known as the law of conservation of matter.

> "...you are saying in effect that even if it had turned into 'thin air' that 'thin air' would still be your golf-ball transformed into a new shape, as happens when water evaporates or when oil is burnt..."[80]

In this case, we continue to look for a recognizable golf-ball: the 'analogies of experience' do not permit us to think that it 'vanished' into thin air. But the point, says Collingwood, is that we go on searching for it in the way we do precisely because of our unfounded belief in the above principle. We take it for granted "not because it has been established once for all by scientific research, for it never has been; nor because we think that it could be so established...for it never could be;...it is taken for granted as one of the AP's without which we should not have our science of nature, and indeed not even that 'daily life' of searching for golf-balls..."[81]. But is this example really anything beyond a bald assertion? Is it constructive in helping the reader understand exactly where and how the 'indestructibility of substance' guided the course of nineteenth century physics? Not in the least. The reader learns something important: that rather than being transhistorical, this presupposition only dates back to the Renaissance. And this point highlights the important historical quality of Collingwood's metaphysics. But if the object was to clarify the nature of absolute presuppositions and their role in the logic of inquiry, then this example does not succeed. It is merely a statement of an absolute presupposition, and illustrates neither the method by which it was uncovered, nor the (supposedly) indispensable role it played in the era of scientific inquiry of which it was a part.

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[80] p.263, Essay.

[81] p.263, Essay.

The same criticisms apply to most of the other examples of Absolute presuppositions Collingwood lists: that the natural world is composed of one universal substance (Ionian physics[82]); that the nature of things lies in their geometrical structure (Pythagorean physics[83]); that God exists (made by natural science![84]); that there is motion in nature[85]; and that there is continuity in time and space.[86] All are professed by him to be examples of things that scientists of a certain time had to take for granted in order for them to have begun their inquiries. Rather than having been derived from their experience, all are professed to have been among the very conditions of its possibility.[87] Again though, none of these examples go much beyond the bare

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[82] Collingwood, R.G. The Idea of Nature. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945. p.30

[83] Idea of Nature, p.52-3.

[84] Essay, p.187, 232. See also the Idea of History: "Take away Christian theology, and the scientist has no longer any motive for doing what inductive thought gives him permission to do." [i.e. assuming that the future will resemble the past]. p.255.

[85] Essay, 217.

[86] p.258, Essay.

[87] "...absolute presuppositions are not 'derived from experience', but are catalytic agents which the mind must bring out of its own resources to the manipulation of what is called 'experience'..." Essay, p.197. "...any supposed experience or experiment from which our conviction might be thought to derive could never have either originated or confirmed it unless the same conviction had been firmly seated in our minds from the start..."p.265, Essay.

For another example of the problem I have with Collingwood's use of examples, see the Essay, p.217. Collingwood says that the idea of motion cannot be an idea which we obtain through the use of our senses. "It is an idea which we bring with us in the shape of an absolute presupposition to the work of interpreting what we get by using our senses." But what is this beyond a mere claim? Where

statement of absolute presuppositions. None attempt to reconstruct the process of question & answer in which the operation of these presuppositions was supposed to have been implicit. None demonstrate their indispensability to the inquiries of which they were a part. And none demonstrate why their (real or perceived) truth was irrelevant. The total effect on the reader is, then, unsurprising: his confidence in both the possibility and the value of Collingwood's program for metaphysics is left seriously undermined.[88]

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is the demonstration of how it was arrived at, and of how it operates in the logic of our inquiries?

It occurs to me that something else needs to be straightened out here. This is that the sorts of things people presuppose 'absolutely' vary in the degree to which they affect human existence. Some -- like universal causation, the law of conservation of matter, and what Collingwood calls continuity in space and time -- appear to be terribly necessary to the most basic everyday existence. Brute physical survival seems unimaginable without them. But can the same <u>really</u> be said of the presupposition that 'God exists'? Collingwood might have been more careful to articulate this point.

[88] Both Stephen Toulmin and W.M. Johnston complain about Collingwood's lack/misuse of examples from the natural sciences. But Johnston goes on to suggest an explanation of why this occurred. He says that the *Literae Humaniores* program at Oxford [in which Collingwood took a 1st] had as its major flaw the tendency to neglect natural science altogether. 'All too often, its graduates had to go through life with only a high school knowledge of mathematics, chemistry, physics, and biology'. See Johnston's, <u>The Formative Years of R.G. Collingwood</u>. The Hague: Martinus-Nijhoff, 1967. pp.117-122, and Toulmin's paper, 'Conceptual Change and the Problem of Relativity' in M. Krausz's edition of <u>Critical Essays on the Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood</u>. pp.202, 207.

Given the above, one can hardly help noticing the irony in the claim that Collingwood makes in the <u>Essay</u>: "...no philosopher can acquit himself with credit in philosophizing at length about a region of experience in which he is not very thoroughly at home."p.240.

It should be clear, then, what needs to be done next. Collingwood's claims about the object and method of metaphysical inquiry need to be tested against a specific example of scientific inquiry.[89] This I propose to do next. I propose to apply Collingwood's method of metaphysical analysis (outlined earlier) to his own historical writing, specifically that on Roman Britain.[90] In so doing, I shall be looking to see: (1) whether his method is in fact capable of showing us the 'logic of question and answer' that a piece of inquiry (in this case, his own) followed; (2) whether this logical process, once reconstructed, does in fact show some presupposition(s) to be 'absolute' (in the sense of not having served as the answer to any previous question); and (3), whether or not said presupposition(s) was/were in fact necessary -- even indispensable -- for the inquiry in question to have unfolded as it did.

This particular approach will, I think, show itself to possess several virtues. Not only will it satisfy the pressing need for a concrete demonstration of Collingwood's theory of metaphysical analysis. And not only will it, in the process, reveal the operation of one of Collingwood's own absolute presuppositions, viz. that historical events/actions are the outcome of rational, purposive

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[89] The reader is reminded again, that 'scientific inquiry' for Collingwood means any inquiry that reflects systematic , orderly thinking about a determinate subject-matter. Thus defined, historical inquiry is for Collingwood scientific inquiry. See p.4, Essay on Metaphysics.

[90] Collingwood, R.G., & Myres, J.N.L. Roman Britain and the English Settlements. Second Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937. As C himself points out, 'this volume is not a work of collaboration. It consists of two independent studies of two distinct, though interlocking, subjects.' C contributed the first part of the work, which covers (on the basis of archaeological evidence) the period of Romano-British history from the time of Caesar's first invasion to the Roman abandonment of Britain

thought. Applying his methods to the analysis of his own work will address a long-standing critical objection: that 'few attempts have been made to range Collingwood's theoretical reflections against his own actual practice as a working historian of Roman Britain'.[91] All in all then, the results of the approach I have chosen to adopt will be of triple significance.

In order to carry out the sort of critical testing I have proposed above, I have chosen to apply Collingwood's method not to one, but to four examples of his thought in Roman Britain. My plan in each case will be fairly straightforward: I will try to 'disentangle' Collingwood's argument, and 'rearrange' it in its logical form according to the propositions he lists in chapter IV of the Essay on Metaphysics entitled, 'On Presupposing'.[92] The result will be a sequence of questions and answers that proceeds, in descending order, from the conclusion of the argument (the 'answer') to the question that gave it rise, to the presupposition(s) involved in the asking of this question, &c. In no case will it be necessary to recreate the complete factual content of the example in question.

