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NOM DE L'AUTEUR / NAME OF AUTHOR:	Chinatsu Kobayashi
ADRESSE POSTALE / MAILING ADDRESS:	716-200 Kensington Westmount, Quebec H3Z 2G7
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FACULTÉ DES ÉTUDES SUPÉRIEURES
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FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND
POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

KOBAYASHI, Chinatsu

AUTEUR DE LA THÈSE - AUTHOR OF THESIS

Ph. D. (Philosophy)

GRADE - DEGREE

Philosophy

FACULTÉ, ÉCOLE, DÉPARTEMENT - FACULTY, SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT

TITRE DE LA THÈSE - TITLE OF THE THESIS

Collingwood on Re-enactment:
Understanding in History and Interpretation in Art

M. Marion

DIRECTEUR DE LA THÈSE - THESIS SUPERVISOR

EXAMINATEURS DE LA THÈSE - THESIS EXAMINERS

H. Aronovitch

D. Davies

D. Duman

D. Tawguay

J.-M. De Koninck, Ph.D.

LE DOYEN DE LA FACULTÉ DES ÉTUDES
SUPÉRIEURES ET POSTDOCTORALES

SIGNATURE

J.-M. De Koninck
DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE
AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

COLLINGWOOD ON RE-ENACTMENT:
UNDERSTANDING IN HISTORY AND
INTERPRETATION IN ART

By

Chinatsu Kobayashi, B.A., M.A.

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree
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Abstract

In this thesis, I aim at an interpretation of some central parts of the philosophy of R. G. Collingwood. My fundamental hypothesis is that in his writings in the philosophy of history and in the philosophy of art, Collingwood developed a general theory of understanding. This theory, which is based on his views on mind and language, is meant to apply to both cases: the understanding of actions of historical agents, or re-enactment, and the interpretation of the work of art.

In chapter 1, I present, after some biographical remarks, some of the intellectual sources of Collingwood. My main thesis is that Collingwood retained one element essential to the epistemology of his Oxford predecessors, idealists and realists alike, namely their opposition to subjective idealism. This is the origin of what I have called Collingwood's *objectivism*.

In chapter 2, I examine Collingwood's philosophy of mind, which forms the basis of his general theory. I show that it is not at all obsolete, as he anticipated Ryle's well-known critique of Cartesian dualism and he moved gradually to a full linguistic philosophy, not far from Wittgenstein's.

In chapter 3, I examine Collingwood's notion of re-enactment in the philosophy of history. I show that it is not to be understood as a psychological notion, akin to either Croce's *intuizione* or Dilthey's *Verstehen*. I also show that, according to Collingwood, in re-enactment it is the literally *same* thought that is grasped by the historian, not a copy of it. This objectivist element is a distinguishing feature of Collingwood's theory of understanding. Furthermore, I argue that Collingwood develops an anti-realist epistemology, which blends this objectivism with an ontological realism, while rejecting a strong conception of historical truth, which would transcend available evidence.

In chapter 4, after a careful definition of the terms, I argue that Collingwood's position amounts to a minimal form of historicism and relativism. I reject the so-called "radical conversion hypothesis."

In chapter 5, I examine Collingwood's aesthetic theory and philosophy of art. I argue that it differs in essential ways from Croce's, it is not a form of 'ideal theory'. I also show that Collingwood argues for objectivity in art by extending his remarks about understanding in language to the interpretation of the work of art. He thus allows for the sharing of the emotions expressed by the artist. I finally point out that this sharing of emotions by the artist and the audience is at the basis of Collingwood's anti-individualistic philosophy of art, whose central claim is that art is the community's struggle against the corruption of consciousness.

In the conclusion, I situate Collingwood's theory of understand within the current panorama, half-way between the post-Quinean analytic philosophers, whose naturalism he rejects, and the continental philosophers, whose relativism he also rejects.

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I should first like to express my gratitude to Mrs. Teresa Smith for her permission to quote passages from her father R. G. Collingwood's manuscripts; to the Bodleian Library, especially to Mr. Oliver House for helping my research during my short visit there.

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Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Mathieu Marion, who introduced Collingwood to me and who helped me at every stage from the beginning to completion of this thesis.

Abbreviations

Books by R. G. Collingwood

- A: *An Autobiography*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939.
- EM: *An Essay on Metaphysics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, rev. ed., 1998.
- EPH: *Essays in the Philosophy of History*, W. Debbins (ed.) Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965.
- EPM: *An Essay on Philosophical Method*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933.
- IH: *The Idea of History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, rev. ed., 1993.
- OPA: *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art*. Reprint. Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1997.
- NL: *The New Leviathan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, rev. ed., 1990.
- PA: *The Principles of Art*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938.
- PH: *The Principles of History and Other Writings*. W. H. Dray and J. van der Dussen (eds.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.
- RPh: *Religion and Philosophy*. London: Macmillan, 1916.
- SM: *Speculum Mentis*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924.

Books about Collingwood

- HR: W. H. Dray, *History as Re-enactment: R. G. Collingwood's Idea of History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.
- HS: W. J. Van der Dussen, *History as a Science: The Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981.
- LPC: A. Donagan, *The Later Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.
- MHD: L. O. Mink, *Mind, History, and Dialectic: The Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969.

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Introduction

Art is the community's medicine for the worst disease of mind, the corruption of consciousness.

Robin George Collingwood

If we too, as lovers of poetry, exert what strength we have, we shall have done the duty of our station.

Benedetto Croce

Robin George Collingwood (1889-1943) held one of the most prestigious chairs in British universities, as Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy at Oxford from 1935 until 1941. Today, he is a largely forgotten figure. His successor, Gilbert Ryle, who had a huge influence on English-speaking philosophy in mid-twentieth century philosophy, wrote a review of Collingwood's *Essay on Philosophical Method* [EPM] in 1937, in which he classified him, "for what such labels are worth, as an Idealist" [Ryle 1990: II, 101]. Collingwood did not accept this label, and exchanged some letters with Ryle on that occasion. Already in 1921, Collingwood was complaining to his friend, the Italian de Ruggiero, that he found the English Idealists "a real nuisance and my chief enemies" [HS: 24]. Later, in his *Autobiography*, he wrote that he had "arrived at conclusions of his own quite unlike the school of Green [i.e., British idealists] had taught" [A: 56]. But the label "idealist" remained stuck to his name. As a matter of fact, Collingwood is more often than not referred to as the last representative of the school of "neo-Hegelianism" or "British Idealism". This is a movement that reached its zenith around the end of the nineteenth century. It can reasonably be described as the dominant philosophical school in Great Britain from the 1880s to the 1920s, but by the 1930s it was all but gone, and buried once

and for all in the 1940s. Collingwood is generally held to have been the last major representative of that movement, to have outlived the existence of the very movement to which he is said to have belonged; he is thus perceived as irremediably *passé*, and even during his lifetime was regarded as the last defender of superseded, obsolete theses, and the target of easy but shallow criticisms. It is not to be denied that Collingwood's philosophy has affinities with "idealism" but in this thesis I wish to present an interpretation not of the whole but of some central parts of his philosophy that should change our perspective towards it. I shall try and picture Collingwood not as the last representative of a dying philosophical school but very much as a philosopher of his time. I shall try and show that he did not merely repeat the theses that he had learned from his elders but that he propounded his own views and supported them with *new* arguments that were every bit as "linguistic" as were, in the middle of the twentieth century, those of luminaries such as Ryle and Wittgenstein. In other words, he deserves not condemnation to oblivion but reconsideration.

Despite this neglect, one still comes across Collingwood's name, mostly in the philosophy of history and of art. The reasons for this are very simple and have to do with the influence of logical positivism over English-speaking philosophy in the mid-twentieth century. In the philosophy of history, a single thesis was set forth that almost brought about the disappearance of that very field, namely the claim, famously put forth by Carl Hempel, that history could only pretend to the status of science if it uses *the* method of the natural sciences, namely the so-called hypothetico-deductive method or "covering-law model". In the twentieth century, Collingwood was the only major English-speaking philosopher who propounded a fully developed alternative view, in his posthumously published *The Idea of History* [IH]. He was thus the target of facile criticisms. Being perceived as an old-style idealist, Collingwood was wrongly identified with

unfashionable philosophers such as Croce or Dilthey. Indeed, Collingwood's notion of "re-enactment" is routinely confused with Dilthey's notion of *Nacherleben*, that had been the original target of Hempel's criticisms. Worse, Collingwood's own pupil and literary executor, T. M. Knox, is responsible for the single most damaging claim about Collingwood, namely the claim that he converted in 1936-38 to a radical and indefensible form of historicism [Knox 1946: x-xi], which sounds very much like Croce's repeated attempts at dissolving philosophy into history (e.g., [Croce 1917: part II, chap. IV], [Croce 1921: part I, app. III], [Croce 1955: part II]). In this thesis, which is mainly of an exegetical nature, I shall refute such misrepresentations of Collingwood's philosophy of history in Chapters 3 and 4.

William Dray was the only major figure in the philosophy of history who tried to use Collingwood's ideas in order to set forth, with his "rational explanation model" an alternative to Hempel's "covering-law model"; it is probably thanks to his continued efforts, beginning in *Laws and Explanation in History* [Dray 1957a] and culminating in *History as Re-Enactment: R. G. Collingwood's Idea of History* [Dray 1999], that Collingwood's name has not been relegated to footnotes. Today, it is clear that hardly any historian would take seriously the claims of the logical positivists and philosophers themselves have moved away from such simplifications; in particular, hardly any philosopher of science believes in the creed of the unity of science which motivated Hempel's work. But Collingwood is still not receiving his due credit because he is still perceived as having been soundly refuted by someone whose philosophical programme has nevertheless also been found to be unsustainable.

Another deleterious influence of logical positivism was the almost complete disappearance of aesthetics and the philosophy of art in the English-speaking world. It is not exactly as if such

studies had been thriving during the heyday of idealism¹ but there had been much written which is of value during Victorian times; one merely has to think of John Ruskin, the greatest art critic of the nineteenth century. By contrast, the topic of aesthetics had almost disappeared in the British philosophical world by mid-twentieth century. Again, Collingwood stands alone in twentieth-century English-speaking philosophy for having developed a philosophy of art in *The Principles of Art* [PA]. As a result, his name crops up in textbooks but his aesthetic theory is invariably dismissed. Again, the association of Collingwood with “idealism” provides the pretext. In his very influential book on *Art and its Objects*, Richard Wollheim spoke of a “Croce-Collingwood theory” and then proceeded to demolish it in a few pages [Wollheim 1980: 99-100], which sealed the fate of Collingwood’s theory. It is claimed that these authors believed that the work of art is first given full elaboration in the artist’s mind and only then given external expression through a given medium. It is then argued that this theory is mistaken because it does not take into account the essential role of the medium. Against this false identification and obviously incompetent reading of Collingwood, Aaron Ridley stands virtually alone, with his astute and very accurate interpretation [Ridley 1997, 1998, 2002]. I shall, in his wake, refute this “Croce-Collingwood theory” in Chapter 5.

In this thesis, I shall try and provide the *prima facie* case for a rehabilitation of Collingwood not only by providing the exegetical analyses that I just mentioned. It is not sufficient to point out that Collingwood on re-enactment in history or interpretation in art has been generally misunderstood. I wish to show, on the basis of my exegetical work in Chapters 2 to 5, that both cases are merely particular cases of a more general and very coherent theory of “understanding” that Collingwood, in a very typically empiricist or English way, worked from the ground up, so

¹ The two notable exceptions before Collingwood’s *The Principle of Arts* in 1938 were [Bosanquet 1892],

to speak, by case studies in what are the most problematic areas, art and history. This general theory will very briefly be outlined in the Conclusion. Ultimately, one should see that Collingwood's theory of understanding is an interesting alternative to the currently fashionable approaches, i.e., on the one hand, the more naturalistic theories developed in the wake of Quine's *Word and Object* and Davidson's "principle of charity" or the new simulation theory in psychology, and, on the other hand, more relativistic theories such as Gadamer's "hermeneutics". I shall say a few words to that effect in my short conclusion. My task is not, of course, to arbitrate the debate between these various competing approaches to "understanding", but to give Collingwood's theory its rightful place among them.

I shall thus provide what is at best a partial, incomplete interpretation of Collingwood's philosophy. This is the price to pay for. I shall thus put aside for the most part books such as *Speculum Mentis* [SM] or the *Essay on Philosophical Method* [EPM], where Collingwood is at his most systematic and where his systematic tendencies reflect very much his neo-Hegelian heritage. I shall therefore focus on the details of his writings in the philosophy of history and in aesthetics; and, in order to bring out the essentially innovative nature of Collingwood's ideas, I shall avoid embedding these in arcane and, after all, superficial systematic considerations, e.g., about the "scales of forms" in *Essay on Philosophical Method*. I shall rather base my interpretation of the central notions of "re-enactment", "interpretation", "understanding", etc. upon a reading of Collingwood's philosophy of mind, presented in Chapter 2, that brings out its originality—it does not suffer from a comparison with Ryle or Wittgenstein.

I should also point out that it is not my intention to provide a full account of either Collingwood's philosophy of history or of his aesthetic theory. Collingwood's thoughts in these

[Alexander 1933]. On the topic of aesthetics within the British Idealist movement, see [Sweet 2001].

domains have many ramifications that will not be explored here. Moreover, I did not set as my task a defence of Collingwood's views in these fields. To give only one example, it is sometimes claimed that Collingwood's focus on the re-enactment of the thoughts of historical agents is too narrow: history is then limited to the actions of major historical agents such as Julius Caesar. Moreover, it would seem to limit the historical evidence, available for the re-enactment of the thoughts of historical agents, to written testimony: pottery sherds, for example, seem *prima facie* useless. Such criticisms can easily be deflected. To begin with, such criticisms are based on sheer ignorance of Collingwood's own historical work, e.g., *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* [Collingwood & Myres 1936]. In the *The Idea of History*, Collingwood defined "evidence" as:

[...] a collective name for things which singly are called documents, and a document is a thing existing here and now, of such a kind that the historian, by thinking about it, can get answers to the questions he asks about past events. [IH: 10]

It is clear from this definition that the notion of evidence covers more than, e.g., written texts. Collingwood's famous criticism of "scissors and paste" history (i.e., history that merely relies on testimony from authorities) included the idea that, since the seventeenth century, the basis of history had to be broadened "by making use of non-literary sources" [IH: 258].² As commentators noted, "critical document study cannot alone produce the sort of history he seeks" [Cebik 1970: 70]. In what follows, it will become clear that in his historical analyses, he relied on broader forms of evidence, including the results of archaeological work; as a matter of fact, he tried to broaden the field of available evidence in his study of folklore (see Chapter 1, section 1). Collingwood was one of the most important British archaeologists of his generation and his

² In 'The Nature and Aims of a Philosophy of History', he also wrote that: "No competent historian who reflects on the progress of his own thought can overlook the way in which that progress has created masses of evidence bearing on questions concerning which there was once no evidence whatever" [EPH: 52].

reflections on historical understanding are derived, as he himself claims, from his practise as an archaeologist and therefore do not merely apply to the interpretation of written documents.³

This is just one example of an easily refuted, naive objection to Collingwood, which is arises from ignorance of his texts. Although I shall state the case for Collingwood against some critics, my task is not, in general, that of a simultaneous defence of his philosophy of history and of his aesthetics against all possible critics. It is an attempt to provide an interpretation of the central notions of “re-enactment” and “interpretation”.

³ A good example of this is Collingwood’s discussion of the imaginary case of an excavation at “Highbury”, where his method of “re-enactment” is applied to artifacts such as “loom-weights”, etc. [PH: 63-67].

Chapter 1

The Background

In this first Chapter, I should like first to present a brief biography of Collingwood, in order to give some information about his intellectual background. The information given will be incomplete, as I wish merely to focus on a few points of importance for my interpretation. Secondly, I shall discuss some of the philosophical influences that helped shaping Collingwood's philosophical outlook; here too, the information is incomplete and not meant to provide an overall picture of Collingwood's philosophical background: I wish merely to focus on a few points of great importance for the following chapters. One such point will be the contentious heritage of his "realist" teachers, Cook Wilson, Prichard and Carritt; the other will be the "objective idealism" of Lotze and Bradley, which Collingwood constantly opposed to "subjective idealism".¹ It forms the invariant background to his philosophy. This "objectivism" as I shall call it, will indeed not be abandoned but simply be transformed in the later philosophy in a linguistic thesis about the public, hence, objective character of thoughts. This will be shown in Chapter 2, section 1 and, especially, in Chapter 3, section 2. As already said, the foregoing analyses are not meant to be exhaustive but merely indicative. A proper understanding of Collingwood's "objectivism" would require not only a detailed study of the metaphysics of

¹ When making last modifications to this thesis, Giuseppina D'oro's *Collingwood and the Metaphysics of Experience* [D'Oro 2002b] came to my attention, which covers much the same ground. Alas, it was not possible at such a late stage, to take it into account.

authors such as Lotze and Bradley, it would require detailed analyses of lengthy manuscripts that are still unpublished.

§ 1. Collingwood's Life and Thoughts

Collingwood was born on 22 February 1889 at Coniston, the only son of William Gershom Collingwood.² His father was very close to John Ruskin and became, late in Ruskin's life, his private secretary. He published a two-volume study of *The Life and works of John Ruskin* [Collingwood 1893]. Many scholars have pointed out that the young Collingwood was influenced by Ruskin through his father, who had educated him at home until, at the age of thirteen, he went to Rugby.³ However, although one of Collingwood's earliest pieces was devoted to Ruskin,⁴ this influence really amounted to little which is tangible, over and above vaguely resembling concerns and emphases; this much can be explained by the fact that there is hardly a systematic philosophy to be extracted from Ruskin's works.⁵ Perhaps it is more a matter of a "Ruskinian attitude" [McCallum 1943: 463].⁶ Collingwood's father also taught him lessons in Greek and Latin and in ancient and modern history [A: 1]. Collingwood had an early interest

² Collingwood published his *Autobiography* [A] just prior to the war in 1939. It is considered not entirely accurate. For short biographical presentations, see his obituary by R. B. McCallum [McCallum 1943] and [Boucher 1995a].

³ For example, [McCallum 1943: 463], [Johnston 1967: 28-30 & 64-65], [Jones 1969], [Häyry 1994], [Boucher 1995a: 1].

⁴ *Ruskin's Philosophy*, reprinted in [Collingwood 1964: 5-41]. Following a suggestion by his father and in agreement with his "neo-Hegelian" leanings, at the time, Collingwood argued that Ruskin was an Hegelian philosopher. He interpreted, for example, the remark quoted in the next footnote as proof of this. But Ruskin had little philosophical knowledge and never read Hegel.

⁵ Ruskin famously wrote that "I am never satisfied that I have handled a subject properly till I have contradicted myself at least three times" (quoted in [Hewison 1976: 206]). On the highly unclassifiable ideas of Ruskin, see [Landow 1971] and [Hewison 1976].

⁶ David Boucher also agrees that there could not have been a substantial influence from Ruskin, see [Boucher 1989b: 3-4].

in natural sciences such as geology, astronomy and physics about which he also read a lot.⁷ He first read a philosophy book, by Descartes, at the age of nine [A: 1]. However, his father's greatest intellectual debt was perhaps his passion for archaeology. Not only was Collingwood to become a renowned archaeologist and a prominent scholar of Roman Britain, his interest in archaeology was to shape his views on historical method and understanding.

Collingwood did not appreciate his life in Rugby, because his teachers did not impress him. Nevertheless, he made his life there profitable and started playing the violin and studying harmony and counterpoint and orchestration, and learned modern languages in order to read poetry by foreign authors such as Dante [A: 7]. In 1908, Collingwood won a scholarship to University College, Oxford, where his father had studied. About Collingwood's studies in philosophy, I shall say more in section 2 below. He got a first in Classical Moderations and a first in Final Honours in *Literae Humaniores*. He obtained his first appointment as a tutor in philosophy at Pembroke in 1912.

Collingwood had already started his career as an archaeologist with his father and he attended classes at Oxford on Roman Britain given by the reputed Professor F. J. Haverfield (1860-1919), one of the great figures in the history of archaeology. He was to become very close to another major figure in British archaeology, F. G. Simpson (1882-1955), whose approach to excavation on Hadrian's wall is said to have "profoundly influenced" Collingwood's own methodology [Richmond 1948: 478]. From Haverfield's and Simpson's *practise*, which he made his own, he learned what is *the* central lesson of his own *theoretical* work, namely that one cannot start digging without having a prior hypothesis or *question* for which one is seeking an

⁷ Collingwood's knowledge of natural sciences would remain, however, weak. See, for example, the critical remarks in [Toulmin 1972].

answer. Collingwood was in turn a very influential archaeologist, whose influence was decisive on leading figures of the next generation such as I. A. Richmond and E. B. Birley.