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[91] This is surprising, continues Mink, given especially Collingwood's "repeated claim that the philosophy of a subject, such as the philosophy of history, consists of second-order reflection on the actual practice of working at that subject." (Louis Mink, in Fay, B., Golob, E.O., and Vann, R.T. (eds.) Historical Understanding. Ithaca: Cornell, 1987, p.223.)

[92] I will, however, omit the third proposition regarding the relationship between the logical efficacy and truth of a supposition. Collingwood's theory of truth is far from clear, and would require a separate investigation unto itself.

III.

4. Application to Roman Britain:

Example 1: Collingwood's argument for the Claudian Invasion of Britain.[93]

Answer: There were five things that motivated Claudius to invade Britain, says Collingwood. First, the project of conquering Britain had already been brought into the agenda of Roman policy by Caesar. Second, there were troops to spare. Third, the Empire needed to vindicate itself for the fiasco of the earlier, aborted invasion attempt led by the preceding emperor, Gaius. Fourth, Britain contained vast amounts of natural resources. Fifth, the political situation in Britain was precarious, and was becoming a growing threat to Roman interests.

Now according to Collingwood's first proposition, if we think 'scientifically', we must realize that whenever we read a statement of the above kind, what we are really reading is an answer to some earlier question the writer has posed for himself.[94] This question cannot have been a vague, generalized question like, 'What was Claudius doing?' (for such a question might have

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[93] Roman Britain, pp.76-78.

[94] Essay, p.23. See also the Autobiography: "...if you will think carefully about the passage you will see that he is answering a question which he has taken the trouble to formulate in his mind with great precision. What you are reading is his answer. Now tell me what the question was."(p.71)

been answered in any number of other ways). It must have been as detailed and as particularized as the answer itself.[95] Hence, Collingwood's question in this case must have been,

Question: What were Claudius' motives for invading Britain?

Now according to the second proposition of Collingwood's method, this question itself embodies a presupposition.[96] It embodies a presupposition without which it could not logically have arisen. (eg. in the way that 'Have you stopped beating your wife?' does not arise logically without the presupposition that one has been in the habit of doing so). The presupposition in this case would appear to be,

Presupposition: Claudius had some motive(s) for invading Britain.

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[95] C calls this the 'principle of correlativity' (Autobiography, p.32.) It is worth pointing out that this principle has an analogue in Collingwood's view of historical explanation. For C, not just any motive or thinking process will do as an explanation of an historical action. The thought/motive being put forth as explanatory must be highly specific; it must fit the available evidence better and 'tighter' than any other possible motive/thought process would have. (Auto, 128; Essays in the Philosophy of History, p.97)

[96] Essay, p.25.

This does in fact seem to be the presupposition involved in Collingwood's question; the 'dead weight' that gives it its 'driving force'.[97] But the matter cannot be left at that. According to the fourth proposition of Collingwood's method, we must -- as 'resolute' inquirers -- push home our analysis and determine whether this presupposition is relative or absolute.[98]

A relative presupposition is (unlike an absolute one) one that exists, or can be seen to exist, as an affirmative answer to some logically prior question.[99] The presupposition that a measuring-tape is accurate is, for instance, a relative presupposition. It can be viewed as a positive response to the logically prior question, 'Is this tape accurate?'[100] Is the presupposition made by Collingwood above viewable in the same way? Let us try to devise some questions from which it might have arisen.

a. 'What did Claudius have that led him to invade Britain?'

b. 'Why did Claudius invade Britain?'

c. 'What did Claudius have?..."

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[97] Collingwood, R.G. Speculum Mentis. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924. p.78.

[98] Essay, p.29, 42. Again, Collingwood's third proposition about the relationship between the logical efficacy of a supposition and its truth-value will be left out of this thesis, in that it poses problems too large to be dealt with here.

[99] Essay, p.29-30.

[100] Essay, p.30

Each of these questions seems capable of giving rise to the presupposition that Claudius had some motive(s) for invading Britain. Each, however, must be rejected.

The first -- 'What did Claudius have that led him to invade Britain?' -- must be rejected because (in this context at least) the demand to know what Claudius 'had' that prompted his invasion seems to be nothing more than a veiled demand to know the **reasons or motives** behind his invasion.[101] It targets Claudius' mental state as the dimension on which explanation is to be found. And such a question is obviously incapable of giving rise to the supposition that Claudius had some motives for invading Britain. For clearly, it **already** supposes them (i.e. motives, mental states) to exist.

The second question we have devised is open to the same sorts of objections. 'Why?' is a demand for reasons for the Claudian invasion of Britain. But not only is this to suppose that reasons are, or ought to be, available. Reasons are practically synonymous with motives. And this, again, is the supposition whose logical ancestry we are trying to trace.

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[101] The question 'What did Claudius have that led him to invade Britain' seems to me to be capable of meaning two things. First, it could taken to mean that Claudius 'had' in his possession something of a physical nature, and that this something (e.g. a trainer or a tour-guide) 'led' him to invade Britain in the way in which one leads a horse or leads a tour. Second, it could be taken to mean that Claudius had in his possession something of a non-physical nature -- something internal to him (i.e. a mental state) which 'led' him to invade Britain (in the way considering evidence 'leads' one to certain conclusions). Of the two, I contend that the latter is the more natural, and more defensible, interpretation of the question.

'What did Claudius have that led him to invade Britain?' is admittedly an awkward question. Strictly speaking however, it <u>is</u> a question to which the statement, 'Claudius had some motive...' would serve as a response. It is for this technical reason that I deal with it.

The third question, 'What did Claudius have?...', is immune to the above criticisms. But it is open to another: that of being non-specific. It could be answered any number of ways, and does not necessarily entail 'Claudius had some motive(s) for his invasion of Britain' as a response.[102] Hence it too is incapable of having given it rise.

Conclusion: Apparently, Collingwood's own presupposition regarding Claudius as having some motive(s) for the invasion of Britain is not conceivable as a response to some logically prior question. Given that it is not, and given that this result is the defining feature of what Collingwood calls 'absolute presuppositions', we may fairly conclude that 'Claudius had some motive(s) for his invasion' is an absolute presupposition of his inquiry into the Claudian invasion.[103]

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[102] Again, for Collingwood, "A proposition was not an answer, or at any rate could not be the right answer, to any question which might have been answered otherwise. A highly detailed and particularized proposition must be the answer, not to a vague and generalized question, but to a question as detailed and particularized itself." Auto, p.32.

See also Collingwood's automotive example. "...if my car will not go, I may spend an hour searching for the cause of its failure. If, during this hour, I take out number one plug, lay it on the engine, turn the starting-handle, and watch for a spark, my observation 'number one plug is all right' is an answer not to the question, 'Why won't my car go?' but to the question, 'Is it because number one plug is not sparking that my car won't go?'"

[103] "Def.6. An absolute presupposition is one which stands, relatively to all questions to which it is related, as a presupposition, never as an answer." Essay, p.31

There is something that must be stressed at this point. 'Claudius had some motive for invading Britain' is an absolute presupposition of a **particular** piece of historical inquiry, viz. C's inquiry into the Claudian invasion. It is a condition of its possibility, without which it would not have unfolded as it did. Yet for all that it is only of secondary importance. For it

Example 2: Collingwood's argument for the origin of the Antonine Wall.[104]

Answer: The construction of the Antonine Wall was motivated not by the desire to provide a defensive frontier against tribes to its north, but rather by the desire to surround, contain, and eventually neutralize the hostile lowland tribes to its south.