In 1913, he was given by Haverfield his first independent command, at a Roman fort at Ambleside. Collingwood was in charge of excavations at this site until their completion in 1920, a task which he was said to have accomplished with “diligence and ability”, his work on the Agricolan fort buried below the Hadrianic had been, according to Richmond, “neither imitated nor equalled” in his times [Richmond 1943: 476]. He would continue excavations and report on his findings throughout his career, excavating not only Roman but also sometimes Saxon sites, as in Penrith, where he reputedly made his biggest archaeological blunder [Richmond 1943: 479], [Hodder 1995: 377-378]. Collingwood published extensively on archaeological matters (see the rather impressive bibliography in [Richmond 1943: 481-485]). His most notable publications in this field are his books on *The Archaeology of Roman Britain* [Collingwood 1930], which is the very first textbook on the subject, and the posthumously published book (with R. P. Wright) on *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain* [Collingwood 1965], which show his mastery of the art of draughtsmanship. This book is in fact Collingwood’s rather belated contribution to T. Mommsen’s *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* [HS: 221].

It is reported, however, that, despite his substantial achievements, Collingwood considered archaeological excavations always as “a side-line or hobby”; his primary topic was always philosophy [McCallum 1943: 464]. However, it would be wrong to believe that the two endeavours were unrelated. In chapter XI of his *Autobiography*, Collingwood explicitly stated that *the very principles of his philosophy of history originated in his practise as an archaeologist* [A: 120-146]. Collingwood strongly believed philosophy to be a reflection on the various human activities and he believed that one was not fully qualified for such reflection unless one had first-

hand knowledge of the activities in question. In other words, his activity as an archaeologist and historian qualified him, in his own eyes, for reflection on history. (He was also a pianist and a draughtsman; this would qualify him for reflection on aesthetics.)

One of Collingwood's most influential papers about Roman Britain is 'The Purpose of the Roman Wall' [Collingwood 1921], which is a great example of the application of his own "logic of question and answer"; in that paper he was the first to show that, contrary to a still widespread opinion, Hadrian's wall was not a "defensive work but a frontier-mark" [HS 226-228]. This paper, which summarizes evidence uncovered by archaeological work, pertains, however, to the domain of history. Indeed, Collingwood was not just an archaeologist, he was also an historian of Roman Britain. (Jan van der Dussen is right to point out that these activities are not the same [HS: 202].) In the field of history, Collingwood also published extensively and his main contribution was a book on *Roman Britain* (1923) whose extensively revised edition, written in collaboration J. N. L. Myres for the chapter on the Saxon period, so that the part on Roman Britain is known to be entirely from the hand of Collingwood, is entitled *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* [Collingwood & Myres 1936]. In the preface, Collingwood wrote:

A history of the Romano-British people has to be written with attention to the somewhat meagre literary sources, eked out by analogy from those of other provinces; but its material comes mainly from archaeology. This country has been fortunate in having a long and widespread tradition of archaeological interest, and in the last half-century it has enriched and purified this tradition by what is nothing short of a revolution in the scientific method of archaeological research. [Collingwood & Myres 1936: vi]

This remark shows that Collingwood was well aware, since he was ideally placed to derive such a judgement, of the importance of the new evidence brought to light by archaeology in the work of the historian, which could henceforth not rely merely on written testimony; it also shows that Collingwood was also very conscious of the methodological changes in the very discipline

of archaeology that brought about this new, reliable evidence. In general, this book has much philosophical interest, since it contains historical explanations that are examples of his own theories, one of which will be presented in Chapter 3, section 1. I shall not discuss further Collingwood's substantial but sometimes controversial achievements in archaeology (these are discussed in [Richmond 1943] and, more sympathetically, in, e.g., [HS: chap. 5] and [Hodder 1995]), and in history (one will find a very balanced and enlightening review of the book on *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* in [Wheeler 1939]); I wish merely to impress on the reader the fact that Collingwood was a reputed practitioner in both fields: it makes no sense *not* to take this into account when discussing his philosophy of history. It is only when one hives off his own work in history and in archaeology that one can sustain accounts of his philosophy of history that are *prima facie* nonsense, e.g., “idealist” accounts that would deny the reality of the past.

Collingwood was a Christian—with some Jewish ancestry [Knox 1969: 165]—who believed in God, although he was not particularly devout. He was also much interested early on in his career in philosophy of religion and joined a modernist circle headed by B. H. Streeter. This early interest was responsible for the publication of *Religion and Philosophy* [RPh] in 1916, a book with which he rapidly became dissatisfied [A: 43] and the chapter on religion in *Speculum Mentis* [SM] in 1924, another book with which he was, for reasons not having to do with philosophy of religion, altogether dissatisfied, calling it “a bad book in many ways” [A: 56]. Issues in philosophy of religion are only tangential to this thesis and Collingwood's work in that field will not be discussed.⁸ (I shall in general avoid reliance on *Speculum Mentis* as a point of entry into Collingwood's thought. The reasons for this are multiple, having partly to do with the

fact that Collingwood's philosophy actually evolved, e.g., about history, where an important shift is recognized by him to have happened around 1928 [A: 107]—I shall comment on this in Chapter 3, section 3 and Chapter 4.)

Of Collingwood's career, only a brief outline should be given. In 1927, he became University Lecturer in Philosophy and Roman History. In 1928, he was made Delegate of the Press at Oxford University Press; he resigned in 1941, after years of brilliant service. He was elected Fellow of the British Academy in 1934 and a year later was appointed Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy, after the retirement of the idealist philosopher and friend J. A. Smith, and became a Fellow of Magdalen College. He resigned from his Chair in 1941 because of poor health. Collingwood died of pneumonia at the age of 52, on 9 January 1943 at Lanehead.

As a lecturer, Collingwood was much admired. His lectures were sought by many for their clarity and poise. But he had very few pupils. He did not participate much in the social life at Oxford, partly because he bought a house at North Moreton, thirteen miles from Oxford and would stay in College only four nights per week. Collingwood also felt isolated at Oxford. His intellectual sympathies were with British neo-Hegelians, such as F. H. Bradley, T. H. Green, B. Bosanquet, H. H. Joachim and J. A. Smith. That movement rapidly lost ground at Oxford in the 1920s and 1930s. Collingwood lived through a period during which Oxford philosophy, along with British philosophy as a whole, swung away from idealism. In Oxford, it was the realism of his teachers, which he ultimately despised, J. Cook Wilson and H. A. Prichard, which gained ascendancy over the younger generations, paving the way for analytical philosophy, with G. Ryle, A. J. Ayer, J. L. Austin, etc. (This topic will be further discussed in the next section.) At

⁸ For more biographical details about Collingwood's religious involvement, see Chapter IV of James Patrick's *The*

any rate, Collingwood appears to have stayed away from the philosophical life at Oxford. When attending lectures and discussions groups, usually in the company of Clement Webb, he would rarely intervene. According to Knox, he simply “believed that philosophical disputation is ‘unprofitable’” [Knox 1969: 165]. Gilbert Ryle once summarized Collingwood’s (lack of) influence by saying: “Philosophy got moving at Oxford without his participation” [Ryle 1970: 14].

Perhaps under the influence of J. A. Smith, who discovered books by Benedetto Croce during a stay in Naples in 1908 [Smith 1924: 230-231], or E. F. Carritt, who claimed to have discovered his *Aesthetics* a bit earlier [Carritt 1953: 452], Collingwood became interested in Italian philosophy. One of Collingwood’s first publications is a translation in 1913 of Croce’s book on *The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico* [Croce 1913]. He also published a translation of Croce’s *Autobiography* in 1927 [Croce 1927] but his translation of Croce’s *Aesthetics* did not appear under his name (For this story, see [Knox 1969: 165].) According to Knox, Collingwood used to say that “Vico had influenced him more than anyone else” [Knox 1946: viii]. It is true that Collingwood’s approach to historical understanding and re-enactment falls within the scope of the tradition inaugurated by Vico’s principle that *verum et factum convertuntur*, which Collingwood himself understood in those terms:

[...] the condition of being able to know anything truly, to understand it as opposed to merely perceiving it, is that the knower himself should have made it [...] history, which is emphatically something made by the human mind, is especially adapted to be an object of human knowledge. [IH: 64-65]

(The implicit reference here is to Vico’s famous remark in *The New Science*, § 331: “that the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind” [Vico 1984: 96].)

Croce and Collingwood became friends, Croce visiting England in 1923. Collingwood was always deferential to the older, more imposing figure of Croce, but often independent and often very critical, for example when he clearly rejected Croce's historicism and assimilation of philosophy to history in 'Croce's Philosophy of History' [Collingwood 1965: 3-22]. Collingwood was also acquainted with Giovanni Gentile, whose sympathies for fascism he found repugnant, and the liberal Guido de Ruggiero, whom he much admired. He translated two of de Ruggiero's books, including the masterpiece on *The History of European Liberalism* [Ruggiero 1927]. These connections with the Italians,⁹ which were out of the ordinary in British philosophy at the time (even more so today), are usually not perceived as proof of Collingwood's open-mindedness and disregard of prejudices but as giving ground to the idea that Collingwood's aesthetics and philosophy of history are but a variant of Croce's. It is true that one finds similar sounding remarks in their works but, when properly worked out, their conceptions appear to be at variance. I shall not argue this point systematically, as I cannot pretend to be a specialist of Croce, but will discuss the differences in relation to the philosophy of history in Chapter 3, section 1 and in relation to aesthetics in Chapter 5, section 1.

Collingwood's health was poor. He suffered from an early age from insomnia. In 1932, he suffered a mental breakdown and had to take a term's leave from Pembroke [Boucher 1995a: 4]. He further suffered a series of increasingly debilitating strokes from 1938 until his death. This might explain a sense of urgency that might have led Collingwood to publish as much as possible in the last years of his life. He took up sailing in 1938 in order to restore his health but narrowly escaped drowning in the Channel. He published his account of a sailing trip to Greece with students in *The First Mate's Log* [Collingwood 1940]. It was also on the occasion of a trip from

⁹ On these, see [Connelly 1995].

England to Java by boat in 1938-39 that Collingwood wrote *An Essay in Metaphysics* [EM] and the posthumously published but alas now incomplete manuscript *The Principles of History* [PH].

Collingwood's poor health in his later years is a matter of importance because his pupil and editor T. M. Knox insinuated that his sudden and radical conversion to historicism was caused by his reduced mental powers [IH: xxi]. In Chapter 4, I shall argue that there was no such radical conversion; if so, it is thus plain that Knox's remark was incorrect. It is also highly inappropriate to "excuse" someone for alleged philosophical mistakes on the grounds that one's mental powers have vanished. To add a lighter touch to these matters, however, there is also the following anecdote by John Mabbott (a minor figure at Oxford, who was of the same generation as his friend Ryle):

Many of my friends were all agog about Freud and his obvious relevance for problems concerning free will and morals. We were content to read 'The Interpretation of Dreams' but Collingwood went off and was psychoanalysed—the full fifty session process—so that he could reflect on something first-hand. I fear it did him serious harm. I thought at the time that it increased the introverted, defensive side of him, and I feel sure it contributed to his later break-down. [Mabbott 1986: 76]

At his death, Collingwood left behind many manuscripts, now deposited at the Bodleian Library in Oxford.¹⁰ Some of these manuscripts served as the basis for the publication after the Second World War of *The Idea of History* [IH] and *The Idea of Nature* [IN] by Malcolm Knox. The manuscript on *The Principles of History* [PH] was discovered at Oxford University Press in 1995 and published in 1999 along with a number of shorter pieces. New editions of *The New Leviathan* in 1992, *The Idea of History* in 1993 and *An Essay on Metaphysics* in 1998 also contain new material (literally hundreds of pages) taken from the unpublished manuscripts. Of

¹⁰ R. A. Burchnell, 'Catalogue of the Papers of Robin George Collingwood (1889-1943)', Dep. Collingwood 1-28, Bodleian Library, 1994. While studying for this thesis I was only able to have access to the Collingwood papers at Oxford for one day. Some of the passages that I transcribed will be quoted in the next section.

the material not yet published, two items are worth mentioning. First, a manuscript sometimes referred to (e.g., in [HS: 450]) under the name of ‘Realism and Idealism’, which is 145 pages long [MS: 20/1]. It is not dated but conjectured to be the lecture notes for a course on ‘Central Problems in Metaphysics’ in 1935. It is probably the fullest statement of Collingwood’s metaphysics. It will be discussed briefly in the next section.

The other item is in fact a series of manuscripts on folklore probably dating from 1936-37 and ranging over 200 pages [MS: 21/1-13]. It seems that folklore and anthropology are to be added to the already long list of Collingwood’s interests. It is possible but difficult to prove that Collingwood’s interest in these topics derives from his reading of Vico. At any rate, it certainly places him firmly in the tradition of Vico and Herder—authors that had been studied by one of Collingwood’s own students, Isaiah Berlin [Berlin 1976].¹¹ Jan van der Dussen is the only commentator to have studied these manuscripts and written about them [HS: 183-191].¹² They form the background to the chapter on ‘Art and Magic’ in *The Principles of Art* [PA: 57-77], in which Collingwood roundly condemned the anthropology of Tylor, Frazer, Lévy-Bruhl, etc. for being “a half-conscious conspiracy to bring into ridicule and condemn civilizations different from our own” [PA: 60]. But the main purpose of Collingwood was, according to van der Dussen, to develop an approach to fairy tales that would allow us to use them as historical evidence; a view which is certainly fashionable today but which was an anathema in his days, when admissible historical evidence was limited mainly to official documents (written testimony) and—this was at the time an innovation—archaeological findings. Consequently, Collingwood studied carefully the philological approach of Grimm and Müller, the psychoanalytical approach of Freud and the functional approach of Frazer in *The Golden Bough*

¹¹ Berlin’s philosophy of history was much influenced by Collingwood’s. See [Marion 1999].

[Frazer 1951]. Collingwood believed that all these approaches were defective because they were naturalistic:

Each of them treats its subject-matter as something to be contemplated from without, something external to the thinker, something that is not himself but something else. (Quoted in [HS: 184].)

Of Frazer, Collingwood wrote in particular that:

[...] he approaches his subject-matter as a thing external to himself and the civilization which he feels as his own: without any attempt to work himself into the spirit of it and to re-create in his own mind the experiences whose outward expression he is studying. (Quoted in [HS: 185].)

Collingwood's criticisms are clearly from the point of view of someone standing in the tradition of Vico. On the other hand, the connections between Collingwood's and Wittgenstein's criticisms of Frazer would be an interesting topic for a comparative study. Wittgenstein also condemned Frazer for being unable "to understand a different way of life from the English one of his time" [Wittgenstein 1979: 5] and thought that Frazer's naturalistic approach was "nonsense":

[...] one might begin a book on anthropology in this way: When we watch the life and behaviour of men all over the earth we see that apart from what we might call animal activities, taking food, &c., &c., men also carry out actions that bear a peculiar character and might be called ritualistic.

But it is nonsense if we go on to say that the characteristic feature of *these* actions is that they spring from wrong ideas about the physics of things. (This is what Frazer does when he says magic is really false physics, or as the case may be, false medicine, technology, &c.) [Wittgenstein 1979: 7]

Further and much deeper points of contact between Collingwood and Wittgenstein will be presented in Chapter 2.

¹² There are also interesting remarks in [Boucher 1992: xxix].

§ 2. Oxford Realism and Objective Idealism

When Collingwood arrived in 1908, the philosophical world at Oxford was divided into two camps, the idealists and the realists, while pragmatism had only one adherent, F. C. S. Schiller. It is not possible to provide an adequate definition of “idealism”, but Wilhelm Windelband’s in *A History of Philosophy* will suffice for my purpose:

[...] by “idealism” is understood the dissolution or resolution (*Auflösung*) of the world of experience in the process of consciousness. [Windelband 1926: 569n.]

According to most history books, British philosophy in general and Oxford was dominated at the turn of the century by a peculiar, native form of idealism which is often called “neo-Hegelianism”. This movement originates in the writings of Ferrier, Grote, and two influential Oxonians: T. H. Green and E. Caird. A second generation of “neo-Hegelians” included further key figures from Oxford: B. Bosanquet, F. H. Bradley, R. L. Nettleship, W. Wallace. To these one might add the figures of J. A. Stewart, White’s Professor of Moral Philosophy (1897-1927), J. A. Smith, Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy (1910-1935), and H. H. Joachim, Wykeham Professor of Logic (1919-1935). The control over these principal Chairs in the 1920s hides the fact that the last two of them had been previously held by two staunch proponents of realism, Thomas Case and John Cook Wilson [Marion 2002a, 2002b]. As Professor Marion has shown, idealism never really dominated the philosophical scene in Oxford [Marion 2000]. Cook Wilson had the ascendancy over the younger generations in the 1890s and 1900s, with pupils such as H. W. B. Joseph, H. A. Prichard, and E. F. Carritt. (The latter was Collingwood’s tutor at Pembroke and steered him towards the realism of Cook Wilson, but he was to become later a proponent of Croce’s idealistic aesthetics.) Cook Wilson stands at the origin of the movement Oxford Realism, which was to beget in turn the “ordinary language philosophy” that was to

characterize analytical philosophy at Oxford,¹³ a movement to be distinguished from and very critical of the logical positivism imported from Vienna by another famous Oxonian, Sir Alfred Ayer. Philosophers educated in the 1920s, such as W. C. Kneale, J. D. Mabbott, H. H. Price, and G. Ryle and others educated in the 1930s such as J. L. Austin, I. Berlin, H. L. A. Hart and J. O. Urmson were all influenced by the Realism of Cook Wilson, Prichard and Joseph [Marion 2000]. It is in this very milieu, where the likes of H. H. Joachim and J. A. Smith “failed”, in his own words, “to avert the collapse of the school to which they belonged” [A: 18], that Collingwood spent his entire academic career.

Collingwood was told by Carritt to attend lectures by Cook Wilson and Prichard [A: 22] and he described himself in his *Autobiography* as having been at first a “realist” although “not without some reservations” [A: 22]. He also tells how he moved away from realism during the First World War, on the occasion of his daily walks by the Albert Memorial in London: “I forced myself to look, and to face day by day the question: a thing so obviously, so incontrovertibly, so indefensibly bad, why had Scott done it?” [A: 29]. Collingwood describes how he came to develop as a consequence of this realisation a “logic of question and answer”, which is the foundation of his philosophy of history (and, I should claim, of his theory of understanding). He believed that Oxford Realists, by focusing on elementary propositions such as ‘this is red’, rendered plausible their otherwise simple-minded views about knowledge and he accused them further of “historical myopia” [A: 61]. Returning to Oxford after the war, Collingwood read a paper to the Oxford Philosophical Society in 1920 in which he called realism “the undischarged bankrupt of modern philosophy” [A: 45]. (The main argument of that paper will be presented below.) Judging from Collingwood’s expectations and from his disappointment at the results, it

¹³ See [Marion 2000] and the introduction to [Cook Wilson 2002].

seems that this was a particularly meaningful event in his life.¹⁴ As a result of the very negative reaction to his paper (and, presumably, to further exchanges), Collingwood gradually withdrew from any public engagement with the likes of Prichard, and his resentment grew steadily through the 1920s and 1930s. It reached its peak with the publication in 1939—therefore in between the Munich affair, which deeply affected Collingwood, and the beginning of the war—of his *Autobiography*, where, using Berkeley's expression, he called the Oxford Realists "minute philosophers" and described them, in a very controversial remark, as "propagandists of a coming fascism" [A: 167]. This was, as it turns out, a rather gratuitous insult, since figures such as Prichard, Joseph, Ryle, Austin, etc. had no known sympathies for fascism.¹⁵ At any rate, in an unpublished manuscript, Collingwood criticized Giovanni Gentile's interpretation of Croce's philosophy as an unacceptable form of "subjective idealism" [PH: 128] which resulted in a "Fascist thought, egocentric and subjective" [PH: 129], which is the reverse of what he perceived to be the true message of Croce's historicism, i.e., it is a form of "Croce's *antistorismo*" [PH: 129]. It seems, therefore, that in the mind of Collingwood the epithet "fascist" did not qualify a particular form of philosophy.