This statement must again be conceived of as an answer to some logically prior question that existed in the mind of its maker. And again, this question must be just as detailed, and just as particularized, as the answer it gives rise to.

Question: What were the motive(s) behind the construction of the Antonine Wall?

Now again, according to Collingwood's second proposition, this question itself involves a presupposition, one from which it 'directly' and 'immediately' arises.[105] It appears to be,

Presupposition: There were motive(s) behind the construction of the Antonine Wall.

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contains, or is of the form of, a much broader, more generalized presupposition: viz. the actions/artifacts of historical agents are the product of rational, purposive thought. **It is THIS underlying AP, this general form, that I wish to draw the reader's attention to.**

[104] Roman Britain, pp.140-148.

[105] Essay, p.25. "Directly or immediately, any given question involves one presupposition and only one, namely that from which it directly and immediately 'arises'..."

Once again, the question to be asked next (according to prop.4) is whether this presupposition is absolute, or merely relative. That it is not relative can be seen in the same way as before. It cannot have arisen from the question, 'What led to the construction of the Antonine Wall', since 'led to' seems (in this case) synonymous with 'motive'. It cannot have arisen from, 'Why was the Antonine Wall built?' for much the same reason. And it cannot have arisen as an affirmative response to the question, 'Were there motives behind the construction of the Antonine Wall?'. For here again, one is asking for what one already presumes to exist.

Conclusion: The presupposition that there were motive(s) behind the construction of the Antonine Wall cannot be conceived of as a response to any logically prior question. According to Def.6 of Collingwood's method, any presupposition that cannot be so conceived must be considered an absolute presupposition. Therefore, the presupposition here arrived at must be an absolute presupposition.[106]

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[106] Here again, 'There were motives behind the construction of the Antonine Wall' is only of limited importance, since it is merely an absolute presupposition of a particular piece of historical inquiry. It is the general AP of which it is an instantiation that is really important.

Example 3: Collingwood's reconstruction of the real reason that Domitian recalled Agricola from Britain.[107]

Answer: Domitian did not recall Agricola from Britain due to jealousy (as Tacitus alleges), nor because he feared Agricola's accomplishments there would outshine his own in Germany. Rather, says Collingwood, Agricola was recalled because his objective of conquest had for all intents and purposes been achieved.

This statement must again be conceived of as an answer to some logically prior question. And again, this question must (according to the principle of correlativity) be just as detailed, and just as particularized, as the answer to which it gives rise.[108] Thus,

Question: What was the real reason for Domitian's recall of Agricola from Britain?

Now again, according to Collingwood's second proposition, this question itself involves a presupposition, one from which it 'directly' and 'immediately' arises.[109] It would appear, in this case, to be

Presupposition: There was a real reason for Domitian's recall of Agricola.

What remains to be decided is whether this presupposition is absolute or only relative. If it were relative, it would be conceivable as a response to some logically prior question, e.g. 'Why did

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[107] Roman Britain, pp.116-117.

[108] A, 32

[109] Essay, p.25.

Domitian recall Agricola?'; 'What was there that led Domitian to recall Agricola?'; or 'Did Domitian have a reason for recalling Agricola?'. It cannot be conceived as a response to any of these questions, however, since all already contain it in one form or another.

Conclusion: The presupposition that Domitian had a reason for recalling Agricola from Britain is an Absolute Presupposition (of the inquiry into the same).

Example 4: Collingwood's argument for the original purpose of the Hadrianic Vallum.[110]

Answer: The original purpose of the Hadrianic Vallum was to provide a location and a control-point for Roman customs officers that was independent from the purely military purposes of the Wall.

According to prop.1 of Collingwood's method, this statement must again be conceived of as an answer to some logically prior question that existed in the mind of its maker. And again, this question must be just as detailed, and just as particularized, as the answer to which it gives rise. Hence,

Question: What was the original purpose of the Hadrianic Vallum?

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[110] Roman Britain, pp.133-34. The Vallum was a broad, flat-bottomed ditch located immediately behind Hadrian's Wall.

Now again, according to Collingwood's second proposition, this question itself involves a presupposition, one from which it 'directly' and 'immediately' arises.[111] This would appear to be,

Presupposition: The Hadrianic Vallum was built for a purpose.

Once again, the question to be asked at this point (according to prop.4) is whether the above presupposition is an absolute one, or only a relative one. If it were a relative one, it would be conceivable as the response to some logically prior question. e.g. 'Did the Hadrianic Vallum have a purpose?'; 'What is notable about the Hadrianic Vallum?'; or 'Why was the Hadrianic Vallum built?'. It is not so conceivable, however. The first question already supposes purpose to be the dimension on which explanation for the Vallum is to be found. The second violates the principle of correlativity in admitting a variety of possible responses. And the third asks for nothing in any way substantially different from the question articulated earlier in the inquiry, viz. 'What was the original purpose of the Hadrianic Vallum?'. It asks, in other words, for a plan, or rationale.

Conclusion: The presupposition that the Hadrianic Vallum was built for a purpose is apparently inconceivable as the response to some logically prior question. Absolute presuppositions are inconceivable in the same way. Therefore, the presupposition

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[111] Essay, p.25. "Directly or immediately, any given question involves one presupposition and only one, namely that from which it directly and immediately 'arises'..."

that the Hadrianic Vallum was built for a purpose must be an AP (of the inquiry into the purpose of the Vallum).

We have four examples of Collingwood's own historical investigations, unpacked and reorganized according to his own prescribed method of metaphysical analysis. There are certainly more examples of these investigations available in Roman Britain. For our purposes, however, the ones chosen will suffice. They will provide us with the information we need to address the three questions we posed at the outset, viz. the questions of whether (1) Collingwood's method is in fact capable of showing us the 'logic of question and answer' that a piece of inquiry (in this case, his own) followed; (2) whether this logical process, once reconstructed, does in fact show some presupposition to be 'absolute' (in the sense of not having served as the answer to any previous question); and (3), whether or not said presupposition was in fact necessary -- even indispensable -- for the inquiry in question to have unfolded as it did.

5. Results:

As to the first question, the answer would appear to be 'yes'. Collingwood's method of logical analysis does appear capable of revealing the process of question and answer implicit in a given piece of inquiry. It showed fairly clearly that the conclusions of his own historical arguments were intelligible only for the reason that they implied, and answered, unspoken questions in his own mind.[112] (Otherwise, they meant nothing).[113] The job of identifying these questions proved, moreover, to be a surprisingly straightforward task. This was due not only to his 'principle of correlativity', viz. the principle that maintained that a question must be as detailed and particularized as the answer to which it had given rise.[114] It was due to the fact that in at least two cases (examples 2 and 4) Collingwood himself pointed out the problem/question to which his work was meant as a response.[115] As such, the problem

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[112] "...there is no sense in any answer unless there is a virtual question driving at it. If there is any sense in our thinking it is in this bilateral relationship between question and answer." Fales, W. 'Phenomenology of Questions'. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 4, 1943. p.65.

[113] A, 31

[114] A, 31-32. Though it is worth noting that Collingwood could deny us recourse to this principle. For even if we end up tailoring a question that is precisely as specific as the statement whose ancestry we wish to account for, we are still presupposing that we understand its (the statement's) meaning. And this, again, can't be done, says Collingwood -- not without knowing its question.

[115] Example 2: Collingwood makes it clear that he finds it difficult to understand the motive for the changes in the British frontier-system of the kind evidenced in the Antonine Wall. (Roman Britain, p.140). That this difficulty provides the driving force

encountered in the first section of this thesis of trying to decide which of several possible questions might have generated a certain answer never arose.

There is, however, a special problem that needs to be pointed out concerning the method of analysis prescribed by Collingwood. This is that it does not acknowledge the possibility of misinterpreting the 'answer', or conclusion, of a piece of inquiry. Fortunately for us, this problem did not arise in our examination of Collingwood's own work. The clarity of his writing in these examples made the point of his investigations unmistakable, if not self-evident.[116] But there are obviously cases in which this is not so, cases in which a piece of inquiry (e.g. a page from a journal) may be so muddled, complex, or disjointed as to admit of a variety of possible interpretations regarding its 'point' (conclusion).[117] In such cases, someone applying Collingwood's method might quite easily fasten upon the 'wrong' conclusion (where 'wrong' means one never arrived at by the original inquirer). From this, he would unknowingly reconstitute the 'wrong' question, viz. one that was never framed in the writer's mind. And from

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behind his subsequent investigation is confirmed six pages later, viz. "The motives which led to the building of the Antonine Wall are now clear."

Example 4: Collingwood makes it clear that the purpose of the Hadrianic Vallum 'has always been a perplexing question', and indicates a page later that his own analysis has been an attempt to provide an explanation for it. (Roman Britain, p.133,134

[116] See note #115

[117] Collingwood himself admits this. "In practice, the common difficulty for the historian is to identify the problem, for whereas the thinker is generally careful to expound the steps of his own thought, he is talking as a rule to contemporaries who already know what the problem is, and he may never state it at all." IH, 313. See also A, p.39: "...a writer very seldom explains what the question is that he is trying to answer..."

this, in turn, he would extract the 'wrong' presupposition, viz. one that the original inquirer never actually made. The ultimate result would be, then, a complete fiction: a reconstructed logic of inquiry entirely in accordance with the principles of Collingwood's method, but having no bearing on the agent's (writer's) actual thought process whatsoever.[118]

Having addressed the first of the three questions we set for ourselves earlier, let us turn now to the second, more important one: Does the logic of question and answer in a given inquiry really terminate in an absolute presupposition? Does it really rest on a presupposition for which no antecedent question can be found?[119]

If we have applied Collingwood's method correctly, then the answer would appear to be 'yes'. For we saw that each of his own historical inquiries reduced to one basic presupposition: the presupposition that the agents in question had some reason, purpose, or motive for their actions.[120] This presupposition was, we found, inconceivable as the positive response to some logically prior question (the test of an AP).[121] 'Why?' questions (such as 'Why did Claudius invade Britain?') could not have generated it: they already invoked it by identifying reasons as

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[118] Collingwood's response to this criticism? 'The method of analysis I propose does not, and never did, purport to be able to identify the conclusion of a given piece of inquiry. This is wholly up to the person using it.'

[119] Essay, p.31,32.

[120] I should perhaps point out that Collingwood equates thought with intention, purpose, and motive. See A, 128; IH, 309, 310, 312; RB, xii, 32-33. At least one other commentator has found the same equation acceptable (See Neil Rossman, 'On Rational Explanation in History', Philosophical Studies, 16, 1967. p.116.) I shall, therefore, do the same.

[121] Essay, p.31,32

the dimension on which explanation for action was to be sought. 'What?' questions (e.g. 'What did Claudius have that led him to invade Britain?') could not have generated it: they implied deliberate mental activity as well. And even simple questions like, 'What did Claudius have?' were ruled out. These violated Collingwood's principle of correlativity, in that they did not necessarily entail Collingwood's presupposition (that of motive) as an answer.[122] Given these failures then, and given what these failures mean in terms of his theory of absolute presuppositions, we are entitled to conclude as follows: that the supposition about historical actions as the expression of reasons/purposes/motives is Collingwood's own 'absolute' presupposition.

Collingwood's own AP about the rationality and purposiveness of historical actions: an indispensable part of historical inquiry in general?

Given the results of the preceding analyses, there should be no doubt as to the answer to the third and final question we posed for ourselves earlier, viz. the question of whether the AP made by Collingwood was 'indispensable' for his (four) inquiries to have unfolded as they did. The answer is 'yes'. For strictly speaking, 'What were Claudius' motives for invading Britain', 'What was the reason for Domitian's recall of Agricola', &c. are questions that would never have arisen in the first place were it not for the supposition that Claudius had motives; that Domitian had a reason. This supposition, and this supposition alone gives them their force, their 'weight' -- their

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[122] A, 31-32

'need' to be asked.[123] Without it, Collingwood's questions would have been, in his own words, 'mere marks of interrogation'; the 'empty form of questioning', questions which 'cut' nothing.[124] They would, as such, never have been able to compel him to provide the sorts of answers he tried to in Roman Britain.

But our findings above are really only of limited value. The most they allow us to conclude is that Collingwood's AP (about historical actions as rational/purposive) was a necessary and indispensable part of four of his historical investigations. What we should want to know is whether it is indispensable to his philosophy of history in general.

The answer is yes. To understand why requires a brief look at his theory of history.

History, for Collingwood, is not the record of the ships commanded by Nelson at Trafalgar. It is not a record of how many troops Caesar took on his first expedition to Britain. Nor is it the record of the location and quantity of Flavian potsherds in Britain. History is, rather, a series

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[123] While questioning is the cutting edge of knowledge, "assertion is the dead weight behind the edge that gives it its driving force. Questions undirected by positive information [in this case, presuppositions], random questions, cut nothing..." Collingwood, R.G. Speculum Mentis. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924. p.78

[124] "to ask any question, even the silliest or most irresponsible, we must already possess information. A mind which did nothing but question could not even frame its questions; the questions which it asked would be the mere marks of interrogation, the empty form of questioning, questions which asked nothing." Speculum Mentis, p.78,79.

of 'answers'. It is (qua actions and artifacts) a series of deliberate, calculated responses to problems which historical agents faced in their day.[125]

The business of the modern-day historian is the re-discovery of these problems. He must determine how, and why, they compelled agent's to think about and respond to them in the way that they evidently did.[126] This knowledge is achieved through reenactment; through 'getting inside the head' of the agent and experiencing the situation as he experienced it.[127] In the case of Nelson, it means looking through the eyes of a man who had been brought up in sailing-ships armed with broadsides of short-range muzzle-loading guns.[128] In the case of Caesar, it means experiencing the dilemma he faced between not invading Britain (and allowing its threat to his interests to grow unchecked) and invading it (which would leave the way open for a Gaulish revolt in his absence).[129] Only when the historian can enter into the agent's mind in this way

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[125] Put otherwise, 'all history is the history of thought'. (A, 110; IH, 215, 283, 312-313). See also IH, 229 and A, p.62, where Collingwood asserts that the history of (eg.) political theory is a history of different answers given to a problem that has undergone continual change.

I have chosen to cast Collingwood's philosophy of history in terms of questions and answers (rather than the familiar 'inside/outside' distinction) in order to capitalize on the understanding the reader has already gained in this area.