But the accusation made against the Realists is a rather important key to the understanding of Collingwood's later philosophy, for the following reasons. Contrary to a claim sometimes made, based on scant evidence in the *Essay on Metaphysics* (e.g. [EM: 194]), Collingwood was not a forerunner of the 'sociology of knowledge'. He criticized Marx [IH: 122-126] and he believed, for example, that Rome was destroyed by bad metaphysics, not by barbarian invasions [EM: 224-225]. Similarly, he believed that liberal democracies were threatened in his days—it

¹⁴ See, e.g., the letters quoted in [HS: 22-23] and the remarks in his *Autobiography* [A: 44-55].

seems that the Munich affair in 1938 played a significant role in waking Collingwood up to the reality of European politics—by collective irrationalism (fascism and nazism) to which the realist metaphysics taught at Oxford was apparently opening the door.¹⁶ Furthermore, Collingwood believed that metaphysics is an integral, necessary part of civilization and the elimination of metaphysics proposed by the logical positivists (in particular, A. J. Ayer at Oxford) would also open the door to irrationalism [EM: 169-171 & 342-343].¹⁷ Such beliefs, erroneous or not, explain the critical remarks against the Oxford Realists and the logical positivists in, respectively, the *Autobiography* and the *Essay on Metaphysics* but also, *inter alia*, the extended criticisms of the intuitionist moral philosophy of the Realists (Prichard, Ross, etc.) in Collingwood's lectures in Hilary Term 1940, 'Goodness, Rightness, Utility' [NL: 392-479] and, of course, the whole project of *The New Leviathan*. (All this would be plain nonsense if he had adhered to the 'sociology of knowledge' approach.) *The accusation of 'fascism', although possibly inappropriate, is thus quite important for the understanding of the intellectual project of the later Collingwood.* This theme is also linked with one of Collingwood's most interesting ideas in aesthetics, that of the social role of art, i.e., to fight against the corruption of consciousness by bringing to public awareness essential emotions, whose repression is the cause

¹⁵ J. L. Austin, for example, was active in the anti-"appeasement" movement during by-elections at Oxford in 1938, during which Collingwood's only political action—after all, he was ill—had been the writing of a letter of support to the anti-"appeasement" candidate [Boucher 1989: 17-19].

¹⁶ This betrays a parochial approach to international politics, since it is hard to see that the bad moral philosophy of Prichard may have played a significant role in the rise of, say, nazism in Germany. It hardly could be said to have played a significant role with Great Britain. On the parochial aspects of Collingwood's thought, see [Collini 1999].

¹⁷ Interestingly enough, Ayer noted in the chapter on Collingwood in his *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* [Ayer 1984: 191-213], the objection that logical positivists served "the cause of irrationality" with their attacks on metaphysics [Ayer 1984: 197], but did not refute it. It would have been easy to do so, since the members of the Vienna Circle were hoping, with their "elimination of metaphysics", to undermine the metaphysics (in particular the right-wing Christian-Hegelian philosophy that was widespread in Austria and Heidegger's metaphysics), which they perceived as serving the cause of fascism and nazism. Both Collingwood and the members of the Vienna Circle believed that their critique of bad philosophy had a wider political dimension, they seem merely to disagree on what they thought was bad philosophy: metaphysics for the Vienna Circle, "elimination of metaphysics" for Collingwood...

of unhealthy social and political life—irrationalism. This ‘corruption of consciousness’ will be introduced in Chapter 2, section 1 and further discussed in Chapter 5.

To come back to Collingwood’s intellectual background. It cannot be denied that Collingwood “sided”, however reluctantly,¹⁸ with the very few idealists that were left around at Oxford in the 1920s and 1930s. The idealist flavour of his philosophy—especially in books such as *Speculum Mentis*—cannot be denied either. But all this must not mask some affinities with the Oxford Realists or realism in general. I shall briefly make two points because of their relevance for this thesis.

My first point relates to the “realism” of Collingwood’s teachers. Throughout his career, Cook Wilson argued fiercely against the idealist thesis, famously put forth by Bradley, that the object of knowledge is inseparable from the act of knowing [Marion 2000: 301]. Cook Wilson claimed:

You can no more act upon the object by knowing it than you can ‘please the Dean and Chapter by stroking the dome of St. Paul’s’ [...] Obviously if we ‘do anything to’ anything in knowing, it is not done to the object known, to what we know, for that simply contradicts the presuppositions of the act of knowledge itself. [Cook Wilson 2002: 802]

His epigone, Prichard made the same point:

Knowledge unconditionally presupposes that the reality known exists independently of the knowledge of it, and that we know it as it exists in this independence. It is simply *impossible* to think that any reality depends on our knowledge of it. If there is to be knowledge, there must first *be* something to be known. In other words, knowledge is essentially discovery, or finding what already is. If a reality could only be or come to be in virtue of some activity or process on part of the mind, that activity or process would not be ‘knowing’, but ‘making’ or ‘creating’, and to make and to know must in the end be admitted to be mutually exclusive. [Prichard 1909: 108]

¹⁸ According to a letter to de Ruggiero quoted by van der Dussen, the only positive reaction to his 1920 paper to the Oxford Philosophical Society was that Collingwood was invited to join a reading group composed of idealists headed by J. A. Smith; but Collingwood remarked: “But it doesn’t do much good really” [HS: 23]. So, already in the early 1920s Collingwood was wary of associations with the old-style idealists.

This was the motto of Oxford Realism, i.e., that “knowing in no way alters or modifies the thing known” [Prichard 1909: 118], an idea that Collingwood criticized in his 1920 paper to the Oxford Philosophical Society with a deceptively simple argument, which he reported in his *Autobiography*:

[I]f you know that no difference is made to a thing θ by the presence or absence of a certain condition c , you know what θ is like without c , and on comparing the two find no difference. This involves knowing what θ is like without c ; in the present case, knowing what you defined as the unknown. [A: 44]

So it does look as if Collingwood was really siding with the idealists. This may sound far-fetched, but there actually were idealists at Oxford who believed that in knowledge the mind “creates” the object. Among Collingwood’s acquaintances, J. A. Smith (his predecessor as Waynflete Professor), who also began by espousing the realist view but ceased to hold it when he became strongly influenced by Croce and Gentile [Smith 1924: 230], claimed that “Mind as knowing is also and *eo ipso* creative” [Smith 1924: 242]. But Collingwood, despite all his sniggering and accusations, never really rejected this realist thesis.

It seems that Collingwood did not disagree with the possibility for the mind of knowing something other than and outside itself, but rather merely with the fact that *all* of knowledge must be of this sort. In *The Idea of History*, he not only chastised “Bradley’s successors” in England, for their “conspiracy of silence” and the “astonishing [...] meagerness” of discussions about historical knowledge [IH: 142], he disagreed with them on this very point:

Everything that we know is thus placed outside the mind, and constitutes a body of things whose proper collective name is nature; history, which is the mind’s knowledge of itself, is ruled out as impossible. [IH: 142]

Speaking of “mind’s knowledge of itself” does not imply a form of dualism if, as I shall claim at the beginning of Chapter 2, section 1, Collingwood does provide a resolution of the

problem of dualism, entirely parallel to that of Gilbert Ryle in *The Concept of Mind* [Ryle 1963], which does not force him towards an idealistic form of monism.

That Collingwood did not reject the realist thesis about knowledge is shown by the following passage from *Religion in Philosophy*:

I believe that the argument I have tried to express contains little if anything which contradicts the principles of either Realism or Idealism in their more satisfactory forms. There is an idealism with which I feel little sympathy, and there is a so-called realism which seems to me only distinguishable from that idealism by its attempt to evade its own necessary conclusions. But I do not wish to appear as a combatant in the battle between what I believe to be the better forms of the theories. Indeed, if they are to be judged by such works as Joachim's *Nature of Truth* on the one hand and Prichard's *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* and Carritt's *Theory of Beauty* on the other, I hope to have said nothing with which both sides would not to some extent agree; though I can hardly expect to avoid offending one or the other—or both—by the way in which I put it. [RPh: 101]

Being published in 1916, this remark could be dismissed, however, as showing the “diffidence of youth” [A: 22]. (This is, for example, van der Dussen's opinion [HS: 21].) But the point cannot be so easily dismissed as it also occurs almost ten years later (1925) in *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art*:

In knowledge [...] the objet is real; and the relation between [the subject and the object] is that the empirical act of knowing presupposes the object and does not create it. This may be said without prejudice to the idealistic view that there is an absolute or transcendental sense in which knowing creates its object. [OPA: 11]

Lest the reader be easily misled, this point deserves careful consideration. One should first note that Collingwood does not clarify what he means by an “absolute or transcendental sense”. My claim is that in the case of history, Collingwood's idealist claim ultimately amounts merely to the idea that the historian “re-enacts” in his own mind the reasoning that led the historical agent to act the way he or she did. The “object” is in this sense “in the mind” of the historian (it is a thought) and cannot be said to be independent in the same sense as one would say of the objects of, say, chemistry, that they are “independent” of the knower. Furthermore, the “object”,

which is a thought (as it is embodied in the action from which we have historical evidence) is by definition “created” by mind. All these claims can be seen as rather trivial and I shall claim later on in this Introduction and in Chapter 3, section 3, that all this does not imply, in Collingwood’s conception, that the past has no concrete (ontological) reality independently of the historian’s mind, i.e., that past events never occurred but that they are merely “created” by the mind. He never held a view such as Smith’s or Croce’s—if this is what they really meant. I already pointed out that none of Collingwood’s extensive work as an archaeologist, which is devised to retrieve evidence of past events, would make sense if he held such nonsense about the past. It should become clearer throughout this thesis that Collingwood’s philosophical positions could not be sustained otherwise.

I should claim, therefore, that there is no true, fully-fledged “idealism” in Collingwood—a fact born out by his explicit denials already mentioned at the beginning of this introduction—but there is a sense in which Collingwood’s philosophy could be described as “constructivist” [Nielsen 1981:1] or “anti-realist”. The latter expression has been employed to describe Collingwood’s view of history [Goldstein 1970: 10, 26] but by “anti-realism” I mean what M. A. E. Dummett meant in papers such as ‘The Reality of the Past’ [Dummett 1978] or ‘Realism and Anti-Realism’ [Dummett 1993b]. This stance does not amount to a rejection of realism on ontological grounds, i.e., that the only reality is Mind, but on semantical and epistemological grounds. Typically, an anti-realist of this sort wishes to deny to the realist that our concept of truth transcends our cognitive abilities, i.e., that a sentence may be said to be rendered true or false in virtue of a reality that transcends our ability to recognize that the sentence is true or false. In the case of the reality of the past and the work of the historian, a typically “anti-realist” argument would be to define “cognitive capacities” in terms of “available evidence”. The

sentences of the historian have a foundation for their truthfulness only in the available evidence at a given time. In Chapter 3, section 3, I shall show that Collingwood's thought on history evolved from a qualified form of realism in *Speculum Mentis* to an anti-realism according to a typically anti-realist rejection of a reality that transcends evidence (which is itself changing, hence the necessary incompleteness of the historian's work); a move that was misinterpreted by van der Dussen as a move from realism to... idealism [HS: 20-41]. (If anything, there are typically idealist aspects of the positions in *Speculum Mentis* that are simply abandoned later, such as the use of the coherence theory of truth—developed from Bradley to Joachim by British idealists—to justify the impossibility of historical knowledge [SM: 231-246].)

This “anti-realism” must not be confused with an “idealism” based on a complete denial of the ontological reality of the past in favour of the idea that it is nothing but a creation of the mind; as a matter of fact, I shall show in Chapter 2, section 1, that Collingwood had a resolution of the problem of dualism, which can in no way to be seen as a vindication of idealism. In other words, the anti-realist and the realist admit of the past as having had existence and differ from the idealist who would see it as having been ‘created’ in the present mind of the historian. They only differ between themselves inasmuch as the anti-realist denies that the past for which we have no evidence has any epistemological import or role to play; this is tantamount to, but not equivalent to saying that, for all practical purposes it has no “reality” outside the present evidence for it. One important reason for adhering to anti-realism so conceived is that it blocks the way to an unappealing form of scepticism about knowledge of the past.¹⁹ As I shall show in Chapter 3, section 3, this may be one of the reasons explaining Collingwood's change of mind, after *Speculum Mentis*.

¹⁹ This point is emphasized in [Goldstein 1970]. It will be discussed in Chapter 2.

To come back to Collingwood's criticisms of the Oxford Realists. It seems at any rate that Collingwood deliberately exaggerated the differences between his views and those of the Oxford Realists because of the political dimension of the book: having accused them of being propagandists of fascism, he obviously did not want to look as if he had anything in common with them. He was thus prone to careless formulation of his positions. One must therefore take *cum grano salis* Collingwood's remarks when dealing with their views.

My second point relates to one specific idea seemingly shared by Bradley, which can be traced back to H. R. Lotze. At turn of the last century, it was commonplace to distinguish "objective" from "subjective" idealism, the latter being more or less what we now refer to as "phenomenalism". Collingwood called his own philosophical position "objective idealism". The lecture notes on 'Realism and Idealism'/'Central Problems of Metaphysics' begin thus:

The distinction between realism and idealism is commonly regarded as an antithesis; it seems to be generally thought that these are two rival metaphysical points of view and that there is between them an irreconcilable antagonism. I hope in the course of the lectures to show that this is not true. If we scrutinize the actual meaning of the terms, and the essential points of the doctrines for which they stand, we shall find that, when certain side-issues and misunderstandings are cleared up, there is a tendency for the two types of theory to converge and for the apparent antagonism between them to disappear. The result of this disappearance is the emergence of a type of metaphysical theory which in the concluding lectures I shall describe under the name of objective idealism; and it is the main thesis of these lectures that some such theory is alone capable of dealing with the problems which today confront the metaphysician. [MS: 20/1, p. 1]

The term "objective idealism" was in use at the time in order to describe a variety of philosophies, from Lotze to Bradley. It is clear that there are connections between Collingwood's metaphysics and those of Lotze and Bradley. However, the precise nature and extent of these connections can only be established by a careful study of Collingwood's unpublished lecture notes on 'Realism and Idealism'/'Central Problems of Metaphysics' [MS: 20/1] and some related unpublished manuscripts. It was not possible for me to do that study while working on this

thesis, but I should like to make a few very brief points concerning Collingwood's "objective idealism", that are of importance for this thesis, by using the following brief description (my emphasis):

Objective idealism is not a theory of knowledge: it repudiates the theory of knowledge, at any rate as a central philosophical problem, and substitutes the theory of reality. *Objective idealism is epistemologically realistic; it believes that we know the object itself as it really is.* In saying that reality consists of ideas it is saying that there is a distinction between the ideas or principles exemplified in natural things and these things themselves; that the principles are not mere abstractions from the things but are logically prior to them & govern their changes & processes; that the things, though perceptible by themselves, are knowable or intelligible only in the light of the principles, whereas the principles are absolutely intelligible in themselves; and that, since to be real & to be knowable are the same, that which is only partially & dependently knowable is only partially & dependently real, & it is only the ideas or principles that are absolutely real. Thus it conceives the world of nature as something derived from & dependent upon something logically prior to itself, *a world of immaterial ideas; but this is not a mental world*, a world of mental activities or of thing-dependent on mental activity, although it is an intelligible world or a world in which mind, when mind comes into existence, finds itself completely at home. [MS: 20/1, pp. 109-110]

First, one should note that Collingwood considers his "objective idealism" to be "realistic": "we know the object itself as it really is". This further confirms the above remark about Collingwood's heritage from Cook Wilson and Prichard. In his *Autobiography*, Collingwood stated that Cook Wilson "constantly criticized Bradley for views that were not Bradley's" [A: 22], and that "a number of [...] doctrines expounded in Cook Wilson's lectures" were "borrowed from Bradley" [A: 44]. The implication was that Bradley's positions, properly understood, were not so far from those of Cook Wilson and Prichard. We find evidence for that sort of thinking in a further unpublished manuscript entitled 'The Metaphysics of F. H. Bradley. An Essay on *Appearance and Reality*' [MS 29], when he points out that

[...] the realism on which [Cook Wilson and Prichard *inter alia*] agreed is in effect an attempt to vindicate [...] Bradley's metaphysics. They all, like him, reject phenomenalism [...]. They all, like him, insist that what we know is really itself and no mere appearance. [MS 29: sec. V]

In the manuscript of lectures given in Balliol College in 1934, 'The Nature of Metaphysical Study', one finds another telling passage, where Collingwood describes Bradley's philosophy as 'realism', i.e., as opposed to subjective idealism and phenomenalism:

The most general name for this [...] is Realism. In claiming Bradley as the father of modern Realism I know that I am saying something unfamiliar and perhaps shocking. [...] Modern realism is supposed to be a revolt against Bradley, led by people like Cook Wilson here, and Moore at Cambridge who had begun their philosophical careers as his followers. I venture to say that this is a misunderstanding of the position; these early realists were not so much revolting against Bradley as revolting against the phenomenalist philosophy which in the early chapters of *Appearance and Reality* he held up to criticism. (Quoted in [Vanheeswijck 1998: 160])

Collingwood rejects "subjective" idealism in the long passage quoted above from the lecture notes on 'Realism and Idealism'/'Central Problems of Metaphysics', when he states of the "world of nature" that it is "not a mental world, a world of mental activities or of thing-dependent on mental activity". In this, his position is indeed akin to that of Cook Wilson and Prichard. Indeed they both criticized phenomenalism and representative theories of perception at length,²⁰ for example in the following passage from Cook Wilson:

We want to explain knowing an object and we explain it solely in terms of the object known, and that by giving the mind not the object but some idea of it which is said to be like it—an image (however the fact may be disguised). The chief fallacy of this is not so much the impossibility of knowing such image is like the object, or that there is any object at all, but that it assumes the very thing it is intended to explain. The image itself has to be apprehended and the difficulty is only repeated. [Cook Wilson 2002: 803]

Collingwood attributes this sort of position to Bradley but it could also be attributed, presumably, to Lotze, who rejected "subjective" idealism in his *Logic*—which was, incidentally, translated into English by B. Bosanquet—by distinguishing between "subjective" mental states and "objective" meanings [Lotze 1884: §3]:

Ideas, in so far as they are present in our minds, possess reality in the sense of an event,—they *occur* in us [...] their content on the other hand, so far as we regard it in abstraction from the mental activity which we direct to it, can no longer said to occur, though neither again does it exist as things exist, we can only say that it possesses validity [Lotze 1884: 440]

One should not forget here that both Bradley and Cook Wilson had carefully studied Lotze's works (Cook Wilson was even a student in 1874). Lotze's *Logic* is the origin of the strong anti-psychologism found in the writings of Oxonians as diverse as Bradley and Cook Wilson. Moreover, Lotze dissociated "objective" meanings from external reality:

The common world, in which others are expected to recognize what we [mean], is, speaking generally, only the world of thought; what we do here is to ascribe to it the first trace of an existence of its own and an inner order which is the same for all thinking beings and independent of them: it is quite indifferent whether certain parts of this world of thought indicate something which has besides an independent reality outside the thinking minds, or whether all that it contains exists only in the thoughts of those who think it, but with equal validity for them all. [Lotze 1884: 12]

For Lotze believed in "an independent objective content" whose "relations to other contents have an eternal and self-identical validity even if neither it nor they should ever be repeated in actual perception" [Lotze 1884: 435], and

Whatever mutability the things may display, that which they are at each moment they are by transient participation in conceptions which are not transient but for ever identical and constant, and which taken together constitute an unchangeable system of thought, and form the first adequate and solid beginnings of a permanent knowledge. [Lotze 1884: 436]

In these passages, taken from the chapter of Lotze's *Logic* on Plato's doctrine of Ideas, one can sense many affinities with the "objective idealism" of Collingwood. It is true that there are no traces in Collingwood of Lotze's famous notion of "validity" (*Geltung*), which played an important role in the neo-Kantian school of Baden (Windelband, Rickert, Weber). It is also true that Collingwood wrote (about Lotze's *Microcosm*, however) that Lotze's "work is characteristic

²⁰ These arguments are analysed in details in [Marion 2000].