[126] IH, p.283, 215, 312; A, p.58. See also Debbins' edition of Essays in the Philosophy of History by R.G. Collingwood. "The business of the historian is to discover what problems confronted men in the past, and how they solved them." p.85.

[127] A, 58; IH, 283

[128] A, 58

[129] Roman Britain, p.32.

and weigh the considerations that he had to weigh can he really be said to understand why the agent acted in they way that he did.[130]

Now as far as present purposes go, there is one main thing to notice about this approach to historical knowledge. **It depends completely on the supposition that there is in fact some conscious, reflective process of thought to be re-enacted.** It depends, in other words, on the belief that Caesar's decision to invade really was a deliberate one; that Nelson really was acting according to some plan.[131] This supposition is not a relative supposition, one that Collingwood can cite further grounds for. It is "one of the most fundamental principles of his philosophy of history", an 'absolute' condition of its possibility.[132]

That this is so can be shown by heading straight for the place that history begins for Collingwood, viz. with evidence. Evidence, for Collingwood, does not exist per se. It is not something that lies about, waiting to be discovered by the historian. Evidence is, rather, something that exists -- and can only exist -- in relation to some problem, or question, in the

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[130] This is nothing but a restatement of Collingwood's familiar dictum: 'you understand nothing except in relation to some problem, or question'. A, 31

[131] "If they were not, there can be no history of them; if they were done on a purpose that we cannot fathom, then we at least cannot reconstruct their history." IH, 310.

[132] W.J. Van Der Dussen. History as a Science: The Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood. The Hague: Martinus-Nijhoff, 1981. p.277. See also Lionel Rubinoff's Collingwood and the Reform of Metaphysics. Toronto: U of T Press, 1970. p.270, 282-284.

historian's mind.[133] And it is this question that is very important for us to notice. Because in Collingwood's case, the question is never, '***Could*** this action/artifact be interpreted in terms of some purpose?', or '***Could*** there have been some reason for it?' The question is always (as we have seen), '***What*** purpose was this artifact/action intended to serve?',or '***What*** was the reason for its existence/occurrence?'[134] The inherent rationality of historical actions and artifacts is, in other words, a given for Collingwood. It is, as Dray puts it, a 'standing presumption'.[135] This presumption is evident in his approach to written historical documents:

> What motives induced Caesar to attack Britain, what he intended to bring about there by his invasion, and how long the project had been shaping itself in his mind before he set about executing it, are questions to which he has given us no answer. **Yet we cannot help asking them; and unless we can find some sort of answer, at least to the first and the second, the mere narrative of his campaigns must remain unintelligible.**[136] (bold mine)

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[133] "Otherwise it is merely perceived fact, historically dumb." IH, 247, 281. E.H. Carr agrees: "The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context." What is History? Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961. p.11.

[134] A, 109

[135] Dray, W. Laws and Explanation in History. Oxford: Oxford U Press, 1957. p.137. The exact quotation is: "The general belief that people act for sufficient reason does not arise out of definite pieces of evidence in particular cases; it is a standing presumption which requires contrary evidence in a particular case to defeat."

[136] Roman Britain, p.32.

It is evident in his approach to archaeological evidence:

> "The archaeologist's use of his stratified relics **depends** on his conceiving them as artifacts serving human purposes and thus expressing a particular way in which men have thought about their own life..." (bold mine).[137]

> "...all [archaeological] objects must be interpreted in terms of purposes. Whenever you find any object you must ask, 'What was it for?'..."[138]

> "...a stratum of earth and stones and mortar, mixed with potsherds and coins" is not to be dismissed as a bunch of stone and clay and metal. It is a stratum of "building-stone and potsherds and coins; debris of a building, fragments of domestic utensils, and means of exchange, all belonging to a bygone age whose purposes they reveal to him. He can use them as historical evidence only so far as he understands what each one of them was for."[139]

And it is even evident in his own day-to-day observations:

> "Every day I walked across Kensington Gardens and past the Albert Memorial. The Albert Memorial began by degrees to obsess me....Everything about it was visibly mis-shapen, corrupt, crawling, verminous....I forced myself to look, and to face day by day the question...why had Scott done it? What relation was there, I began to ask myself, between what he had done and what he had tried to do? Had he tried to produce a beautiful thing....[or] had he perhaps been trying to produce something different?"[140]

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[137] IH, 212.

[138] A, 128

[139] A, 108. See again A, 133: 'it is almost impossible to describe what someone else has found without using some interpretive terms implying purpose.'

[140] A, 29

In general then, Collingwood feels obliged to interpret historical actions/artifacts as the expression of conscious, purposive thought.[141] History for him is just plain unintelligible along any other line.[142]

We have come roughly halfway in terms of the objectives of this thesis. We have demonstrated that Collingwood's method **is** one that can reveal the existence of what he calls 'absolute' presuppositions. And we have shown, using his own work, that such presuppositions really **do** underpin the logic of inquiry.

But for Collingwood, absolute presuppositions are not defined solely as products of a logico-analytic method. They are defined by other, more descriptive criteria as well. What we have to do next is see whether the AP we have found embedded in Collingwood's own work meets these criteria.

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[141] "If the scientist is obliged to assume that nature is rational, and that any failure to make sense of it is a failure to understand it, the corresponding assumption is obligatory for the historian, and this not least when he is the historian of thought." An Essay on Philosophical Method. Oxford: Clarendon, 1933. p.226.

[142] The reconstruction of a campaign led by a military commander "...depends on the assumption that his acts were done on a purpose. If they were not, there can be no history of them; if they were done on a purpose that we cannot fathom, then we at least cannot reconstruct their history. IH, 310. See also Roman Britain: "The question which risk to take [in the case of Caesar's dilemma] could be decided only in the light of an estimate of possible gains; that is, in the light of an answer to the question what a British campaign might hope to achieve. It is **impossible** to think that Caesar had no answer of his own to this question..." p.33. (emphasis mine).

The first of the claims that Collingwood makes about absolute presuppositions is that they are not, and cannot be, learned **from** experience.[143] They are, rather, something the mind brings **to** experience (from its own inner 'resources').[144] Does Collingwood's own AP (about historical actions as the outcome of deliberate, purposive thought) bear the weight of this claim? The answer must be, 'yes'. For Collingwood was simply not around to witness any of the historical actions/events from which this presupposition might be said to derive. He was not around to see Claudius invade Britain (much less learn that he had particular reasons for doing so). He was not around to watch the Antonine Wall being built (much less learn that Antoninus Pius had some reason for building it).[145] His conviction, therefore, that there was some 'thought-side' behind these events cannot be said to derive from his own experience.[146] It must have derived

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[143] Essay, p.254, 264-5, 268.

[144] Essay, p.197, 217, 265. I suspect 'resources' means 'history', viz. the thought of past minds, 'incapsulated' in the mind of the present. 'Resources' **cannot** mean permanent, ahistorical features of mind. See Essay, p.265, 245, 192, **179-180, 57**; IH, 220, 224.

[145] An objection will be raised here. The reader will point out that the reasons for which an agent did something were often made explicit by him (or by his biographer) in journals, diaries, etc., and that it was from these (and other written sources) that Collingwood derived his AP about historical actions. But this is highly unlikely. For Collingwood simply did not trust evidence. He was acutely aware of the way in which the truth (about motives, intentions, etc.) could be distorted or suppressed to suit nationalistic or personal biases.(IH, 37-40, 235, 237, 245, 261). And he was also aware of how tricky, and how difficult, the task of getting it out could be. As such, it is highly unlikely that Collingwood would have based his AP (about the rationality of historical actions) on written sources.

[146] Both Dray and Rubinoff agree: "The general belief that people act for sufficient reason does not arise out of definite pieces of evidence in particular cases; it is a standing

from some other source. This source, I suggest, is history. Collingwood inherited his conviction about the rationality of historical actions/events from the past.[147] It is a part of his 'mental furniture' -- furniture that was wrought by centuries of historiographical thinking from Herodotus to Hegel, but accepted uncritically, and unconsciously, as a part of his own.[148] This interpretation finds support from Collingwood himself.

> "...for the purposes of a particular piece of work there are certain historical problems relevant to that work which for the present he [the historian] proposes to treat as settled; though if they are settled, it is only because historical thinking has settled them in the past..."[149]

The problem of whether or not the actions/artifacts of historical agents express conscious purposes is, I am suggesting, just this sort of problem. It was 'settled' -- or 'answered' -- in the

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presumption which requires contrary evidence in a particular case to defeat." (Dray, Laws and Explanation in History. Oxford: OUP, 1957. p.137.); The presupposition about the rationality of historical events "is not a generalization which is empirically discovered by the historian in the course of his inquiry, but is an a priori condition of historical knowledge, an absolute presupposition of the standpoint itself." (Rubinoff, Collingwood and the Reform of Metaphysics. Toronto: U of T Press, 1970. p.283.)

147 "...the historian's own mind is heir to the past and has come to be what it is through the development of the past into the present, so that in him the past is living in the present." IH, 171.

148 IH, 248. For the affinity between Collingwood's views and those of Herodotus, see IH, 19; for that between his own and Hegel, see IH 115-116.

149 IH, 244.

past. The 'answer' was inherited by Collingwood in unconscious, or 'incapsulated', form.[150] Thus, the question of how it was arrived at naturally "form[s] [and could form] no part of the question-answer complex which constitutes...the superficial or obvious present, of the mind in question [viz. Collingwood's own]."[151] In other words, it could not 'arise' for him. This, I suggest, is a way of explaining the origin of Collingwood's presupposition about the rationality of historical action. This is why it is considered by him to be a 'rule of thumb'.[152]

The reader will, of course, want to object to all this. He will want to maintain that Collingwood's AP about the rationality/purposiveness of historical actions is still conceivable as something that grew out of his own experience. How this might have happened is easy to imagine, he will say. Collingwood watched his father plan archaeological digs, and then saw him actually dig them. He heard him plan a series of paintings, and then saw him actually paint them. He heard him plan to write Ruskin's biography, and then saw him actually write it.[153] It was, the reader will argue, nothing more than an extrapolation from these constant conjunctions

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[150] For more on the 'incapsulation' doctrine, see A, p.97-8, 141, and the beginning of this thesis.

[151] A, p.113. Mink has another way of putting it: AP's are "a necessary condition of every argument but are not parts of any one." Mind, History, and Dialectic. Bloomington: Indiana U Press, 1969. p.145.

[152] IH, 216. The job of showing who Collingwood inherited this presupposition from and by what process is one that is obviously worth tackling. But it is beyond the scope of this thesis, not to mention the range of my own capabilities.

[153] Collingwood's father was himself an artist, an archaeologist, and the secretary/biographer of John Ruskin. See Auto, 80; Van Der Dussen's History as a Science..., p.202; and Johnston's The Formative Years of R.G. Collingwood.

between intention and action that led Collingwood to make the presupposition about historical actions that he does. There is, as such, no need for any of this stuff about 'incapsulation'.

But this objection is nonsense. For it is based on a fundamental kind of mistake: the mistake of assuming that Collingwood's experience would be at all comparable to that of the agent's he studied. And this is highly unlikely. For as he himself points out,

> The laws of nature have always been the same, and what is against nature now was against nature two thousand years ago; but the historical as distinct from the natural conditions of man's life differ so much at different times that no argument from analogy will hold.[154]

There can, as such, be no extrapolation from Collingwood's particular historical situation.[155] n his situation, it may have been quite proper, and quite adequate, to interpret human action in

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[154] IH, 239-240, 224. See also the Essay, p.60. Question: How can Collingwood, located in the present, really claim that a Roman soldier's experience and his own experience are so different as to be completely incomparable? How can he know that which (from his standpoint) is not capable of really being known?

[155] This, of course, cannot be completely true. For as Collingwood and many of his critics have pointed out, reenactment would be impossible unless there was at least some identity between the experience of the historian and that of the agent he is trying to understand. See IH, 304-5, 327, 108, and W.H. Walsh's, Philosophy of History: An Introduction. Revised ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1967. ("If men in ancient Greece or the Middle Ages, for example, had nothing in common with men in the world today, how could we hope to make anything of their experiences?"). See also Rex Martin's, Historical Explanation. Ithaca: Cornell U Press, 1977. p.218.

The conflict between the need to keep the present standpoint out when interpreting the past and the need to keep it in is a source of fundamental tension in Collingwood's philosophy of history. It is also terribly important. (see esp. IH, 300-1.) But to do justice to it would require more time than I have at present. (For a good introduction to the problem, see A.O. Lovejoy's, 'Present Standpoints and Past History.' The Journal of Philosophy, 36, 1939. pp.477-89.)

terms of reasons and purposes. But in the Roman situation, it may not have been so at all.[156]

To sum up then, Collingwood's first descriptive claim about absolute presuppositions has been validated. His own AP cannot be thought to derive from his own experience. It must, rather, be regarded as something that is derived from history; something that comes from past minds contained in his own in 'incapsulated' form.

The second of the descriptive claims Collingwood makes about absolute presuppositions is that they can be neither verified, nor undermined, by the verdict of experience. They are, instead, the 'yardsticks' by which experience is judged.[157] Does the presupposition that Collingwood makes in his own work bear the weight of this claim? The answer must, again, be 'yes'. For clearly, if anything could have verified his conviction that Antoninus Pius, for example, had some reason(s) for building the Antonine Wall, and if anything could have undermined his belief that

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[156] Historian's like A.O. Lovejoy concur: The historian "may not assume *a priori* that the major problems of the present were the major problems of the past, or that the controlling categories and presuppositions of thinkers of all former ages were those now commonly accepted..." A.O Lovejoy, 'Present Standpoints and Past History', The Journal of Philosophy, 36 (18), 1939. p.483. To assume so would be to fall prey to what Vico calls the 'conceit of scholars' (found in his Scienza Nuova, #127, and in Pompa, Leon. Vico: A Study of the New Science. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1990. p.11)

See also IH p.223: "Types of behaviour do, no doubt, recur, so long as minds of the same kind are placed in the same kind of situations. The behaviour-patterns characteristic of a feudal baron were no doubt fairly constant so long as there were feudal barons living in a feudal society. But they will be sought in vain (except by an inquirer content with the loosest and most fanciful analogies) in a world whose social structure of another kind. In order that behaviour patterns may be constant, there must be in existence a social order which recurrently produces situations of a certain kind. But social orders are historical facts, and subject to inevitable changes, fast or slow."

[157] EM, 32, 147, 194, 173.