of the woolly and emotional nebulosities which in Germany followed the collapse of the idealist school" [IH: 165]. But Lotze's "*unchangeable system of thought*" is not very far from Collingwood's "*world of immaterial ideas*". At any rate, although a detailed study of the sources in Lotze of the conceptions of Collingwood (through Bradley's) is of itself an important task, it is not my intention to pursue the matter further here. Moreover, whether there is a transcendental sense in which this "world of immaterial ideas" may be said to be "created" by the mind—so that one would still talk of "idealism" in the sense of Windelband—or "eternal" and independent of the existence of any thinking being, is a question that I shall not try and answer here. I merely wish to point out what could be seen as the metaphysical source of Collingwood's "objectivism": in a nutshell, *there is a world of objective meanings, which is independent of our mental states and of the external world but accessible to all thinking beings*. In plainer terms, when someone thinks that " $2+2 = 4$ " and someone else thinks that " $2+2 = 4$ ", there is a sense in which they may be said to share the *same thought*, otherwise there would be no "objectivity" of meaning, thus no communication possible, etc. This is the lesson learned by two readers of Lotze: Frege and Husserl. It is worth quoting from both of them, in order to get the point across as clearly as possible. Incidentally, both Frege and Husserl made a very selective use of the philosophy of Lotze; the Lotze they present is, as Hans Sluga would say about Frege, a "Lotze stripped to the logical bones" [Sluga 1980: 152]. Indeed, in *Foundations of Arithmetic*, Frege introduces with these words a distinction between "objective" and "actual", which he owes to Lotze:

I distinguish what I call objective from what is handleable or spatial or actual. The axis of the earth is objective, so is the centre of mass of the solar system, but I should not call them actual in the way the earth itself is so. We often speak of the equator as an *imaginary* line; but it would be wrong to call it a *fictitious* line; it is not a creature of thought, the product of a psychological process, but is only recognized or apprehended by thought. If to be recognized were to be created, then we should be able to say nothing positive about the equator for any period earlier than the date of its alleged creation. [Frege 1980: 35]

Against Kant's subjective notion of space, Frege adds:

Yet there is something objective in [space] all the same; everyone recognizes the same geometrical axioms, if only by his behaviour, and must do so if he is to find his way about the world. What is objective in [space] is what is subject to laws, what can be conceived and judged, what is expressible in words. What is purely intuitable is not communicable. [Frege 1980: 35]

The implicit argument here is that, in order for it to be communication, there must be grasping of something objective, i.e., of something which is the same for all. In his later paper on 'Thoughts', where Frege argued for the existence of a "third realm" (alongside the mental and the physical world) for objective thoughts, we find the idea clearly expressed in passages such as this one:

If other people can assent to the thought I express in the Pythagorean theorem just as I do, then it does not belong to the content of my consciousness. I am not its owner; yet I can, nevertheless acknowledge it as true. However, if what is taken to be the content of the Pythagorean theorem by me and by somebody else is not the same thought at all, we should not really say '*the*, Pythagorean theorem', but '*my* Pythagorean theorem', '*his* Pythagorean theorem', and these would be different, for the sense necessarily goes with the sentence. In that case my thought may be the content of my consciousness and his thought the content of his. Could the sense of my Pythagorean theorem be true and the sense of his false? [Frege 1984: 362]

Husserl also showed the same anti-psychologistic and Platonist tendencies in his *Logical Investigations*. In the first investigation, he expressed himself rather clearly:

What, e.g., the statement ' π is a transcendental number' says, what *we* understand when we read it, and mean when we say it, is no individual feature in our thought-experience, which is merely repeated on many occasions. Such a feature is always individually different from case to case, whereas the sense of the sentence should remain *identical*. [...] Over against this unbounded multiplicity of individual experiences, is the selfsame element expressed in them all, 'selfsame' in the very strictest sense. Multiplication of persons and acts does not multiply propositional meanings; the judgement in the ideal, logical sense remains single. [...] I see that, wherever there is talk of the *proposition* or *truth* that π is a transcendental number, there is nothing that I have less in mind than an individual experience of any person. [...] I see [...] that what I mean by the sentence in question or (when I hear it) grasp as its meaning, is the same thing, whether I think and exist or not, and whether or not there are *any* thinking persons and acts. [Husserl 1970: 329-330]

That such ideas derive from Lotze can be gathered from the reference to “validity” in the following key passage (my emphasis):

Meanings constitute, we may say further, a class of concepts in the sense of ‘universal objects’. They are not for that reason objects which, though existing nowhere in the world, having being in a [topos ourianos] or in a divine mind, for such metaphysical hypostatization would be absurd. If one has accustomed oneself to understand by ‘being’ only real being, and by ‘objects’ only real objects, then talk of universal objects and of their being, may well seem basically wrong; no offence will, however, be given to *one who has first used such talk merely to assert the validity of certain judgements*, such in fact as concerns numbers, propositions, geometrical forms, etc., and who now asks whether he is not evidently obliged, here as elsewhere, *to affix the label ‘genuinely existent object’ to the correlate of his judgement’s validity*, to what it judges about. In sober truth, the seven regular solids are, logically speaking, seven objects precisely as the seven sages are: the principle of the parallelogram of forces is as much a single object as the city of Paris. [Husserl 1970: 330].

Husserl acknowledged, on more than one occasion, in no uncertain terms his debt to Lotze. For example, in his 1913 draft of a preface to the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl wrote about his move away from his earlier psychologism to the Platonism expressed in the above quotations:

For the fully conscious and radical turn and for the accompanying “Platonism”, I must credit the study of Lotze’s logic. Little as Lotze himself had gone beyond [pointing out] absurd inconsistencies and beyond psychologism, still his brilliant interpretation of Plato’s doctrine of Ideas gave me my first big insight and was a determining factor in all further studies. [Husserl 1975: 36]

It is true that later on in the same text, Husserl demarcates his project from Lotze’s [Husserl 1975: 44-47]. But his criticisms do not bear on this essential point. On the other hand, Frege never acknowledged a debt to Lotze but the connections are nevertheless easy to see; Sluga has argued that Lotze had influenced him [Sluga 1980: 52-58].²¹

The above remarks about and quotations from Lotze, Frege and Husserl are certainly not meant as a substitute for a full analysis of their metaphysics. The point was merely to highlight

the idea that meanings are objective in the sense that they can be shared by many, and the idea that what I shall call hereafter Lotze's "objectivism", which is, to my mind, the metaphysical counterpart of Collingwood's controversial, anti-relativist and anti-historicist claim that it is possible to re-think the *same* thoughts as those of an historical agent such as Caesar or Euclid and that the *same* act by which the artist becomes aware of his own emotion can be re-enacted by his audience. It is not possible, in absence of access to unpublished manuscripts that deal specifically with metaphysical issues and with the legacy of Bradley, to provide here a full study of Collingwood's metaphysics that would substantiate this claim. I have provided, however, enough textual evidence to make my claim *prima facie* sound. Nevertheless, I should like to add to this.

A section on 'Objectivity', from a recently published manuscript called 'Notes Towards a Metaphysics', provides further evidence that Collingwood was thinking along the same line as Lotze, Frege, and Husserl. (Of course, all these authors' conceptions vary from each other; I am merely focussing on a shared strand.) In this first excerpt, Collingwood couches a point for which Wittgenstein became famous but in a terminology reminiscent of nineteenth-century philosophy (my emphasis):

Concepts determine facts as their formal cause, as the essence of which they are existence. Now, essence is one where existence is manifold; one form is therefore capable of embodiment in a plurality of instances. Therefore, whereas my experience can only be mine, and nobody else's, the concepts exemplified in it may be exemplified in other experiences. *No two people can have the same tooth-ache, but they may both have tooth-ache. Thus concepts provide a common ground on which diverse experiences can meet. Any world of thought is a public world, accessible not indeed to every mind in common, but accessible in common to any two minds which enjoy similar experiences. It is because they have similar experiences that they can share the same thoughts, and it is through sharing the same thoughts that they can know their experiences to be similar.* [PH: 133-134]

²¹ I am aware that Michael Dummett has criticized this reading of Lotze in [Dummett 1991]. To adjudicate this debate would leave us too far afield.

Applied to historical thinking, the above ideas led Collingwood to express exactly what I presented as Lotze's "objectivism" (my emphasis):

Objectivity is that characteristic of the concept by which it transcends experience. In so far as what is given in my experience is something that exists outside my experience, it is objective. It need not transcend all experience: to call the French Revolution an objective historical fact does not imply that it really existed quite apart from the experience of the people who took part in it; nor does it imply that in that experience the revolution appeared exactly as it appears to me in my historical study of it; what is implied is that the French Revolution is an object of thought, or concept, which appears in different ways to the different persons into whose experience it enters. Everyone, whether contemporary observer or student, who has genuine knowledge of the French Revolution knows what it really or essentially was, that is, conceives its essence, and this essence is *a concept which is public and objective, accessible to any thinking mind into whose experience it enters*. [PH: 134]

Of course, Collingwood adds, "objectivity" does not mean that the essences in question are "eternal objects": "Objectivity does not imply eternity; only community as between similar experiences" [PH: 135]. In *The Idea of History*, Collingwood has already described the Roman Constitution and its modification by Augustus as "eternal objects" because they "can be apprehended by historical thought at any time" [IH: 218]. What Collingwood meant by this much-discussed remark was that once the thought is recorded (in print) or embodied (in action) it becomes *qua* thought re-enactable by anyone afterwards (provided, of course, that enough evidence for it survives); in that sense it has a beginning and it is "eternal as *in æternum*, not as *ex æterno*" [PH: 222].²²

²² One must therefore be wary of the expression "eternal object". In a much-discussed passage from *The Idea of History*, Collingwood says that Pythagoras' discovery concerning the square of the hypotenuse or Augustus' discovery that a monarchy could be grafted upon the Republican constitution of Rome are "eternal objects" because "they can be apprehended by historical thought at any time; time makes no difference to [them] in this respect. The peculiarity which makes [them] historical is not the fact of [their] happening in time but the fact of [their] becoming known to us by our re-thinking the same thought which created [them]" [IH: 218]. As Collingwood himself would say, talking about the Norman Conquest, "Its eternity is therefore nothing but a grandiloquent (and inaccurate) way of stating its survival as an effective force down to the present" [PH: 222]. I shall not say more on this topic, which is a perfect example of an issue where careless readers might easily misinterpret Collingwood. In order fully to

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fact devised to give us a sense of what it means to have access to the past, to be able meaningfully to retrieve it for the present. In the above passage, Collingwood expressed this idea by speaking of past events as “historically knowable”. This is also why his philosophy is anti-realist in the sense that it is claimed that the past has no reality which is transcending our ability to know it, i.e., transcending the available evidence: to hold the contrary is to open the door to the very scepticism that undermines our sense that we have, after all, a perfectly *bona fide* access to the past.

A key part of this philosophy is what I have called Lotze’s “objectivism”; it is a much-neglected aspect of Collingwood’s philosophical heritage from his student days at Oxford, inherited through Bradley’s “objective idealism”—although it is clear that he himself also read Lotze. It stands at the core of my interpretation, and this is why I took some space to expound it. In the passages quoted in this section, Collingwood certainly comes out as an ‘old-style’ metaphysician. Again, there is no denial of this—one merely needs to read *Speculum Mentis*—, my claim is only that what makes Collingwood’s philosophy even more interesting is that, as I shall show in Chapter 3, section 2, he developed in the late 1920s and the 1930s arguments in support of the notion of “objectivity of thought” that are of an ultimately altogether different nature, much closer to “linguistic” philosophy and much more modern sounding; for that reason, his position does not have, in the last analysis, to rely on ‘old-style’ metaphysics.

Chapter 2

Philosophy of Mind

In this chapter, I wish to give an account of some central issues in Collingwood's philosophy of mind since it is necessary to do so in order to understand the deep connections between the two central notions of historical understanding and artistic interpretation. This is nothing new: the importance of Collingwood's philosophy of mind has already been noticed by commentators such as Louis Mink [Mink 1972: 155]. Both Mink [MHD] and Rubinoff [Rubinoff 1970a] wrote extensive introductions to the philosophy of Collingwood from the point of view of the philosophy of mind. Rubinoff approaches the latter from *Speculum Mentis* with the intention to show that "Collingwood's thought [has] a systematic unity in which every moment has been anticipated from the very beginning" [Rubinoff 1970a: 34]. I do not find this plausible and I shall opt for a variant of Mink's approach through later writings such as *The Principles of Art* and *The New Leviathan*.

Collingwood gave a detailed presentation of his philosophy of mind in the second part of *The Principles of Art*. There are also indications in earlier manuscripts that form the last part of *The Idea of History* [IH: 285-7, 291, 306-7] and a revised, albeit cursory, description in Collingwood's last published work, *The New Leviathan*, part I, chapters I-VI.¹ Far from being outdated, as it is sometimes claimed, Collingwood's philosophy of mind has a surprisingly modern flavour; as his old adversary, A. J. Ayer, admitted, the remarks in *The New Leviathan*

¹ For commentaries, see [LPC 1962: 25-46], [MHD 1969: 79-118], [HS: 259-269]. One interesting point of contact between Collingwood and Wittgenstein which will not be discussed in this thesis is their criticism, on similar grounds, of the 'causal theory of meaning' held by Ogden & Richards and Russell. See [Lewis 1998].

“strike a contemporary note” [Ayer 1984: 213]. Many commentators have indeed pointed out similarities with ideas for which both Ryle and Wittgenstein became well known.² In the first section, I shall show that Collingwood had anticipated Gilbert Ryle’s well-known criticisms of dualism in his *Concept of Mind*. In the second section, I shall present Collingwood’s theory of the ‘levels of consciousness’ which forms the structure of his philosophy of mind. Only on the basis of an appropriate understanding of the relationship between ‘feelings’, ‘consciousness’ and ‘intellect’ can one understand Collingwood’s notions of historical understanding and artistic interpretation. Indeed, many errors committed by commentators and critics alike derive from an inappropriate understanding of specific aspects of Collingwood’s theory of the levels of thought or consciousness, as well as from a misunderstanding of his views on the mind/body distinction. In particular, the distinction between ‘feeling’ and ‘consciousness’ or ‘awareness’ plays an important role. In the philosophy of history, Collingwood will claim that one needs to ‘re-enact’ the thoughts of the historical agents in order to understand their actions. In order to understand this claim, it is crucial for one to see that it is not that one should enact the same ‘feelings’; this is obviously impossible. Instead, it is merely asked that one should re-think the thoughts that arise at the level of ‘consciousness’. In the philosophy of art, Collingwood will claim that art is not about emotions to be found merely at the level of ‘feelings’. The “essence” of art is “an activity by which we become conscious of our own emotions” as they occur at the level of ‘feeling’ [PA: 292]. Such emotional charges that are the subject matter of art are to be found not just at the level of consciousness but also at that of “intellectual experience” [PA: 294]. Furthermore,

² For connections between Collingwood and Ryle, see, e.g., [Walsh 1967: 55], [HS: 87], [HR: 188], [Boucher 1995a: 9], [Sclafani 1972: 47-8]; between Collingwood and Wittgenstein, see [Saari 1989: 83-4], [Johnson 1998: 52]; between all three, see [Sclafani 1976] and [Boucher 1995a: 8].

interpretation is, in analogy with the case of history, taking place at the level of ‘consciousness’.
(These statements are somewhat inaccurate and will be rendered more precise as we go along.)

Collingwood’s thoughts about these issues evolved over time and there are some changes occurring between *The Principles of Art*, written in 1938 and *The New Leviathan*, in 1942. In the third section, I shall deal with one such change, concerning the role of language. Indeed, in *The New Leviathan*, Collingwood introduces a new idea, namely that ‘consciousness’ is, through and through, linguistic. This fundamental change was properly accounted for in Alan Donagan’s *The Later Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood* [LPC]. I shall, in this third section, also criticize the interpretation proposed by Louis Mink in *Mind, History and Dialectic* [MHD], which is terribly muddled; he uses Collingwood’s remarks on imagination in *The Principles of Art* in order to supplement his interpretation of *The New Leviathan*, thereby misunderstanding the nature of Collingwood’s change of mind. Only when this fundamental change is properly accounted for can Collingwood’s philosophy of mind be properly understood. As I shall show, some of his remarks about language prefigured well-known analyses by Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* as well as in other later writings. In accordance with an elementary principle of exegesis, I am assuming that the last expression of Collingwood’s philosophy of mind, in *The New Leviathan*, is his most considered opinion in these matters.

§ 1. Refutation of Dualism

In *History as a Science*, Jan van der Dussen points out that Collingwood’s philosophy of mind has a “monistic” aspect [HS: 261, 266]³. As it should become clear in Chapters 2 to 5, this

³ Also, cf. [MHD 1969: 111].

rejection of dualism is closely connected to his construal of historical action as having an outside and an inside (which is the very thought expressed by the action) as an *inseparable whole*, and to his concept of artistic understanding as imaginative understanding by the audience of the expression of an artist's emotion.

Famously, Gilbert Ryle argues in the first chapter of *The Concept of Mind* that mind-body dualism, which he derides as “the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine”, comes from what he calls a “category-mistake” [Ryle 1963: 17]. One can claim that Collingwood anticipates that criticism. I should like first briefly to rehearse Ryle's argument and then present, in light of it, Collingwood's refutation of Cartesian dualism in *The New Leviathan*.

A category-mistake simply is the placing of an entity in the wrong logical category, for example, to place Oxford University in the same category as that of its colleges, libraries, playing fields, museums, scientific departments and administrative offices—the University is the way in which all the colleges, libraries, etc. are organized and not, e.g., a further college or library [Ryle 1963: 17-18]. The specific category-mistake committed by dualism consists of representing “the facts of mental life as if they belonged to one logical type or category (or range of types or categories), when they actually belong to another” [Ryle 1963: 17]:

It maintains that there exist both bodies and minds; that there occur physical processes and mental processes; that there are mechanical causes of corporeal movements and mental causes of corporeal movements. [Ryle 1963: 23]

Thus “the belief that there is a polar opposition between Mind and Matter is the belief that they are terms of the same logical type” [Ryle 1963: 23]; minds “are things, but different sorts of things from bodies; mental processes are causes and effects, but different sorts of causes and effects from bodily movements” [Ryle 1963: 20]. Dualists consider the mind not as machines, such as the body, but as “extra centres of causal process” [Ryle 1963: 21]. In other words, they consider the working of the mind under the “para-mechanical hypothesis”. Those, such as

Descartes, who commit the category-mistake have no other way than using negatives of the descriptions given to bodies in order to describe the working of minds: “they are not in space, they are not motions, they are not modifications of matter, they are not accessible to public observation.” But, as Ryle would point out, minds “are not bits of clockwork, they are just bits of “not-clockwork” [Ryle 1963: 21]. As a matter of fact, mind and body can be said to “exist” in two different senses, which cannot be compared because they are not the counterpart of each other:

It is perfectly proper to say, in one logical tone of voice, that there exist minds, and to say, in another logical tone of voice, that there exist bodies. But these expressions do not indicate two different species of existence, for ‘existence’ is not a generic word like ‘coloured’ or ‘sexed’. They indicate two different senses of ‘exist’, somewhat as ‘rising’ has different senses in ‘the tide is rising’, ‘hopes are rising’, and ‘the average age of death is rising’. [Ryle 1963: 24]

However, refuting Cartesian dualism does not make the entire distinction between mind and body disappear, i.e., Ryle was not arguing in favour of a monism:

I am not, for example, denying that there occur mental processes. Doing long division is a mental process and so is making a joke. But I am saying that the phrase ‘there occur mental processes’ does not mean the same sort of thing as ‘there occur physical processes’, and, therefore, that it makes no sense to conjoin or disjoin the two. [Ryle 1963: 23].

In the very first paragraphs of *The New Leviathan*, Collingwood discusses three versions of dualism. The first, which he derisively describes as an “old wives’ tale” [NL: 2.15] consists of the claim that the mind inhabits the body as one inhabits a house. Collingwood says that it is “childish”, for “nothing can inhabit a house made of matter except something else made of matter” [NL: 2.13]. This is exactly parallel to what Ryle later called “the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine” [Ryle 1963: 17].⁴ The second version is “psycho-physical parallelism”, which

⁴ In connection with this, it is very strange to find commentators claiming that Collingwood held the view criticized by Ryle. See, e.g., [Cohen 1952: 173], that I discuss below.

states that mind and body are working in parallel so that “Hardly anything happens to the mind without a corresponding thing happening to the body, and vice versa” [NL: 2.22]. Leibniz’s “pre-established harmony” would be an example of this theory. For Leibniz, as opposed to Descartes, the soul or monad is not strictly speaking in the body, which is unreal. The soul follows final causes and the body follows mechanical or efficient causes and they do not affect each other. Yet they are synchronized as two clocks keeping time. This is the result of a “pre-established harmony”:

The soul follows its own laws, and the body likewise follows its own laws; and they agree with each other in virtue of the pre-established harmony between all substances, since they are all representations of one and the same universe. Souls act according to the laws of final causes through appetitions, ends, and means. Bodies act according to the laws of efficient cause or motions. And the two realms, that of efficient causes and that of final causes, are in harmony with one another. [Leibniz 1898: 77-8]

Collingwood dismisses this theory as follows:

‘Psycho-physical Parallelism’ is another old wives’ tale. If a mind does not really live in its body it does not really run parallel to its body, and what is more nobody thinks it does. Parallelism is a geometrical idea presupposing a space of at least two dimensions in which two lines run, each preserving its equidistance from the other, not meeting. [NL: 2.25-2.26]

Furthermore, Collingwood remarks, psycho-physical parallelists neither “think that mind-events and body-events occur in pairs at equidistant places” [NL: 2.27], nor even mean anything by the word ‘Parallelism’ [NL: 2.28]. The term ‘parallelism’ could mean that “there is a one-one relation between a mind-event and its corresponding body-event, and that this is not a causal relation” [NL: 2.28] but, as Collingwood points out, this is “less mellifluous” but “just as evasive” [NL: 2.29].