Hadrian had some reason(s) for building the Vallum, it could **not** have been his own experience.[158] When these events happened, Collingwood was simply not around to experience, period.[159]

The reader will, of course, object to this line of thinking. 'Yes', he will say, 'Collingwood was not around to experience these historical events firsthand. He was not around to actually hear Antoninus Pius lay out reasons for wanting to build the Antonine Wall. But in fact he need not have been. For he was around to 'experience' the documents (eg. monographs, narratives, journals, etc.) in which these events were recorded. And it is in relation to these documents that his presupposition about their 'thought-side' could have been undermined/verified.'

This objection must, however, be dismissed. For it rests on the assumption that these historical documents would **themselves** have been trustworthy. And this, for Collingwood, is an assumption that simply cannot be granted.[160]

> A man who makes a statement may be known to be neither ignorant nor mendacious, and his statement may bear no recognizable marks of being untrue. "But it may be untrue for all that: and the man who made it, though in general he bears a good name for being well-informed and honest, may on this one occasion have fallen a victim to misinformation about his facts, misunderstanding of them, or a desire to suppress or distort what he knew or believed to be the truth."[161]

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[158] Obviously, the preceding point about the danger of judging the past based on the present applies here too.

[159] "...the past is never a given fact which he [the historian] can apprehend empirically by perception. *Ex hypothesi*, the historian is not an eyewitness to the facts he desires to know." IH, 282. See also IH, 233.

[160] IH, 259, 246, 259

[161] IH, 261.

Distortion is, in fact, a more or less regular feature of recorded history, says Collingwood. Whether consciously or not, the writers who 'make' it habitually overlook, mis-state, and conceal the 'facts' according to the picture of the past that they feel 'obliged' to present.[162] What does all this mean in terms of the question at hand? It means, of course, that **none** of the historical documents that were available to Collingwood could ever really have been in a position to verify/undermine the absolute presupposition that he made. For clearly, they themselves would have been in question for him. They themselves would have required verification/authentication in his own mind.[163] How would this have been done? It would have been done, for

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[162] IH, p.235, 237, 36-40. Vico agrees with Collingwood. For him, the literary remnants of the past are not the products of impartial, objective observers, but rather the products of men to whom it was the most natural thing in the world to adopt a partial and prejudiced viewpoint and incorporate this unblushingly into their accounts of the past. (See Pompa, Leon. Vico: A Study of the New Science. 2nd ed. pp.8-10.) E.H. Carr also agrees with Collingwood: "Our picture [of the past] has been preselected and predetermined for us, not so much by accident as by people who were consciously or unconsciously imbued with a particular view and thought the facts which supported that view worth preserving." What is History? Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961. p.12.

'Prejudice' is, of course, an integral part of good historical writing. For where everything is important/relevant, nothing is.

For Oakshott's reference to the historical writer as the 'maker' of history, see Carr, p.22.

[163] IH, 256, 259; Pompa, Vico, p.10. The hero of a detective novel is lucky in this respect, says Collingwood. He constructs a theory of how a crime was committed, and then has it neatly 'pegged down' by a confession from the criminal himself. But the historian is less fortunate. "If, after convincing himself by a study of the evidence already available that Bacon wrote the plays of Shakespeare or the Henry VII murdered the Princes in the Tower, he were to find an autographed document confessing the fact, he would by no means have verified his conclusions; the new document, so far from closing the inquiry, would only have complicated it by raising

Collingwood, by appealing to the evidence; by asking the question, 'What does the evidence at my disposal permit me to believe?'.[164] Only when corroborated by the proper (ideally, archaeological) evidence would he have accepted the information they contained as true.[165] And how, in turn, would such evidence have been understood by Collingwood? How would its interpretation have been justified? This we already know: it would have been understood, and justified, in terms of thought, reasons, and purposes, viz. in terms of the absolute presupposition supposedly in question.

In short then, none of the documents which Collingwood inherited could have been used to verify/undermine his AP about the rationality of historical actions. This presupposition itself would always have served as the 'yardstick' by which such documents were ultimately judged.[166]

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a new problem, the problem of its own authenticity." IH, 242.

[164] "The only way in which the historian or anyone else can judge...of [a statement's] truth is by considering [its] relation [to evidence]..." A statement incapable of being justified in terms of it is, to the historian, "a thing of no interest." IH, 246. See also A, 128, 130-31, and EM, 69, 235.

[165] E.g. An ancient writer says that the Antonine Wall was intended to serve as a defensive frontier. Does the available archaeological evidence back up this statement? The answer, in this case, is 'no': The Antonine Wall is known to have been considerably smaller than Hadrian's Wall; its flanks were unprotected; it had no milecastles nor turrets; and it was built from clay and turf instead of stone. Roman Britain, pp.140-148.
See also Debbins, Essays in the Philosophy of History, xiv-xv, and the murder case in IH, p.276. Both sources emphasize the priority of physical evidence over statements for C.

[166] See EM, 193.

6. Conclusion 1:

It is time now to review the course, and the results, of this long investigation. We shall start at the beginning.

Collingwood's central claim in the Essay on Metaphysics was this: there exist special sorts of presuppositions that underpin the logic of any piece of scientific inquiry. These presuppositions are not acquired from experience. Nor are they capable of being verified, or undermined by it. They are, instead, 'absolute' presuppositions; ones "which a man takes as fundamental and incontrovertible, which he assumes as true in all his thinking and acting."[167]

The main business of this thesis was to defend this bold stand. But in order to do that, we needed to do some preliminary work first. We needed to examine the method proposed by Collingwood for uncovering absolute presuppositions in the first place, viz. the 'logic of question and answer'. This examination revealed two important things.

First, it revealed that the technique of interpreting a given piece of inquiry in terms of a logic of question-and-answer was beset by some serious methodological difficulties. For one thing, it overlooked (and hence could not cope with) the very real possibility that several different presuppositions (qua propositions) might have caused a question to arise.[168] For another thing, it denied the ability to determine which of several possible questions might have caused a certain

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[167] from Collingwood's article entitled, 'Ruskin's Philosophy' (as quoted by Rubinoff in Collingwood and the Reform of Metaphysics, p.224).

[168] See p.26

statement to arise.[169] And last but not least, it allowed us to generate perfectly legitimate questions to which Collingwood's own favourite example of an AP ('All events have causes') would have served as a logical response. This was something we should never have been able to do.[170]

The second thing our examination revealed was a defect that was much more penetrating, and much more serious, than these purely technical difficulties. Collingwood had failed to apply his method of analysis in the way that he had promised to.[171] He had failed to show it at work, actually uncovering the sequence of questions and answers (and presuppositions) involved in a specific example of historical/scientific inquiry. This failure was the real flaw of Collingwood's Essay on Metaphysics, we argued. For not only did it serve to undermine our confidence in the workability of his method even further. It blocked, in the process, Collingwood's entire theory about absolute presuppositions -- presuppositions that were supposed to be the product thereof.

It was fairly obvious, then, what needed to be done in the third section of the thesis. We needed to apply Collingwood's method ourselves, and see whether it could in fact do what he said it could. This we decided to do using Collingwood's own historical work. The results were as follows.

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[169] See p.25

[170] viz. we discovered that 'How many events have causes?' was a question that was perfectly capable of having given rise to the (Kantian) AP of 'All events have causes'. see p.24.

[171] See the preface of the Essay. "...I have offered to the reader's attention a few examples of metaphysics itself, in order to show how metaphysical inquiry will be conducted if the principles laid down in the opening chapters are taken as sound."