The third version, which is called “psycho-physical interactionism”, states that there is mutual interference between the mind and the body [NL: 2.31-2]. For example, the body acts on

the mind in such a way that the pain occurs after a kick on one's shin and the mind acts on the body in such a way that one writes words because of one's wish to write them [NL: 2.33-4]. This theory, however, does not have any support from the physicists [NL: 2.37]. Of course, the third version corresponds to Descartes' theory. He distinguishes the mind (in Descartes' own word, the 'soul') from the body. All thoughts one has belong to the soul but, by contrast, all heat and movements belong only to the body [Descartes 1955: 332]. He then explains that the soul and the body are inseparable and that the soul has its seat in the body, i.e., in the pineal gland, from which "it radiates forth through all the remainder of the body by means of the animal spirits, nerves", etc. [Descartes 1955: 347].

Collingwood rejects all forms of dualism by simply stating that "The truth is that there is no relation between body and mind. That is, no direct relation; for there is an indirect relation" [NL: 2.4]. The mistake of both Descartes and Leibniz is that they assume that mind and body are two different substances—the category-mistake; consequently, they are forced to explain the relation between mind and body, either through interaction or parallelism. But, according to Collingwood it is the whole problem of the relation between the mind and the body which is "bogus":

'The problem of the relation between body and mind' is a bogus problem which cannot be stated without making a false assumption.

What is assumed is that man is partly body and partly mind. On this assumption questions arise about the relations between the two parts; and these prove unanswerable. [NL: 2.41-2.42]

The reason why there is only an indirect relation between the two is that Collingwood considers that man's body and man's mind are not, to speak like Ryle, two things erroneously subsumed under the same category but only one "thing" which is known in two different ways:

For man's body and man's mind are not two different things. They are one and the same thing, man himself, as known in two different ways.

Not a part of man, but the whole of man, is body in so far as he approaches the problem of self-knowledge by the methods of natural science.

Not a part of man, but the whole of man, is mind in so far as he approaches the problem of self-knowledge by expanding and clarifying the data of reflection. [NL: 2.4-2.45]

This is, as van der Dussen rightly saw, the “monistic” aspect of Collingwood’s theory. If it is at all appropriate to speak of monism, it is not, however, similar to the idealistic monism of Spinoza, who considers that God or Nature is only one substance. Although man consists of mind and body, and the human mind is united to the body⁵, the human body is man considered to be the mode of the attribute of extension, and the human mind is man considered to be the mode of the attribute of thought. They are two attributes of substance since they are part of the order of Nature: “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things” [Spinoza 1930: 52]. Collingwood had criticized Spinoza’s theory in *The Idea of Nature* by claiming that it

[...] failed because the two attributes of extension and thought are held together in the theory, so to speak, by main force: there is no reason that Spinoza can give why that which is extended should also think, and vice versa; and consequently the theory remains at bottom unintelligible, a mere assertion of brute fact. [IN: 106]

In rejecting any form of transcendence, Collingwood’s ‘monism’ is more like the ‘neutral monism’ expounded by William James and, for a time, by Bertrand Russell. For example, James writes that:

The attribution subject and object, the thing represented and that which represents, thing and thought, signify a practical distinction which is of a purely functional order and not at all an ontological order, as classical dualism would have it; [...]

Finally, things and thoughts are not at all fundamentally heterogeneous; they are made of one and the same stuff, a stuff we cannot define as such but can only experience, and which we can call, if we wish, the stuff of experience in general. [James 1971: 120]

⁵ “Prop. XIII.—The object of the idea constituting the human mind is a body, or a certain mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else” [Spinoza 1930: 59].

Russell, who coined the expression “neutral monism”, describes James as taking “experience” as “a product” and not as a “part of the primary stuff of the world”. However, Russell continues, other American realists after James dropped this word and turned their interest not towards psychology but towards “logic and mathematics and the abstract part of philosophy”, speaking of “‘neutral’ entities as the stuff out of which both mind and matter are constructed” [Russell 1921: 24-5]. Russell then gives his own point of view:

My own belief—for which the reasons will appear in subsequent lectures—is that James is right in rejecting consciousness as an entity, and that the American realists are partly right, though not wholly, in considering that both mind and matter are composed of a neutral-stuff which, in isolation, is neither mental nor material. I should admit this view as regards sensations: what is heard or seen belongs equally to psychology and to physics. But I should say that images belong only to the mental world, while those occurrences (if any) which do not form part of any “experience” belong only to the physical world. There are, it seems to me, *prima facie* different kinds of causal laws, one belonging to physics and the others to psychology. [Russell 1921: 25]

Now, Collingwood’s monism also differs from James’ and Russell’s simply because he is not talking about ‘neutral’ *stuff* or *entities* and he is certainly not likening, as Russell did, sensations to this ‘neutral stuff’.

It should therefore be clear not only that did Collingwood reject dualism, in all possible forms, but that his rejection was not on grounds similar to Spinoza’s, James’ or Russell’s. In light of some of the remarks made in the introduction, it is fitting to point out that Collingwood’s resolution of the problem of dualism in no way forces him to adopt an idealistic form of monism. Again, according to Collingwood, body and mind are “not two different things” but “one and the same thing, man himself, as *known* in two different ways” (my italics). There is no room for an idealism that would claim that the only reality is spiritual.

Body and mind are “not two different things” but “one and the same thing, man himself, as known in two different ways”. This is the key to Collingwood’s theory; it is worth restating it

forcefully, as critics not infrequently accuse Collingwood of being an old-fashioned Cartesian dualist. For example, Patrick Gardiner writes about Collingwood on historical understanding that:

We are informed that to know why a particular man acted as he did in a particular situation we must know his thoughts. This apparently is only possible because thoughts are timeless entities, which can be revived in his own mind by the historian. Such a “transcendental deduction” provides Collingwood’s solution to his problem; nevertheless it is an expensive solution, requiring the postulation of a peculiar entity, a peculiar container in which this entity may be “housed,” and a peculiar technique by which the “housing” may be achieved. [Gardiner 1952b: 213]

Another example is that of L. J. Cohen, who believed that Collingwood’s conception of history implies the very dualism that “G. Ryle has attacked as ‘the dogma of the ghost in the machine’” [Cohen 1952: 173]. These are definite errors of interpretation.

As a matter of fact, Ryle himself had recognized, in his inaugural lecture as Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy, Collingwood’s rejection of Cartesian dualism as the forerunner of his much-celebrated ‘category-mistake’ argument:

Professor Collingwood saw more clearly, I think, than did his most eminent predecessors in the philosophy of history that the appearance of a feud or antithesis between Nature and Spirit, that is to say, between the objectives of the natural sciences and those of the human studies, is an illusion. These branches of inquiry are not giving rival answers to the same questions about the same world; nor are they giving separate answers to the same questions about rival worlds; they are giving their own answers to different questions about the same world. Just as physics is neither the foe nor the handmaid of geometry, so history, jurisprudence and literary studies are neither hostile nor ancillary to the laboratory sciences. Their categories, that is, their questions, methods and canons are different. In my predecessor’s word, they work with different presuppositions. To establish this point it is necessary to chart these differences. This task Professor Collingwood died too soon to complete but not too soon to begin. He had already made that great philosophic advance of reducing a puzzle to a problem. [Ryle 1990: 195]

In this passage, Ryle praises Collingwood having seen that natural sciences and the sciences of the mind are not “rivals”, “*they are giving different answers to different questions about one and*

the same world” because “Their *categories*, that is, their *questions*, methods and canons *are different*” (my italics). This is indeed Collingwood’s argument. To repeat:

For man’s body and man’s mind are not two different things. They are one and the same thing, man himself, as known in two different ways.

Not a part of man, but the whole of man, is body in so far as he approaches the problem of self-knowledge by the methods of natural science.

Not a part of man, but the whole of man, is mind in so far as he approaches the problem of self-knowledge by expanding and clarifying the data of reflection.

[NL: 2.4-2.45]

The distinction between two approaches to the study of man is intimately linked, in Collingwood’s writings, to his attempt at separating natural sciences from psychology and both of them from history and philosophy:

Historical knowledge, then, has for its proper object thought: not things thought about, but the act of thinking itself. This principle has served us to distinguish history from natural science on the one hand, as the study of a given or objective world distinct from the act of thinking it, and on the other from psychology as the study of immediate experience, sensation, and feeling, which, though the activity of a mind, is not the activity of thinking. [IH: 305]

(I shall not argue here for the cogency of these claims.)

The fact that Collingwood prefigured Ryle’s rejection of dualism has some very important consequences for the interpretation of his philosophy. I shall discuss two of them within the remainder of this section, other ones will come up in subsequent sections and chapters. The first one concerns Collingwood’s distinction between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of an historical event; a distinction that was misconstrued by Gardiner in the above quotation. I shall discuss this distinction further in Chapter 3 but for the moment I should point out that Collingwood believed that an event has both an ‘outside’, which he defines as what can be described in physical terms, and an ‘inside’, which he defines as what can be described in terms of ‘thought’. The point is made in a well-known passage:

The historian, investigating any event in the past, makes a distinction between what may be called the outside and the inside of an event. By the outside of the

event I mean everything belonging to it which can be described in terms of bodies and their movements: the passage of Caesar, accompanied by certain men, across a river called the Rubicon at one date, or the spilling of his blood on the floor of the senate-house at another. By the inside of the event I mean that in it which can only be described in terms of thought: Caesar's defiance of Republican law, or the clash of constitutional policy between himself and his assassins. [IH: 213]

Now, my point is that, unless one reads this passage in conjunction with the above-quoted passage in *The New Leviathan*, one will not see that Collingwood's distinction between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of an historical event is directly connected to his rejection of dualism. One ought to see, indeed, that the 'outside' corresponds to the approach of self-knowledge "by the methods of natural science", i.e., "bodies and their movements", while the 'inside' corresponds to the approach of self-knowledge "by expanding and clarifying the data of reflection", i.e., "thoughts".

In *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle characterized dualism as embodying a distinction between an 'inner' and an 'outer' which appears, on the surface, to parallel the above distinction between 'inside' and 'outside':

A person therefore lives through two collateral histories, one consisting of what happens in and to his body, the other consisting of what happens in and to his mind. The first is public, the second private. The events in the first history are events in the physical world, those in the second are events in the mental world. [...]

It is customary to express this bifurcation of his two lives and of his two worlds by saying that the things and events which belong to the physical world, including his own body, are external, while the workings of his own mind are internal. This antithesis of outer and inner is of course meant to be construed as a metaphor, since minds, anything else, or as having things going on spatially inside themselves. [Ryle 1963: 13-4]

This parallel is likely to confuse people into believing that Collingwood, by making a distinction between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of an event, is reduplicating the dualist distinction between the 'inner' and the 'outer'. If this were true, it would mean that Collingwood is contradicting himself, since he has rejected, on the other hand, dualism in the passages from

The New Leviathan that I have quoted and discussed. We ought not to be so uncharitable, especially in light of the fact that one can provide, as I just did, a reading of the above passage from *The Idea of History* which clearly shows that it is not meant to imply any *dualist* distinction between the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’.

In his later writings, Wittgenstein also dealt with the issue of the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’. The following quotation, which could serve as a summary of his position, squares with what has been said so far about Collingwood:

“Of course actually all I see is the outer.”

But am I not really speaking only of the outer? I say, for instance, under what circumstances people say this or that. And I do always mean *outer* circumstances. Therefore it is *as if* I wanted to explain (quasi-define) the inner through the outer. And yet it isn’t so.

[...] There are inner and outer concepts, inner and outer ways of looking at man. Indeed there are also inner and outer facts—just as there are for example physical and mathematical facts. But they do not stand to each other like plants of different species. For what I have said sounds like someone saying: In nature there are all of these facts. Now what’s wrong with that? [Wittgenstein 1982: 63]

“There are inner and outer concepts, inner and outer ways of looking at man”: this is virtually the same thought as that expressed by Collingwood in *The New Leviathan* [NL: 2.4-2.45] that I have already quoted twice.

The second point concerns the so-called first-person authority, which is implied in the picture of dualism presented by Ryle. In chapter VI of *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle presents this view, which he calls “Privileged Access” in the following terms:

A mind has a twofold Privileged Access to its own doings, which makes its self-knowledge superior in quality, as well as prior in genesis, to its grasp of other things. I may doubt the evidence of my senses but not the deliverances of consciousness or introspection. One limitation has always been conceded to the mind’s power of finding mental states and operations, namely that while I can have direct knowledge of my own states and operations, I cannot have it of yours. I am conscious of all my own feelings, volitions, emotions, and thinkings, and I introspectively scrutinize some of them. But I cannot introspectively observe, or be conscious of, the workings of your mind. I can satisfy myself that you have a

mind at all only by complex and frail inferences from what your body does. [Ryle 1963: 148-9]

I shall merely discuss here one aspect of the Privilege Access theory, namely the idea, crudely put, that there is an asymmetry between knowledge of one's own sensations and knowledge of someone else's sensations. Ryle's argument in *The Concept of Mind* is to the effect that "knowledge of what there is to be known about other people is restored to approximate parity with self-knowledge" [Ryle 1963: 149]. One could also claim that this is also the position argued for in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*:

In what sense are my sensations *private*? —Well, only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it.— In one way this is wrong, and in another nonsense. If we are using the word 'to know' as it is normally used (and how else are we to use it?), then other people very often know when I am in pain.— Yes, but all the same not with the certainty with which I know it myself!— It can't be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke) that I *know* I am in pain. What is it supposed to mean—except perhaps that I *am* in pain? Other people cannot be said to learn of my sensations *only* from my behaviour,— for I cannot be said to learn of them. I *have* them. [Wittgenstein 1997: § 246]

The idea that one's own sensations are private and therefore that one can have privileged access to them comes from ignorance of the usage of the word 'know'. Here Wittgenstein points out that it cannot be used for one's own sensations. Therefore, it is 'grammatically' wrong to say "I know that I am in pain".

As a matter of fact, the Privilege Access theory again comes from the wrong idea that the pain one feels is 'something' which empirically connects to the body. Because of this idea, one is led to another wrong idea that one acquires the knowledge of one's own sensation by turning one's attention into the inward and pointing out 'this'. There is no such 'thing' which needs to be pointed out: if otherwise, there would be a possibility of error whether or not one points out correctly the 'thing' as pain. "Suppose I were in error and it was no longer pain?" [Wittgenstein

1997: § 288] explains this absurdity. This does not mean that Wittgenstein's view is that of behaviourism. Again, the inner always belongs to an active agent.

The way to see this is to go back to *The Principles of Art*, in order to realise that Collingwood described the discovery of the self as a discovery of oneself as a speaker which is *at the same time* the discovery of other speakers and that he believed that 'thoughts' are linguistic and by nature *public*. Concerning the first of these points, I should like to cite the following extract from *The Principles of Art*:

[...] the child's discovery of itself as a person is also its discovery of itself as a member of a world of persons. [...] The discovery of myself as a person is the discovery that I can speak, and am thus a persona or speaker; in speaking, I am both speaker and hearer; and since the discovery of myself as a person is also the discovery of other persons around me, it is the discovery of speakers and hearers other than myself. Thus, from the first, the experience of speech contains in itself in principle the experiences of speaking to others and of hearing others speak to me. [PA: 248-9]

This passage clearly indicates that Collingwood believed that discovery of the self is of a linguistic nature, which involves the simultaneous discovery of others as speakers. One important point to notice here is that Collingwood allows for the interchangeability of the points of view: *there is no primacy of the 'I'*. This point will become of great importance later, in the theory of 're-enactment', since no such thing could take place unless *that possibility was already allowed for by the sharing of a language*.

Concerning the second point, I should like to quote at length from the beginning of Book II of *The Principles of Art*:

[...] There is a special kind of privacy about feelings, in contrast with what may be called the publicity of thoughts. A hundred people in the street may all feel cold, but each person's feeling is private to himself. But if they all think that the thermometer reads 22°Fahrenheit, they are all thinking the same thought: this thought is public to them all. The act of thinking it may or may not be an entirely private act; but a thought in the sense of what we think is not the act of thinking it, and a feeling in the sense of what we feel is not the act of feeling it. In the last paragraph I pointed to a distinction between the act of feeling and the act of

thought; in this I am pointing to a distinction between what we feel and what we think. The cold that our hundred people feel is not the physical fact that there are ten degrees of frost; nor is it even something due to that fact, for if one of them had lately been living in a colder climate he would not feel cold in those physical conditions; it is simply a feeling in them, or rather a hundred different feelings, each private to the person who feels it, but each in certain ways like all the rest. But the 'fact' or 'proposition' or 'thought' that there are ten degrees of frost is not a hundred different 'facts' or 'propositions' or 'thoughts'; it is one 'fact' or 'proposition' or 'thought' which a hundred different people 'apprehend' or 'assent to' or 'think'. And what is here said of the relation between different persons in respect of what they feel and think respectively is equally true of the relation between different occasions of feeling and thinking respectively in the life of a single person. [PA: 157-8].

This passage contains a very important, multi-faceted argument, of which I would like simply to highlight one aspect, namely that 'thought' or 'propositions' are *public* as opposed to feelings that are *private* and that the understanding of propositions is *eo ipso* a public affair which does not rely on the sort of *private* 'ceremony' of ostension that Wittgenstein so famously demolished in his *Philosophical Investigations* by pointing out that in such cases, where there is no *public* criterion of identification, "whatever is going to seem right to me is right" [Wittgenstein 1997: § 258].

This argument plays an immense role in Collingwood's philosophy of history and in the philosophy of art, because it is through the public character of 'thoughts' that one can ascertain (never, of course, with full certainty) that, on the one hand, it is *this* thought that caused so-and-so to act in such-and-such a way in the past and, on the other hand, that it is *this* emotion that this artist put in, so to speak, in a given work of art. In order fully to understand these further claims by Collingwood, however, it is necessary to sketch his theory of the 'levels of consciousness' or 'levels of thought', to which I shall now turn.

§2. Levels of Consciousness

The fundamental points of Collingwood's theory of mind, as we find it expressed in his later writings, are, first, that thoughts do not occur independently from feelings, however distinct they are, and, secondly, that consciousness is an essential ingredient of thought [NL: 4.18] and consists of different levels [NL: 4.2]. Although commentators—Mink and Donagan—disagree on the nature of the changes to his theory of mind from *The Principles of Art* (1938) to *The New Leviathan* (1942), Collingwood kept these main features as the kernel of his theory. They are also sketched in 'The Subject-Matter of History' written in 1936 and included in *The Idea of History*.⁶ In this section, I shall explain this basic, common structure of his (later) theory of mind through a chronological study of these three texts. Additionally, my purpose in this section will be to introduce a number of key notions.

In *The Idea of History*, Collingwood presents his theory of mind in articulation with the concept of historical knowledge, which is the primary focus of the 'Epilegomena' which conclude the book. For this reason, his presentation remains minimal. Yet it is obvious that his theory is similar to that which appears in his later books. Collingwood starts with the claim that there can be "historical knowledge" only of "that which can be re-enacted" [IH: 302]. This means that "there can be no history" of "that which is not experience but the mere object of experience", i.e., of nature, "whether as perceived or as thought by the scientist" [IH: 302]. If "the processes of nature are not historical processes", it is simply because the events in nature are not "actions on the part of some thinking being or beings", whose thoughts can be re-enacted [IH: 302]. (It should be pointed out that, throughout, Collingwood implicitly admits that there is

⁶ cf. [HR: 112].

an “object of experience” [IH: 302]; so there are, again, no grounds here for reading him as holding a strong form of idealism.)

Even “experience” itself is not necessarily the object of historical knowledge because, as mere “immediate experience” it is “a mere flow of consciousness consisting of sensations, feelings, and the like” [IH: 302]. It is no doubt an “activity of mind” but still not “the activity of thinking” [IH: 305], in other words it is not yet thought and not what is subject to re-enactment. (Collingwood expresses the same idea differently by saying that there could be no history of memory or perception, because the “thinking” in memory or perception is “unconscious” [IH: 307].) This “flow” is not only “directly experienced in its immediacy”, it can be “known” and “studied by thought” in both its particular details or its general characteristics [IH: 302]. In a passage where he alludes to Dilthey’s doctrine of *Nacherleben*, without, however, mentioning him, Collingwood demarcates his approach from that of his great German predecessor:

In so far as we think of [the particular details of the flow of consciousness], we are remembering experiences of our own or entering with sympathy and imagination into those of others; but in such cases we do not re-enact the experiences which we remember or with which we sympathize; we are merely contemplating them as objects external to our present selves, aided perhaps by the presence in ourselves of other experiences like them. [IH: 302-303]

(This passage allows us clearly to see that Collingwood’s notion of ‘re-enactment’ is *not* a variant of Dilthey’s *Nacherleben* or ‘re-living’. See Chapter 3, section 1.) As for thinking about “general characteristics”, this much is entering into the domain of the science of psychology but not of history. So, “In neither case are we thinking historically” [IH: 303].

Moreover, even thought itself “in its immediacy as the unique act of thought with its unique context in the life of an individual thinker” cannot be re-enacted, it is not the object of historical knowledge [IH: 303]. As such a thought in its immediacy cannot be re-enacted because one “cannot apprehend the individual act of thought in its individuality, just as it actually happened”

but only as “something that it might have shared with other acts of thought” [IH: 303]. What the individual thought shares with other acts is not, however, an “abstraction” or “common characteristic” or “universal” (as in medieval forms of realism):

But this something is not an abstraction, in the sense of a common characteristic shared by different individuals and considered apart from the individuals that share it. It is the act of thought itself, in its survival and revival at different times and in different persons: once in the historian’s own life, once in the life of the person whose history he is narrating. [IH: 303]

It is fitting to note in passing that this passage shows that Collingwood did not conceive “sameness” of thought in re-enactment in terms of the thought falling under the same universal; his theory is therefore not a resumption of the medieval theory, as was the case, for example, with Husserl’s theory in the passages from first of the *Logical Investigations* that I quoted in the introduction. It is certainly more like Aristotle’s.

In order to explain the difference between feeling and thought, Collingwood uses the example of feeling cold:

The distinction between mere feeling and thought may thus be illustrated by the distinction between simply feeling cold and being able to say ‘I feel cold’. To say that, I must be aware of myself as something more than the immediate experience of cold: aware of myself as an activity of feeling which has had other experiences previously, and remains the same throughout the difference of these experiences. I need not even remember what these experiences were; but I must know that they existed and were mine. [IH: 306]

It may be the case that one is feeling cold—the sensation would thus be part of one’s ‘flow of consciousness’— but that one is not immediately aware of that fact. To become aware is the first step towards ‘thought’, because when one becomes ‘aware’ that one is cold, one is not only conscious of the feeling but also conscious of the consciousness one has of ‘feeling cold’. Thus the key characteristic of thought is “not mere consciousness but self-consciousness”:

The peculiarity of thought, then, is that it is not mere consciousness but self-consciousness. The self, as merely conscious, is a flow of consciousness, a series of immediate sensations and feelings; but as merely conscious it not aware of

itself as such a flow; it is ignorant of its own continuity through the succession of experiences. The activity of becoming aware of this continuity is what is called thinking. [IH: 306]

The 'reflective' dimension is the key dimension. By self-consciously noticing that 'I am feeling cold' from the mere having of the feeling, by being thus aware of the reflective characteristic, thought "in its immediacy" turns into reflective thought [IH: 306-7]. Therefore, one must recognize "reflective thought" alongside thought "in its immediacy".

Reflective thought transcends "its own immediacy, survives and revives in other contexts" [IH: 303], it is, in that sense, universal. A reflective thought, "because it was actually theirs", is "potentially everyone's" [IH: 303]. Therefore, the possibility of re-enactment is situated at the level of reflective thought:

In order [...] that any particular act of thought should become the subject-matter of history, it must be an act not only of thought but of reflective thought, that is, one which is performed in the consciousness that it is being performed, and it constituted what it is by that consciousness. [IH: 308]

This should conclude the survey of the theory of the mind as sketched in *The Idea of History*. One can see that Collingwood divides it into three levels: the mere flow of consciousness or immediate experience, thought in its immediacy, and reflective thought. This trichotomy can be summarized by the following chart:

LEVELS	CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LEVELS
3. Reflective thought	Self-consciousness, universality, and possibility of re-enactment.
2. Thought in its immediacy	The unique act of thought or individual thought as awareness of something. Memory or perception as 'unconscious' thought.
1. Immediate experience	Mere flow of sensations as an activity of mind but not of thinking.

*

In *The Principles of Art*, Collingwood's focus is on the expression of emotions in the work of art. This allows him to focus on his theory of mind not merely in relation to the concept of thought as what is subject to re-enactment, as he does in *The Idea of History*, it allows him to develop in a more detailed fashion his views on the relationship between feelings/emotions and thought because, art is described as "an activity by which we become conscious of our own emotions" [PA: 292]: the passage from the level of the simple having of an emotion to the full self-awareness of the having of that emotion is thus crucial to the whole of his enterprise.

At the beginning of Book II of *The Principles of Art*, Collingwood contrasts feeling and thinking in two different ways: the contents and the acts differ. Concerning the former, Collingwood points out three differences. First, there is the contrast between "simplicity about feeling" and "bipolarity of thought". Our thinking can be well done or poorly done, successful or unsuccessful, right or wrong, true or false, good or bad, but none of these pairs apply to feelings. One does not have, e.g., a false feeling or a successful feeling. Secondly, there is a contrast between a special kind of privacy about what we feel and the publicity of what we think. Collingwood expressed this contrast in a passage about the public nature of thoughts that I have already quoted in the previous section: "A hundred people in the street may all feel cold, but each person's feeling is private to himself. But if they all think that the thermometer reads 22° Fahrenheit, they are all thinking the same thought" [PA: 157-8]. Thirdly, thoughts can corroborate or contradict each other but feelings cannot. When people feel cold, it does not necessarily imply the existence of a physical fact that there are ten degrees of frost. They are simply a hundred different feelings that are private to each person who feels it. Therefore, when I feel cold, "nothing about this feeling of mine follows from some one else's feeling either cold or

warm” [PA: 158]. That someone else is having a feeling different from mine does not mean that he is contradicting me. As I shall explain shortly, these differences come from the fact that consciousness works at the level of thought but not at the level of feelings.

The differences between the acts of feeling and thinking are linked to the theory of the levels of thoughts, the sketch of which in *The Idea of History* we have just examined. The terminology, however, turns out to be different; one must be careful not to get confused. First, Collingwood defines feeling as having two parts or elements, sensation and emotion [PA: 162]. (In this, he stands close to the psychology of Brentanians such as Meinong.) However, it is not as if one could separate these elements and, as Cartesians would do, focus merely on sensations.

There is a relation between sensation and emotion which is more intimate than [simply falling under a common genus]. When an infant is terrified at the sight of a scarlet curtain blazing in the sunlight, there are not two distinct experiences in its mind, one a sensation of red and the other an emotion of fear: there is only one experience, a terrified red. We can certainly analyse that experience into two elements, one sensuous and the other emotional; but this is not to divide it into two experiences, each independent of the other, like seeing red and hearing the note of bell. [PA: 161]

(One should notice, once more, the anti-Cartesian aspect.) To these elements of feeling, Collingwood gives the following names: sensum and emotional charge. Although Collingwood admits that it would be “difficult to verify in detail to any great extent” the claim that “every sensum has its own emotional charge” [PA: 162], he ultimately claims that the reader, when introspecting, would

[...] find that every sensum presents itself to him bearing a peculiar emotional charge, and that sensation and emotion, thus related, are twin elements in every experience of feeling. [PA: 162-163]⁷

⁷ In *The New Leviathan*, Collingwood also states clearly that every sensation carries an emotional charge [NL: 4.76-77].

Collingwood takes the opportunity for chastising “modern European civilization” for its habit of “‘sterilizing’ *sensa* by ignoring their emotional charge” [PA: 162].⁸ He also condemns the concept of *sensum* without emotional charge, which was currently in use in British philosophy, e.g., the notion of “sense-data” championed by Moore and Russell: “the emotionless *sensum*, the ‘*sensum*’ of current philosophy, is not the actual *sensum* as it is experienced, but the product of a process of sterilization” [PA: 163]. One must therefore not confuse Collingwood’s approach with the phenomenalism of Moore, Russell and their epigones.⁹

The relation between *sensum* and emotional charge is not that of temporal precedence, nor is it akin to the relation of cause to effect or the logical relation of ground to consequent. It is more like the relationship between raising one’s hand from the elbow by contracting the biceps:

The contraction of the biceps and the raising the hand are not two bodily acts, but one. This one act is analysable into these two parts, and of these the muscular contraction takes precedence of the change in the position of the hand (the hand rises ‘because’ the biceps contracts), although it is anatomically impossible that the biceps should contract before the hand rose. [PA: 161-2]

Now feelings, which are thus constituted of *sensa* and their emotional charges, “arise independently of all thinking in a part of our nature which exists and functions below the level of thought and is unaffected by it” [PA: 163]. Feelings seemingly occur independently of thought: “thought seems in this case simply to be discovering what was there independently of it almost as if we were thinking about the anatomical structure and functioning of our body, which would no

⁸ This very interesting criticism is linked with Collingwood’s political ideas in *The New Leviathan*, as he believed that one of the major defects of European liberal democracies, when facing the threat of fascism and nazism, was that it had suppressed (this is the ‘sterilization’ alluded to) the emotional element that supports it. It is also linked with Collingwood’s ideas about the social role of art in *The Principles of Art*; he saw it as a primordial role of art to bring to consciousness these very emotions that are needed in support of European democracies. These very interesting connections cannot be discussed, however, within this thesis. On political philosophy see also [Collingwood 1989] and [Boucher 1989] and [Boucher 1992].

⁹ At any rate, there is no trace of the thesis that sense-data are the *objects* of acquaintance. For related criticisms of Russell and Moore on sense-perception, see, e.g., [Collingwood 1923] and [PA: 198-199]. On Collingwood’s rejection of their theory of acquaintance, see [Dray 1957b].

doubt exist and go on whether we thought or not” [PA: 163]. This is why Collingwood distinguishes a level of feelings, which he calls the “psychical level”, without, as he warns, wishing “to conjure up associations with the Society for Psychical Research” [PA: 164]. (In *The New Leviathan*, Collingwood uses a more appropriate term, albeit with Freudian connotations: “preconscious”.) This level is a “level of experience below the level of thought”:

In calling it lower, I do not mean that it is relatively unimportant in the economy of human life, or that it constitutes a part of our being which we are entitled to despise or belittle. I mean that it has (if I am right in my opinion about it) the character of a foundation upon which the rational part of our nature is built; laid and consolidated, both of the history of the living organism at large and in the history of each human individual, before the superstructure of thought was built upon it, and enabling that superstructure to function well by being itself in a healthy condition. [PA: 163-164]

At this level, since consciousness is not at work, the distinction between conscious and unconscious does not even exist; one must therefore not describe this level as “unconscious”, since the distinction does not apply. At this level, there is a flux of sensations, where “one pattern of the total sensory field is being replaced by another” [PA: 210]. However, the “activity of attention” allows us to be “conscious” of part of the flux of sensations, say of a scarlet patch, while the other part recedes into a “penumbra”, i.e. the “negative counterpart [...] of that upon which attention is focused”: the “unconscious” [PA: 204-105]. (Thus our experience of the world is “an experience partly sensuous” and “partly intellectual” [PA: 166].)

“Attention” is identified with “consciousness” [PA: 206, 207, 223, 266] or “awareness” [PA: 206]. It is said by Collingwood to have a “double object”, the *sensum*, i.e., a sound and one’s act of sensing it, i.e., the hearing of the sound itself [PA: 206]. In this way, both sensation and *sensum* are present in one’s conscious mind. Thus the focus of attention is not identical with the focus of seeing or perceiving. Moreover, consciousness is independent of feelings and, so to

speaking, “dominates” them: consciousness is “assertion of the self as able in principle to dominate the feeling” [PA: 208]. By this work of attention, one becomes able to perpetuate feelings at will:

Attending to a feeling means holding it before the mind; rescuing it from the flux of mere sensation, and conserving it for so long as may be necessary in order that we should take note of it. This, again, means perpetuating the act by which we feel it; for a given sensum can appear only to the appropriate act, and a sustained sensum implies a sustained act of sensation. If the reference here had been to pure sensation, this language would have been meaningless; but the reference is to sensation as modified by consciousness. [PA: 209]¹⁰

These remarks about “consciousness” form the basis for Collingwood’s rejection of the method of introspection, which was common in the psychology of his days:

Hence we cannot study psychical experience [...] by inquiring into our own consciousness; that can only tell us clearly of the things to which it attends, and obscurely of those which it ignores. [PA: 205]

A further critical remark can be gleaned from *An Essay on Metaphysics*: “Introspection can do not more than bring into the focus of consciousness something of which we are already aware” [EM: 43].

Incidentally, the reasons for Collingwood’s rejection of introspection are linked with his deep-seated rejection of Cartesianism. This much becomes clearer later in *The New Leviathan*, but a few words are in order here, if only to press the point further that Collingwood did not hold a form of Cartesian dualism. First, as Donagan pointed out, Collingwood rejects “Descartes’ doctrine that the acts of consciousness are, as it were, self-illuminating” [LPC: 25]: one is not necessarily aware of what one is conscious of and another act must be performed [NL: 5.91], i.e., the act of “attention” or “awareness”, which is not akin to seeing or perceiving [PA: 203-204]. Secondly, there is no “infallibility” about reports of one’s feelings [NL: 11.36]. The reasons for

¹⁰ Jones points out [Jones 1972: 51] the similarity between Collingwood and Wittgenstein, who wrote: “Attending to the feeling means producing or modifying it.” [BB: 174].

this claim will be explored later: what one is aware of must be expressed in propositions and all propositions may be, in principle, mistaken [NL: 11.35].

However, Collingwood claims in *The New Leviathan* that arguments about reports of what one is immediately conscious of are “misplaced” [NL: 4.73]. As Donagan pointed out,

If you profess to admire Napoleon, it must be reasonable for somebody to try to persuade you that you ought not; but he would make himself ridiculous if he tried to argue that you do not. Yet in saying you admired Napoleon, you could be mistaken. [LPC: 25]

One could be mistaken for the very reason just pointed out: your report, in the shape of a proposition, could just be mistaken. Therefore, it is fallacious, according to Collingwood, to infer from the fact that one is immediately aware of something that one cannot be mistaken about what one is aware of. All this amounts to a rejection of introspection as a valid method.

According to Collingwood, thought detects relations between *sensa*. It is because one detects a “qualitative similarity” between a given patch and other red patches that one is capable of calling it “red” but

Before I can say ‘This is red’ I must first have appreciated the colour-quality which, because it is like certain other, I thus call by the same name. This act of appreciating something, just as it stands, before I can begin to classify it, is what we call attending to it. [PA: 203]

Attention works thus:

[...] what presents itself (what is called ‘a red patch’) to our eyes, in so far as we merely see, is never a red patch. It is always a visual field, more or less parti-coloured; having no definite edges, but fading into confusion and dimness away from the focus of vision. A patch is a piece cut out of this field, which presents itself to us only in so far as we look at it. To describe it as a patch implies that the field is divided into an object of attention, and a background or penumbra from which attention is withdrawn. [PA: 204]

Attention is thus always of a “concrete individual”, i.e., this red patch as it presents itself to oneself. Therefore, “Attention divides, but it does not abstract” [PA: 204]. It is possible to

abstract from it the quality “redness”, which it shares with other red patches, but “we do so not by attending but by thinking” [PA: 204]. Such acts of thinking are *founded on* acts of attention:

The activity of thinking or intellectual activity always presupposes the activity of attention, not in the sense that it can only happen after it, but in the sense that it rests upon it as upon a foundation. Attention is going on concurrently with intellection; an attention combined with intellection, and modified by it in such way as that combination requires. [PA: 204]

(Collingwood is not very far here from the notion of “founded acts” which was current in the Brentano school, especially in the sixth of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* [Husserl 1970].) But Collingwood wished to distinguish a further level between those of sensation and intellect, “a distinct level of experience intermediate between sensation and intellect, the point at which the life of thought makes contact with the life of the purely psychological experience” [PA: 215], and he accordingly introduced the level of imagination:

There must, in other words, be a form of experience other than sensation, but closely related to it: so closely as to be easily mistaken for it, but different in that the colours, sounds, and so on which in this experience we ‘perceive’ are retained in some way or other before the mind, anticipated, recalled, although these same colours and sounds, in their capacity as *sensa*, have ceased to be seen and heard. This other form of experience is what we ordinarily call imagination; [...] [PA: 202]

Here, Collingwood explicitly ties his conception of imagination to Hume’s distinction between impressions and ideas:¹¹

[...] we must cling to the notion of something of the kind exists, and recollect that its existence was a cardinal point in the philosophy of Hume. It was in order to distinguish it from sensation that Hume distinguished ideas from impressions; and it was his great merit to have realized that what modern philosophers miscall relations between *sensa* (that is, between what he calls impression) are relations not between impressions but between ideas. [PA: 203]

¹¹ For a discussion of Collingwood’s use of Hume in this context, see [Wertz 1994: 261-268]. One should notice that Collingwood actually differs from Hume by making explicit the fact that an act of attending is necessary to explain the move from impressions to ideas, while Hume claimed that they were formed as the result of custom and experience.

At the merely psychological level, the mind exists “only in the shape of sentience”, but when “the light of consciousness” falls on feelings, “what was sentience becomes imagination” [PA: 205]. In other words, the activity of consciousness is to *convert* crude sensation into imagination. Consciousness and imagination are somewhat synonymous but consciousness is what converts feelings into imagination:¹²

[...] they stand for the same thing, namely, the level of experience at which this conversion occurs. But within a single experience of this kind there is a distinction between that which effects the conversion and that which has undergone it. Consciousness is the first of these, imagination is the second. [PA: 215]

Thus imagination is “the new form which feeling takes when transformed by the activity of consciousness” [PA: 215]. Imagination is placed between sensation and intellect, thus, “it is not *sensa* as such that provide the data for intellect, it is *sensa* transformed into ideas of imagination by the work of consciousness” [PA: 215].

On the other hand, consciousness is identified by Collingwood with thought “in its absolutely fundamental and original shape” [PA: 216], which applies not only to intellect but to all conscious activity. Like thought, consciousness has bipolarity. The statement ‘This is how I feel’ imply the opposite, ‘This is not how I feel’; it asserts the former and denies the latter. In this sense,

A true consciousness is the confession to ourselves of our feelings; a false consciousness would be disowning them, i.e. thinking about one of them ‘That feeling is not mine’. [PA: 216]

With these remarks, Collingwood sets the stage for one of the most fascinating concepts of his entire *opus*, that of “corruption of consciousness”, a concept that has, as he himself

¹² There are other uses of the word “imagination” in *Principles of Art* which do not correspond to this meaning. It is clear that Collingwood merely equivocates as, e.g., Donagan pointed out [LPC: 116]. This point is discussed at length in Chapter 5, section 2.

recognizes, Spinozistic [PA: 219] and Freudian [PA: 218-219] overtones. The reasoning is fairly simple: consciousness is said to be the process by which we turn sensation into imagination, in other words, by which one becomes aware of one's feelings. This process of recognition "may be attempted but prove a failure":

It is as if we should bring a wild animal indoors, hoping to domesticate it, and then, when it bites, lose your nerve and let go. Instead of becoming a friend, what we have brought into the house has become an enemy. [PA: 217]

It is when recognition takes place "abortively" [PA: 217] that consciousness becomes corrupted:

First, we direct our attention towards a certain feeling, or become conscious of it. Then we take fright at what we have recognized: not because the feeling, as an impression, is an alarming impression, but because the idea into which we are converting it proves an alarming idea. We cannot see our way to dominate it, and shrink from persevering in the attempt. We therefore give it up, and turn our attention to something less intimidating. I call this the 'corruption' of consciousness [...] [PA: 217]

This notion is a key to Collingwood's philosophy of art: as such art consists of a fight against the corruption of consciousness, whose symptoms are described by Collingwood as "evil in itself" [PA: 218], it is a fight against the "powers of darkness" by successfully bringing into collective consciousness socially important emotions. (One must remember that *Principles of Art* was published in 1938—the year of the Munich affair and the betrayal of Czechoslovakia by the European democracies, which terribly upset Collingwood—and his overt reference to totalitarian states such as Nazi Germany is rather obvious here.) I shall discuss this again in Chapter 5, section 3.