First, we found that in practice, the technique of unpacking an inquiry and rearranging it logically in terms of questions and answers really did work. Collingwood's conclusions in Roman Britain **did** in fact only make sense as responses to logically prior questions. These questions **were**, moreover, fairly easy to reconstruct. This was due, in part to his 'principle of correlativity' (which we imported from his Autobiography).[172] But it was also due to the fact that in two cases, Collingwood himself indicated the questions to which his work was meant as a response. So that, in our case at least, the problem (noticed before) of determining which of a number of questions a statement might be an answer to did not arise.[173]

Second, we found that, once reconstructed, the logic of question-and-answer implicit in a piece of inquiry really **did** terminate in the way Collingwood said it would. It really did terminate in presuppositions that were 'absolute'. This impression was confirmed by applying Collingwood's own test. We tried to generate three different types of questions to which Collingwood's own AP (regarding the rationality/purposiveness of historical actions/artifacts) might have served as a logical response. But in each case, we failed. For we found that these questions were either (a) so non-specific that they admitted of a variety of possible responses other than Collingwood's own (thereby violating his principle of correlativity), or (b) that they

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[172] The reader must remember though, that Collingwood could still block our appeal to this principle if he wanted to. The principle of correlativity dictates that the questions we reconstruct must be just as detailed and just as specific as the answers/statements to which they are supposed to have given rise. But this presupposes an understanding of these statements. And this, says Collingwood, is something we just cannot have -- not without knowing the questions to which they serve as responses. See p.26-27.

[173] p.26-27.

had already made an appeal to his presupposition in one form or another, by already supposing reasons/motives to be the dimension on which explanation was to be found.[174]

Third, and last, we found that Collingwood's presupposition (about the inherent rationality of historical actions/artifacts) really was indispensable for his investigations in Roman Britain to have followed the course that they did. For again, without the supposition that Claudius **did** in fact have some motives/reasons for invading Britain, and without the supposition that the Hadrianic Vallum **was** built for specific purposes, the project of determining **what** they were could never have been begun. There would have been no need for it to. The problem would simply not 'arise'. And this, we argued, was true not only of Collingwood's work on Roman Britain. It was true of his entire philosophy of history in general. Without the supposition that

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[174] We should, at this time, point out another problem that has been dissolved. Back in the first section of the thesis, we discovered that we were able to devise two questions to which the Kantian AP, 'all events have causes' would have served as a logical response, (viz. 'What do all events have?', and 'How many events have causes?') This ability reflected a fundamental weakness in Collingwood's method, we argued. It was something that we should never have been able to do.

But we can see now that our criticisms were misguided. Why? (1) 'What do all events have?' is an illegitimate question. It violates the principle of correlativity, in that it does not necessarily entail the statement, 'all events have causes' as a response. It can be answered in almost any way. (2) The question, 'How many events have causes?' is a question that presupposes, or allows for the possibility of, the existence of events that are uncaused. But (if Collingwood is right) this is a presupposition that in Kantian physics was not made. In that period, 'all events have causes' reigned. And from that presupposition, the question of how many events had causes could not 'arise'. See EM, pp.49-55, 179-80.

there **are** in fact 'insides' or thought-sides to every historical artifact/event, the project of penetrating through to them and reconstructing them would simply not 'arise'.

We have seen, then, that Collingwood's logic of question and answer did what he said it could do. It revealed the existence of an 'absolute' presupposition; one that was inconceivable as a response to a logically prior question, yet which underpinned the logic of his practice -- and his theory -- of historical inquiry. But as we pointed out, absolute presuppositions were not defined for Collingwood solely in terms of a logico-analytical method. They were defined (in the Essay) in terms of two other criteria as well. What were these criteria?

The first concerned the subject of their origin. Absolute presuppositions, said Collingwood, were not the sorts of things that were derived, or learned, **from** experience. They were, rather, the sorts of things that the mind brought **to** experience from out of its own 'inner resources'. Did Collingwood's own AP subscribe to this definition? The answer, we suggested, was 'yes'. For clearly, Collingwood could not have been around to learn that the actions of e.g. Claudius were the product of rational, purposive thought. He could not have been around to learn that Roman historical actions in general had 'insides'. Did he, then, form this presupposition based on an **analogy** with his own experience? No, we argued; this implied a constancy of mind (and human nature) over time that Collingwood was concerned to deny. Where, then, did this presupposition come from? It came, we suggested, from history; from the thought of past minds 'incapsulated' in Collingwood's own.

The second of the criteria by which Collingwood defined absolute presuppositions concerned the matter of their justification. Absolute presuppositions, said Collingwood, could be neither

verified nor undermined by the verdict of experience. They were, instead, the 'yardsticks' by which experience was judged.[175] Did the AP he made in Roman Britain bear the weight of this claim? The answer, we argued again, was 'yes'. For clearly, if anything could have verified/undermined his conviction that Hadrian, for example, had some reason for building the Vallum, it could not have been his own experience. Collingwood was, at the time, simply not around to experience, period. The reader might, of course, have objected to this line of thinking. He might have insisted that Collingwood's AP was yet justifiable; that it could have been 'measured' against the 'yardstick' of the written historical documents that were available to him. But this, we argued, would have been impossible. Because for Collingwood, the credibility of written testimony was **itself** perpetually in question. And how was its veracity established? This was the rub. It was established in terms of evidence, evidence that could only be interpreted in terms of rational, purposive thought. In short then, the AP that Collingwood made in Roman Britain could never have admitted of external verification/refutation. It would, instead, have always been the 'yardstick' by which external sources were judged.

To sum up: Our application of Collingwood's method to his work in Roman Britain has revealed a presupposition that is absolute not only in the formal sense (i.e. in the sense of being inconceivable as a response to some logically prior question.) It has revealed a presupposition that satisfies the more descriptive claims that he made about AP's in the Essay as well.

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[175] Essay, p.193-194, 173.

7. Conclusion 2: Why does any of this matter? Why is it important?

The objectives of this thesis have been met. We have uncovered a presupposition involved in Collingwood's own work that is 'absolute' in the sense(s) defined by him in the Essay on Metaphysics. And we have done so using the method of analysis that he himself prescribes, but never applies.

But the question now comes: Why is any of this important? **What does it really matter** that the thinking of one isolated figure in the history of philosophy turned out to be founded on something which he took 'absolutely' for granted? Of what possible consequence can such knowledge and the search for it be to the problems of modern life?

The answer is simple: it is of every possible consequence. For the past from which the present grew is not dead and gone. It remains alive, influencing the thought and course of the present. An investigation into the AP's made by someone like Collingwood is, accordingly, no mere intellectual dalliance. It is no mere academic exercise. It is, instead, an investigation of the thought, and the presuppositions, that have gone into shaping the way we think and live in the present. Only when the power of **that** inheritance is fully understood will we put ourselves in

a real position to choose. Only when we understand the nature of the limitations it imposes will we truly become free.[176]

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[176] If my portrayal of Collingwood's philosophy of history sounds psychoanalytical, that's because it is. Psychoanalysis is loosely defined as a technique which renders conscious the contents of the unconscious mind. So too it is with history. By using its methods correctly, we bring to the fore the presuppositions that we have inherited, presuppositions that have long guided our thought and action, but of whose existence we were largely unaware. The effect? Greater self-consciousness, which in turn promotes a greater capacity for choice and self-determination.

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