At first blush, one may describe the intellect as thought that takes other thoughts as its objects. Collingwood also calls it "secondary form of thought" [PA: 166] or "secondary function of thought, or thought of the second order" [PA: 167]. According to Collingwood, "The work of intellect is to apprehend or construct relations". So, more precisely, intellect in its "primary" function apprehends relations between feelings, not as "crude feelings of purely psychical

experience”, i.e., what he calls “impressions”, but “as modified by consciousness and so converted into ideas” [PA: 216]. In its “secondary” function, intellect “apprehends relations between acts of primary intellection or between what in such acts we think” [PA: 216]. For example, when I say “That is my hat”, I make certain relations between certain colour-sensa arranged in a certain way, obtained by looking at a hat, and other sensa obtained by memory such as the ‘look’ of my hat as I remember it hanging on the peg in my hall. Then I say that these relations are of such a kind that the hat at which I am now looking cannot be any one else’s but mine [PA: 165].

I may thus conclude my presentation of the philosophy of the mind in *The Principles of Art* with the following chart:

LEVELS	CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LEVELS
3. Intellect	Thought apprehends the relations between other thoughts from the previous level and between such primary acts of intellection.
2. Imagination	Consciousness (attention, awareness) converts crude feelings into imagination (impressions into ideas); no abstraction; bipolarity
1. Psychological level	Flow of sensations, crude feelings.

*

Collingwood gave another presentation of his philosophy of mind four years after *The Principles of Art* in *The New Leviathan* (1942). In the style of the book, this presentation is more succinct but new elements are added (and, as I shall claim in the next section, there is at least one important change). For example, Collingwood elaborates his view on the “objects of feeling”; these were hardly mentioned in *The Idea of History* and not at all in *The Principles of Art*. This detailed discussion obviously shows that Collingwood considered that objects of feeling exist independently from the perceiver. It shows Collingwood’s agreement with the rejection of

phenomenalism and other representative theories which he shares *inter alia*, as I pointed out in the introduction, with both Bradley and the Oxford Realists, Cook Wilson and Prichard. But Collingwood's argument in *The New Leviathan* has a surprisingly modern flavour.

"Are there objects of feeling or not? I do not know. Nobody knows" [NL: 5.2]. Collingwood opens his discussion with this peremptory remark. His answer to the question will thus be on "methodological grounds" [NL: 5.2]. He begins by pointing out that, while Locke asserted that there are objects of feelings, Descartes denied it [NL: 5.21]. According to the Lockean doctrine, seeing, hearing, etc. are activities that have objects, i.e., hearing has sounds as objects, etc. and these objects are called "sense-data" or "sensa" [NL: 5.23-5.24]. (These sense-data are said by Collingwood to be the "first-order objects" of sheer sensation at the same time as they are "second-order objects" of "simple consciousness", whose "first-order" object is the sensation itself [NL: 5.24]. These terminological matters involve the distinction between levels of thought; I shall come back to it in a moment.) Collingwood further points out that Berkeley, having made Locke's doctrine explicit, asked the further question: What is the status of these objects? [NL: 5.27]. Berkeley famously answered that "their *esse* is *percipi*" [NL: 5.28] and, Collingwood continues:

The things whose *esse* is *percipi* are in his language 'ideas', which are non-mental things, not constituents of mind like the activities of seeing or hearing, but apanages of mind and in particular inert or passive things, products of these activities. [NL: 5.29].

So, according to Collingwood, neither Locke nor Berkeley seriously ask if there are such things but assume that some of them (i.e., secondary qualities), in the case of Locke, and all of them, in the case of Berkeley, "must be the products of the activity [...] whose objects they were" [NL: 5.3]. Then, Collingwood points out that G. E. Moore argued, by contrast, that an object of feeling is "precisely what it would be if we were not aware [of it]" [NL: 5.31], thus maintaining

that the objects of sensation, i.e., sense-data, are independent from both the act of sensation and consciousness. Now Collingwood argues that both Berkeley and Moore are wrong, because *there are strictly speaking no objects of feeling*. He claims further that this point was made by Descartes:

The Cartesian answer to the question: 'Are there objects of feeling or not?' (5.2) was negative. This does not mean that Descartes was such a lover of paradox as to deny that when I raise my eyes above the table at which I am writing I see a blue colour. What it means is that Descartes denied the blue colour to be the object of a transitive verb *to see*, as a dog may be the object of a transitive verb *to kick*. It means that for Descartes the grammar of the sentence 'I see a blue colour' is not like the grammar of 'I kick a bad dog' but like the grammar of 'I feel a transient melancholy' or 'I go a fast walk'. The colour, the melancholy, the walk, are not objects of the action, they are *modes* of an action; their names have an *adverbial* function in the sentences in which they occur. [NL: 5.34-5.35]

If Descartes is right, then an essential presupposition of the antagonistic views of Berkeley and Moore is undermined, hence both appear to try and answer a nonsensical question:

If the Cartesian answer is right, the question which Berkeley answered one way ('sensa are mind-dependent') and Moore, like so many others in the present century, in the opposite way ('sensa are mind-independent') is a nonsense question: a question to which no possible answer is right because it arises logically from an assumption that is not made. [NL: 5.36]

In short, the Cartesian answer is that, because of a confusion about the grammar of sentences such as 'I see blue colour', what are wrongly described as the *objects* of the activity of seeing are in fact the *modes* of that activity. Donagan calls this a "modal theory" of the objects of sensation [LPC: 31];¹³ to avoid a possible confusion it is perhaps better to call this the "adverbial" theory. Collingwood concludes that, in absence of any possible evidence in favour of one or other answer

¹³ Donagan argues in [LPC: 30-36] at length that "both the theory in *the New Leviathan* that what is felt consists simply of modes of feeling, and not of objects, and the theory in *The Principles of Art* that the *esse* of objects of feeling is *sentiri*, must go" [LPC: 36]. I shall not provide a rejoinder here. I should merely remark that Donagan considers Collingwood's "obvious truth" [PA: 200] that there cannot be 'unsensed sensa'—Russell's 'sensibilia'—a "howler" [LPC: 33], proving his point by arguing from analogy: Collingwood's "truth" would imply the non-existence of a parliamentary candidate prior to his standing for election. Donagan's argument is itself a *petitio*

to his question, it is methodologically sounder to follow Occam's razor and, accept Descartes' viewpoint because one can thus do without the postulation of objects of feeling.

Never mind the fact that Descartes framed such an argument, its *linguistic nature* is very striking. It sounds so much like linguistic philosophy that it is very much the same as another theory for which Ryle became famous instead of Collingwood, his theory of "adverbial verbs" in *On Thinking* [Ryle 1979]. As Ryle points out, "there is and can be no such thing as, for example, just obeying *per se* or just accelerating *per se*. Something positive or concrete must be being done for taking care, rehearsing or cooperating to be being done" [Ryle 1979: 17]. For example, I obey the order to slope my arms just by sloping my arms, I do not do two different kinds of act of obeying and sloping arms: I am obeying by sloping arms. The conclusion is that adverbial verbs do not take the object as other kinds of verbs do.

Collingwood's grammatical argument is on the other hand also reminiscent of Wittgenstein, according to which a sentence such as 'You cannot know when A has pain' should not be considered on a par with a sentence such as 'I cannot know whether the other man has a gold tooth', for the former is a metaphysical proposition that needs conceptual investigation and the latter is a physical proposition that needs factual, scientific investigation. Unlike physical propositions that express facts, metaphysical propositions express grammatical rules. The only way to resolve the problem in the conceptual sentences is by making grammatical rules clear. P. M. S. Hacker, a well-known commentator, expressed the idea thus: "Conceptual investigations are investigations into our measuring rods and their uses, not into what is measured" [Hacker 1986: 196]. Therefore, the sentence 'You cannot know when A has pain' does not mean that you

principi, since the analogy holds only if the *sensa* is existing prior to its being sensed, which is precisely the point of contention.

really do not know but that it is grammatically incorrect therefore makes no sense to say you know [Wittgenstein 1958: 54]. As Wittgenstein explains:

If we are angry with someone for going out on a cold day with a cold in his head, we sometimes say: "I won't feel your cold". And this can mean: "I don't suffer when you catch a cold". This is a proposition taught by experience. For we could imagine a, so to speak, wireless connection between the two bodies which made one person feel pain in his head when the other had exposed his to the cold air. One might in this case argue that the pains are mine because they are felt in my head; but suppose I and someone else had a part of our bodies in common, say a hand. Imagine the nerves and tendons of my arm and A's connected to this hand by an operation. Now imagine the hand stung by a wasp. Both of us cry, contort our faces, give the same description of the pain, etc. Now are we to say we have the same pain or different ones? If in such a case you say: "We feel pain in the same place, in the same body, our descriptions tally, but still my pain can't be his", I suppose as a reason you will be inclined to say: "because my pain is my pain and his pain is his pain". And here you are making a grammatical statement about the use of such a phrase as "the same pain". You say that you don't wish to apply the phrase, "he has got my pain" or "we both have the same pain", and instead, perhaps, you will apply such a phrase as "his pain is exactly like mine". (It would be no argument to say that the two couldn't have the same pain because one might anaesthetize or kill one of them while the other still felt pain.) Of course, if we exclude the phrase "I have his toothache" from our language, we thereby also exclude "I have (or feel) *my* toothache". Another form of our metaphysical statement is this: "A man's sense data are private to himself". And this way of expressing it is even more misleading because it looks still more like an experiential proposition; the philosopher who says this may well think that he is expressing a kind of scientific truth. [Wittgenstein 1958: 54-55]

These connections show once more that Collingwood was far from being an old-fashioned philosopher, such as his predecessor J. A. Smith, but a much more modern, linguistic philosopher than he is usually made to be. I should like now to present briefly Collingwood's description of the various levels of thought in *The New Leviathan*.

In *The New Leviathan*, there are three important characteristics about thought and feelings. First of all, thought, or consciousness, is a consciousness of something, namely of feelings [NL: 6.26]. In this sense, secondly, thought cannot stand alone without feelings. Therefore, thirdly, feeling is considered as the basis of thought. Considering these characteristics, when Collingwood says that man's mind *is* consciousness and that man's mind *has* feelings [NL: 4.2],

he describes, first, that mind as an activity of thought which becomes conscious of feelings which is the object of the act of thought, and therefore secondly, that thought as not existing independently from feelings but as converting them into the form of higher level by consciousness.

Consciousness at the level of brute feelings is called “simple consciousness” [NL: 4.24]. As in *The Principles of Art*, feeling consists of “sensuous elements” such as a colour seen or a sound heard, and an “emotional charge” such as the cheerfulness with which you see the colour, or the fear with which you hear the noise [NL: 4.1]. Emotional charge exists at each level of consciousness and thus becomes the first object of consciousness at each level of thought [NL: 4.76-4.78]. Emotions occur not only with sensations but also with thought. In this case, emotions are inseparable from thought [NL: 4.76-4.78, RPh: 10-11]. They are inseparable not only in the sense that emotions depend on either sensations or thought, but also because they contain an intellectual element, namely that of conceptual thought [NL: 10.26, 10.43].¹⁴ This characteristic of emotion is important for the philosophy of art; I shall talk about this issue in Chapter 5.

As with *The Principles of Art*, feelings are also described in *The New Leviathan* as the tangle or confusion of the “here-and-now” [NL: 4.4, 4.6, PA: 159]. Collingwood describes feelings as a “field” [NL: 5.61] that has “focal” and “penumbral” region [NL: 4.44]. It is indefinite [NL: 4.8] and has no “edge” [NL: 4.45], i.e., feelings fade in and out without clear distinction. Because of this, it has a numerical ambiguity [NL: 5.6]. It cannot be single or complex, nor a whole [NL: 5.6] since being whole requires edges. At this level, one does not clearly understand what one is feeling: “A man is conscious... of a confused mass of feeling”.

¹⁴ Van der Dussen further refers the manuscript on cosmology as follows: [a]n emotion which we find by reflexion to persist as part of the furniture of our mind is a thought, or contains thought. Emotion as such is not destroyed by

Donagan puts this in the following way: “A man may be conscious of being something, and yet not aware that he is conscious of it” [LPC: 25].

As was stated both in *The Idea of History* and *The Principles of Art*, consciousness is identified with thought and considered to be the essential constituent of the mind [NL: 4.18].

This is called the second-level consciousness and it takes feelings as its object:

Feeling is a here-and-now immediately given to consciousness; from which it follows that any characteristics that feeling may have are discoverable by simply reflecting on that consciousness, and any characteristics that a particular feeling may have are discoverable by reflection on that particular feeling as given to theoretical consciousness after being distinguished from the here-and-now in which it occurs by the act of selective attention. [NL: 4.71]

Until one pays attention to the flux of feelings that are here-and-now, it stays tangled. It is the work of selective attention which gradually makes “an infinite variety of different patterns, according as it reduces this confusion to order in an infinite variety of different ways”. It is first imposed by an act of practical consciousness and “affording an object of contemplation to theoretical consciousness” [NL: 4.6]. Thus, for instance, the colour red, when perceived as “this red patch”, is isolated from tangled feeling by selective attention [NL: 5.64-5.65].¹⁵ That is to say, edges are given to a feeling by selective attention [NL: 4.5, 4.53]. Unlike what he wrote in *The Principles of Art*, Collingwood does not consider attention as being immediate and non-abstract: on the contrary, he now says that “anybody who supposes ‘this red patch’ to be immediately given in or by sensation to consciousness has overlooked the numerical ambiguity of feelings” [NL: 5.64], which means that no feeling can be counted distinctively [NL: 5.6]. Therefore, for example, “The red is actually given in feeling to consciousness as a quality transfusing all the rest of the same field; only a man who indulges in the practise of selective

reason; it is clarified, it comes to know itself, it rids itself of many strange errors; but it survives all these changes” [HS: 265]

attention segregates it into a patch” [NL: 5.65]. This activity is done by language, by talking about the feelings in speech or any other non-verbal languages [NL: 6.2-6.22]. This work of attention is done when “he ‘attends to’ some element or group of elements in this mass of feeling” [NL: 7.24]. This is the second-level consciousness, which is called “conceptual thinking” [NL: 7.2-7.21]. At this level, feelings can be remembered [NL: 5.54].

The next level of consciousness is called ‘propositional thinking’ [NL: 11.22]. At this level, language formulates propositions. The characteristic of this level of consciousness is knowing a thing by “asking questions and answering them” [NL: 11.11]. The whole procedure from the simple consciousness to the propositional thinking is described as follows:

First, where x is the thing I want to get knowledge about, and begin with mere consciousness of, I *make supposition about x*.

For example, as I write, I hear a roaring noise. Having fixed my attention on it by an act of second-order consciousness whose practical aspect is what I call *selective attention* or the *focusing* of my consciousness on that noise and away from other things, I consider whether I shall suppose it to be a noise in my head or a noise made by something outside me, and choose the latter.

Next, I *ask question about it*. These are logically connected with the suppositions. In this case, having decided to suppose that the noise is made by something outside me, I ask: ‘What makes it?’

Thirdly, I *answer the questions*. In this case, having compared the noise with what I recollect of other noises I have heard, I answer: ‘An aeroplane: to be precise, a Hurricane fighter.’ [NL: 4.32-4.35]

Brute sensation such as hearing, in this case, or emotional charges such as anger [NL: 10.51] are first merely given as flux of feelings. Selective attention is “capable of framing abstractions from what is ‘given’” [NL: 10.51], abstractions by which I realize that I hear something or I have a certain emotion. This is the first-order consciousness. I may then heed this first-order consciousness: this is the second-order consciousness and, by this act, I form a proposition about my feeling.

¹⁵ Mink links this with the role of imagination in *The Principles of Art*. See [Mink MHD: 92, 94-5, 97-100].

Here, Collingwood is making room for another theory of his own, which he calls in his *Autobiography* the “logic of question and answer”. As already mentioned in the introduction, this theory came about through his experiences in archaeology. It amounts to a rejection of “the intuitionist theory of knowledge favoured by the ‘realists’” [A: 30]. Collingwood considers that a body of knowledge “consists not of ‘propositions’, ‘statements’, or ‘judgements’”, but “of these together with the questions they are meant to answer” [A: 30]. He explains this as follows:

I began by observing that you cannot find out what a man means by simply studying his spoken or written statements, even though he has spoken or written with perfect command of language and perfectly truthful intention. In order to find out his meaning you must also know what the question was (a question in his own mind, and presumed by him to be in yours) to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer.

It must be understood that question and answer, as I conceived them, were strictly correlative. 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 as itself. [A: 31-2]

Thus, using Collingwood’s own example, when my car has a breakdown, I check whether the number-one plug works or not. My observation that ‘number one plug is all right’ is not the answer to the question ‘Why won’t my car go?’, it is the answer to the question ‘Is it because number one plug is not sparking that my car won’t go?’ The question ‘Why won’t my car go?’ is a summary of all these concrete and detailed questions. (Therefore, it does not exist separately and independently from them.)

Collingwood further applies this concept to the ideas of contradiction and of truth. He argues that current logic makes a mistake in considering that propositions that seem to contradict each other can be examined without taking the questions about them into account. He maintains that the contradiction of the answers to the same question is impossible, therefore, what seems to be contradicting propositions are normally different answers to different questions. Truth and

falsehood should also be considered under the same condition. Since the meaning of a proposition is relative to the question it answers to, its truth depends on both the proposition and the question. Collingwood's concept of truth will be further explained and discussed in Chapter 4.

These remarks can now be summarized by the following chart for the *New Leviathan*:

LEVELS OF THOUGHT	CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LEVELS
4. Reason	Question-and-answer thinking about the relation of propositions.
3. Propositional thinking	Question-and-answer thinking about individual thought.
2. Conceptual thinking	Selective attention which makes a pattern of feelings in the mind.
1. Simple consciousness or preconscious	Immediate experience of sensations and emotional charges.

This account of *The New Leviathan* and of Collingwood's final, mature theory of mind is not complete, however, because one aspect of it has been deliberately left aside (or rather merely alluded to) in order to be discussed in the following section, namely the role played by language. At any rate, the material presented in this section was not meant to be an exhaustive presentation of Collingwood's theory of the levels of consciousness. The point was to provide a sketch of the parts of it that form an essential background to the discussion of historical understanding in Chapter 3 and of artistic imagination in Chapter 5.

§ 3. Attention, Imagination, and Language

As I have already claimed, the passage from *The Principles of Art* of 1938 to *The New Leviathan* of 1942 embodies an important change. In a nutshell, Collingwood's theory of mind becomes "linguistic" because the passage from the lowest level ("psychical" or "preconscious") to the

level immediately above is not anymore explained in terms derivative of associationist psychology, i.e., essentially by the role of “imagination”, as in, e.g., Hume, but in linguistic terms. This change is perhaps best reflected in this sentence from *The New Leviathan*:

Language in its simplest form is the language of consciousness in its simplest form; the mere “register” of feelings. [NL: 6.58]

In this section, I shall describe this change, using as a basis Alan Donagan’s apt commentary in *The Later Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood* [LPC: 29-50].

I shall take the opportunity to refute the interpretation given by Louis Mink in *Mind, History and Dialectic* [MHD: 92f.]. Mink’s interpretation is based on the idea that there are no significant distinctions between the presentation of the theory of mind in *The Idea of History*, *The Principles of Art* and *The New Leviathan*. Therefore, he supplements his reading of *The New Leviathan* helping himself with the account of the role of imagination in *The Principles of Art*, not realizing that the explanation of the role of language in *The New Leviathan* conflicts with it. I favour the more linguistic interpretation over the “dialectical” interpretation of Mink [Mink 1972: 155]. Furthermore, Mink distinguishes between two parallel sets of levels, namely the levels of cognitive consciousness and the levels of practical consciousness. This distinction does not occur in Collingwood’s texts. Its fictitiousness is all the more apparent when Mink needs, as I shall show, to supplement his analyses by introducing a level of practical consciousness parallel to the level of cognitive consciousness which he dubs “perception” and for which there is no basis in Collingwood’s text. This is a further reason to reject Mink’s interpretation of Collingwood. Such criticisms are important, if only to show that there is a danger in getting lost in ‘architectonic’ considerations when interpreting Collingwood, as opposed to simply trying to understand the very nature of his arguments, where his originality and relevance are really to be found. To put the contrast bluntly, it is better to avoid an overall interpretation of Collingwood’s

philosophy in ambitious quasi-Hegelian, 'dialectical' terms and to focus instead on the (linguistic) nature of the key arguments underlying his positions.

I should like first to elucidate the changes between the *Principles of Art* and *The New Leviathan*, by going back to the above remarks concerning the notion of 'imagination' in the *Principles of Art*. According to Collingwood, the confusion of sensation with imagination, from Locke to Moore, has become a dogma:

The only way in which a sensum can be present to us is by our sensing it; and if there is anything which enables us to speak of 'sensa' not now being sensed, this cannot be strictly sensation, and the sensa in question cannot be strictly sensa. This is an obvious truth; but the denial of it has become an orthodoxy. [PA: 200]

Here, Collingwood aligns himself with his teachers, the Oxford Realists, who had criticized thoroughly and vehemently the 'representative' theories of perception. Prichard had actually levelled the same objection against Russell [Marion 2000: 336-337]. However, the Realists had perceived Hume as a sort of 'father of fallacies' but Collingwood believed that Hume had seen the way out:

He was right when he laid it down that the immediate concern of thought is not with impressions but with ideas; that it is ideas, not impressions, that are associated with one another and thus built up into the fabric of knowledge; and that ideas, though 'derived' from impressions, are not mere relics of them like an after-taste of onions or an after-image of the sun (as Lockians like Condillac supposed), but something different in kind: different, if not in what he calls their 'nature', in the way which they are related to the active powers of the mind. But because he was not able [...] to give a satisfactory account of this difference, we find today that philosophers who attempt to follow him lose sight of his partial but very real achievement; either identifying the idea with a special kind of impression, like Condillac, or denying the idea altogether, and reducing what Hume called the relations between ideas to relations between the words which we use when we talk about ideas. [PA: 200-201]

To this passage, Collingwood appends a footnote concerning the denials by Condillac and contemporary philosophers. Its second part is worth quoting:

The alternative way of ignoring Hume is to merge the idea in the word by which we designate it, and thus reduce what Hume calls relations between ideas to

relations between words. This is the doctrine of certain ‘logical positivists’, who hold that the propositions which Hume describes as asserting relations between ideas merely ‘record our determination to use symbols’ that is, words ‘in a certain fashion’ (A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (1935) [sic], p. 11). [PA: 201]

It is clearly implied here that Collingwood rejected the ‘merging’ of the idea in the word that he found in Ayer’s book. In other words, Collingwood was not, at the time of writing *Principles of Art*, a linguistic philosopher. The role played by imagination in the philosophy of mind is pre-linguistic and Collingwood clearly stands, for that reason, in the wake of the associationist psychology derived from British empiricism. I contend, along with Donagan, that Collingwood changed his mind on this point, although, he did not free himself completely from his old conception. I shall first explain this change of mind, then add some critical comments concerning Mink’s interpretation.

Uninclined as he was to adopt the Realist notions of ‘acquaintance’ (Moore, Russell) and ‘apprehension’ (Cook Wilson), Collingwood conceived of perception as involving not just “immediacy” (sensation) but also a large component of “mediation” or “thought” (interpretation) [SM: 204]. In his 1924 paper on ‘Sensation and Thought’, Collingwood made it plain that according to his conception, the element of mediation dominates in perception:

The nature of all knowledge is fundamentally mediation or interpretation. [...] Every starting point of thought is a product of thought. [Collingwood 1924: 74]

With this antirealist claim, of a Kantian nature, Collingwood definitely stands apart from ‘realism’ in perception.¹⁶ Collingwood even expressed himself in terms reminiscent of Wilfrid Sellars’ famous critique of the ‘myth of the given’ [Sellars 1997]: precisely because, as he would write later when criticizing Cook Wilson, “familiarity with the operations involved has bred not so much contempt as oblivion” [A: 26], Collingwood, would write that

¹⁶ Rubinoff has noted the Kantian aspect here [Rubinoff 1970b: 92].

Perception appears to the perceiver as immediate; this is what is meant by speaking of the object of perception as “given”. [EPH: 49]

But:

[...] it is not in reality immediate, and its object is not in the strict sense given. Reflexion shows in all perception two elements, sensation and thought “interpreting” or reflecting upon the “data of sensation”. Sensation here is a mere abstraction, the limiting case in which we are supposed to receive unreflectively a pure datum. In actual experience we never get such a pure datum: whatever we call a datum is in point of fact already interpreted by thought. [EPH: 49-50]

Therefore, to ‘see’, ‘hear’, ‘feel’, ‘taste’, or ‘smell’ is not just to be in a purely receptive state; those words are, according to Collingwood, what Ryle would later call “achievement words” [Ryle 1963: 223]; there is, as Donagan would put it, an element of ‘noticing’ [LPC: 36-38]. In *The Principles of Art*, Collingwood spoke of “attention”, as I have shown in the previous section.

Collingwood also held, in *The Principles of Art*, that attention is selective and that “Attention divides, but it does not abstract” [PA: 204]. These points need to be clarified and I shall clarify by adapting (following Donagan [LPC: 48]) Collingwood’s own example of seeing a red patch against a green background, e.g., looking through the window and seeing a red blanket on a green lawn. Collingwood believes that in order to name a part of the visual field ‘red patch’, or before one can say ‘This is a red patch’, one must attend to it (my emphasis): “This act of appreciating something, just as it stands, *before I can begin to classify it*, is what we call attending to it” [PA: 203]. Now attention merely divides the visual field into an object of attention and a “background or penumbra”. The passage in question has already been quoted:

[...] what presents itself (what is called ‘a red patch’) to our eyes, in so far as we merely see, is never a red patch. It is always a visual field, more or less parti-coloured; having no definite edges, but fading into confusion and dimness away from the focus of vision. A patch is a piece cut out of this field, which presents itself to us only in so far as we look at it. To describe it as a patch implies that the field is divided into an object of attention, and a background or penumbra from which attention is withdrawn. [PA: 204]

It is as if one first divides the visual field into two parts, the patch and the background and only then gives it the name 'red patch'. Attention simply precedes abstraction or, as it amounts to the same conceptual thinking [NL: 7.22]. I contend that Collingwood's conception of attention, as just presented, does not square with his quasi-Sellarsian rejection of the 'given' in his earlier writings. This rejection of the 'given' is a cornerstone of Collingwood's philosophy and was not to be traded off. In order fully to reject the possibility of a pure datum, in order to claim that perception is dominated by "mediation", attention had to be conceived of as conceptual through and through: there must not be a bottom level which would be non-conceptual. It should come as no surprise then that in *The New Leviathan*, Collingwood, who would now speak of "selective attention" [NL: 4.5, 7.23], held the exact opposite view from that he expressed in the above passages of *The Principles of Art*:

The act of attending is not merely a doing something to yourself, focusing your consciousness on a certain part of the field and repressing (4.51) the rest; it is also a doing something to the object: circumscribing it, drawing a line between it and the rest of the field.

For example if the field is a visual field this act converts the part 'attended to' into a patch of colour. It is fashionable to describe colour-patches as if they were given in sensation and not (as they really are) made by selective attention; but this only because those who so describe them have penetrated in reflection no further than the level at which these things are found ready-made, stopping short of the deeper level at which the work of making them is done, and still further short of the level at which it has not begun. [NL: 7.3-7.31]

Now this selection is not just 'division' but 'abstraction', as in the case of looking at the red blanket on the lawn: one cannot circumscribe the red patch without attending to it *as a red patch*. In order to select the red patch for attention you must first 'clarify' to yourself what you are attending to:

As not given but abstracted from the given, a selection is a product of practical consciousness; in cutting it off from the rest of the datum you have not only circumscribed it (7.3) [...] you have also clarified it; [...] you have eliminated the green out of what was given as a red-green colour-contrast, and selected the red for attention. What you attend to is pure red, and this pure red is nothing found, it

is something made: made by the practical act of attention and afterwards found ready-made by reflection on the consequences of that act. [NL: 7.38]

Now, as Alan Donagan pointed out, such acts of abstraction are “inescapably linguistic”:

To form the concept *red* is to abstract what being red is, as distinct from being something else; and you show that you have formed it by such acts as telling whether a rose or a blanket or the like is red or not, and perceiving that if pearls are white all over they cannot be red even in part. These acts are inescapably linguistic, although neither the word ‘red’ nor the English language need be employed. Unless you employed some sign or gesture that means what the English word ‘red’ means, you could not employ the concept *red*, even in your head. The idea that it is possible to form a pure wordless concept of red, whose glassy essence may be contemplated by a mind alone with itself, is only not refutable because it is vacuous. [LPC: 49]

This is clearly the conclusion reached earlier by Collingwood, who would now define attention as a linguistic act, and thus, following chapter IV of Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, invert the priority from thought over language to language over thought:

‘Hobbes emphatically asserts that it is... reason... which marks men off from the brutes... And yet if we look more narrowly we shall find that this marvellous endowment of man is really the child of language.’ [NL: 6.51]

Here Collingwood is not so much quoting directly from Hobbes but from an unsympathetic essay by a certain W. G. Pogson Smith [NL: 6.5], who sees the idea that “man is capable of reason because he has *invented* speech” as a *hysteron proteron* [NL: 6.53]. Collingwood agrees but does not see this as a reproach [NL: 6.55]; he defends the view:

‘Instinct’ may say if it likes that you must first be conscious of a feeling before you can fit it with a name; experience teaches that this is a vulgar error (6.26). The experiment, I confess, is not easy to make, because normally the act of naming is pre-consciously done (6.28). When I succeed in reflecting on it I find that Hobbes was right. [NL: 6.56]

This may not be the strongest argument in favour of the priority of language over thought. It remains that the priority of language over thought is, according to Michael Dummett, the defining characteristic of ‘analytical’ philosophy [Dummett 1993a], on whose side Collingwood now stands:

It has long been known that language is an indispensable factor in social life, the only way in which knowledge can be communicated from one man to another. But it was long believed that within the precincts of the individual mind the processes of thought could go on without language coming into operation.

[...] language is not a device whereby knowledge already existing in one man's mind is communicated to another's, but an activity prior to knowledge itself, without which knowledge could never come into existence. [NL: 6.4-6.41]

That attention is "inescapably linguistic" is confirmed by Collingwood's remarks, which should be quoted in full:

But what is the *modus operandi* of this finding? If feeling is 'given' to consciousness, what is the procedure by which consciousness receives the gift? How does a man make himself conscious of his feelings?

By talking about them, whether in speech or in any other language.

For example, a man is cold. He may be cold 'preconsciously' (5.9); not that he represses the feeling of cold, but just that he 'hasn't noticed it'.

Take the case when, after being in this condition, he comes to notice it. Is there anything he does, any practical activity of his own that marks or brings about the change?

Certainly there is. He *names the feeling*. Perhaps he uses the language of speech and says 'cold'. Perhaps he uses the language of gesture and gives an expressive shiver. This shiver is the name in gesture-language of the same feeling whose name in English is 'cold'.

To name the feeling awakens his consciousness of the feeling. There is a tendency to put the cart before the horse and fancy that consciousness of the feeling comes first and finding a name for it afterwards; but that is a mistake due to false analogy with cases that are essentially different, e.g. when an explorer sees an unrecorded mountain then finds a name for it, or when you or I, out for a walk, see a little pink flower and wonder what its name is.

Rid yourself of these misleading analogies, fix your mind on the point at issue, and you will see that the practical act of naming your feeling is what sets you off being conscious of it.

Until you name it, the feeling is preconscious. When you name it, it becomes conscious. [NL: 6.21-6.28]

This long passage should indicate *beyond doubt* the linguistic and 'modern' nature of Collingwood's later philosophy of mind. This much might just be overlooked by the reader influenced by Mink's 'dialectical' interpretation; I shall criticize it in a moment. He was far from being just another 'old style' metaphysician. However, his views were not without minor defects. For example, Donagan, who had clearly seen that Collingwood grasped the fundamental truth

that no one could be said to possess the concept 'red' or selectively attend to a red object unless one is able properly to apply to word 'red', also noticed that Collingwood lapsed into the "exploded associationist doctrine" [LPC: 55]:

He had [...] grasped a fundamental truth: that a concept is not what is selected, a feeling or an object felt, but something created in order to make the selection. It is what the selected thing is clarified or selected *as*. When you select a red patch for attention, you must clarify it as red, or, putting it more clumsily, as falling under the concept *red*; but it does not follow that the red patch selected and the concept *red* are the same thing. [...] His final definition of a concept [...] as 'selection together with its context of evocations', which confounded what is selected with the concept by which it is selected, was pure associationism. [LPC: 54-55]

(The definition of concepts in terms of 'selection together with its context of evocations' is from [NL: 7.39]; 'evocations' being the arousal by thought, within oneself, of feelings one does not find as 'given' within oneself [NL: 7.32-7.33], in other words the capacity to imagine, say, a patch of red in order to select one in the visual field.) This "blunder" explains the error of allocating conceptual thinking and propositional thinking to different levels of consciousness [NL: 10.51]. As Donagan points out, Collingwood took 'proposition' to be what is capable of being true or false but, in line with associationist psychology, believed conceptual thinking not to be capable of being true or false because the objects selected, although abstract because selected, are individuals and not universal or predicative: "If a concept were indeed a selection together with its context of evocations, and if making that selection involved nothing predicative, then conceptual thinking would not be propositional" [LPC: 56]. Had he realized that concepts are indeed predicative, he would have concluded that they are propositional: 'This is red' is, after all, a proposition.

Defects such as this one or even the mistaken view expressed in *The Principles of Art* according to which "Attention divides, but it does not abstract" [PA: 204], leave untouched the heart of Collingwood's philosophy. In a nutshell, it is through language that one becomes aware

of (part of) one's own complex of sensation-emotion; it is a linguistic act that will bring second-order consciousness. And here 'language' does not mean only speech but, more generally, any system of bodily movements [PA: 235, 241, 243], [NL: 6.1]; a point of much importance for the philosophy of art, since Collingwood literally *identifies* art with language [PA: 247, 273, 317].¹⁷

Louis Mink once proposed to alter the angle of vision in the interpretation of Collingwood by looking at the doctrines propounded in *The Idea of History* from the standpoint of Collingwood's "larger philosophy" [Mink 1972: 155]. There are two keys:

[...] the first is to see that the main questions of *The Idea of History* belong to the philosophy of mind rather than to what is *ordinarily* called the 'philosophy of history'; the second, and harder, is to see that the conceptual system which informs Collingwood's answers is *dialectical*, in a complex and original way. [Mink 1972: 155]

In this Chapter, I followed the first key. Mink believed that in setting *The Idea of History* within the larger context, "apparently dominant doctrines are diminished in importance or modified in meaning, while the recessive doctrines are revealed as centres of unsuspected conceptual connections" [Mink 1972: 155]. The enquiry into Collingwood's philosophy of mind in this Chapter proves him right. However, it is not clear to me that one ought to follow the second key, i.e., embedding the philosophy of history into a conceptual system which is 'dialectical'. There is a danger in trying to set up such a "system". Architectonic considerations may lead one (1) to overlook details that do not really fit in and (2) to provide supplementary details, where there is no evidence for them but when required by the "system". Moreover, unless one has a 'dialectical' explanation for changes over time of part of the "system", one will usually tend (3) to conceive of a *static* "system" that would not allow for changes of mind from one book to another. The resulting "system" is, of itself, no justification for this meddling. For example,

¹⁷ Dance, for example, is bodily gestures that do not involve speech but it is considered to be "the mother of all

not to recognize any fundamental change of mind in Collingwood's thinking about history from *Speculum Mentis* to *The Idea of History* would be to fly in the face of common sense. While focussing merely on the theory of the levels of consciousness, or the 'dialectic of mind, as Mink calls it, I shall find him guilty on all counts in his "reconstruction" of Collingwood's ideas in his book, *Mind, History, and Dialectic. The Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood* [MHD].¹⁸

First, taking the points in reverse order, Mink does not allow for changes as in between *The Principles of Art* and *The New Leviathan*. His reconstruction is a mixture of elements taken from both books.¹⁹ It is summarized thus:

In the final form of the theory as we may reconstruct it in toto, both practical activity and cognitive activity are distinguished into four levels of consciousness. At the first level they are not separated at all. At the second and third levels, they are connected but may be separately analyzed. At the fourth level [...] they are reunited. The second level has *imagination* as the cognitive activity corresponding to the practical activity of appetite; and the third level—although at this point Collingwood's scheme must be filled out inferentially—has *perception* as the cognitive activity corresponding to the practical activity of desire. Fourth-level cognitive activity, as one might expect, is *reason*, or intellect; it has a degree of identity with the practical activity of will—it is so to speak, the obverse of will—which is impossible of attainment at the second and third levels. [MHD: 92-93]

Mink has provided a chart for his reconstructed theory [MHD: 177], of which this is a simplified version.²⁰

languages" [PA: 244, 246].

¹⁸ The paper [Mink 1968] can be looked at as a sort of précis.

¹⁹ Mink's analyses are often deeply muddled, precisely because of this mixture. For example, the passage where Mink wrongly identifies "selective attention" with "imagination": "Selected attention is directed upon sensuous-emotive feeling from the second level of consciousness; and Collingwood calls this level "imagination". As an activity (which, in *The Principles of Art*, Collingwood often calls "attention" and sometimes just "consciousness") [...]" [MHD: 98-99]. To begin with, the former is a notion pertaining to *The New Leviathan* only, while the latter pertains only to *The Principles of Art*. It is true that Collingwood speaks of "attention" in the *Principles of Art* and that equates "attention" with "consciousness" [PA: 206, 207, 223, 266] but, as pointed out in the previous section, "consciousness" is the process of conversion and "imagination" is the result of the process [PA: 215]. Although they stand for "the level of experience at which the conversion occurs" [PA: 215], they are not strictly speaking the same. In the same passage, Mink also describes the various functions performed by "imagination" mingling references from the two books on the basis of this erroneous identification. Imagination is the result not what does the performing.

LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS	FORMS OF PRACTICAL CONSCIOUSNESS	FORMS OF THEORETICAL CONSCIOUSNESS	FORMS OF EXPERIENCE (<i>Speculum Mentis</i>)
Fourth level	Will Rational choice	Reason/Intellect Thinking about thinking	Science/Philosophy
Third level	Desire	[Perception] Propositional thinking	Religion
Second level	Appetite Hunger/Love	Imagination Conceptual thinking	Art
First level	\ Pure feeling / Undifferentiated sensuous-emotional flux		

There are many problems with this chart. (One should immediately note that the parallel between the levels of practical or theoretical consciousness, on the one hand, and the forms of experience in *Speculum Mentis*, on the other hand, is purely superficial. But I shall not discuss this overarching parallel between ‘dialectics of the mind’ and ‘dialectics of experience’; see [MHD: 113-118].) The first problem to be examined is relevant to the charge that Mink overlooks changes of mind, i.e., objection (3) above. Indeed, Mink conflates at the second level of theoretical consciousness “conceptual thinking”, as found in *The New Leviathan*, with the earlier notion of “imagination”, in *The Principles of Art*. He declares that they are “the same activity” [MHD: 94]. In light of the above discussion, it is clear that they are not and this is precisely why the expression “imagination” does not appear in *The New Leviathan*; Mink speaks of a mere lack of uniformity in the terminology [MHD: 97]. This conflation does not make for good scholarship, all the more so since it rides roughshod over the important change of priority from thought over language to language over thought; a change that not only allows Collingwood to free himself from the associationist psychology but also allows him to continue holding the view that perception is conceptual throughout and, finally, which provides him a keystone for his

²⁰ There is an even more simplified version in [Mink 1968: 11].

philosophy of mind. These are not unimportant matters. The change of priority and the abandonment of the associationist psychology would normally provoke a collapse of the second and third levels of the so-called levels of theoretical consciousness. Mink does not see the difficulties linked with allowing different levels to conceptual and propositional thinking; he thus overlooks details that do not fit in his scheme—this is objection (1), above. Instead, Mink merely points out that, stretching it a bit, the account of concepts in *The New Leviathan* follows the prescriptions set forth in the *Essay on Philosophical Method* [EPM: 100-101], [MHD: 95]. Furthermore, he hints at what is an impossible connection between the notion of “imagination” in *The Principles of Art* and the notion of “historical imagination” in *The Idea of History* [MHD: 97].

As for the charge that, (2), Mink fills in details because architectonic considerations require him to do so, it is clear from the above quotation and chart that he “filled out inferentially” Collingwood’s scheme, by postulating a third level of theoretical consciousness, which he calls “perception” [MHD: 93, 103], when there is no basis for this in Collingwood’s text; as he says himself: “without Collingwood’s explicit authority” [MHD: 104]. This is supposed to show that “the dialectical schema of mind is open although not indeterminate” and that “fitting Collingwood’s three-termed schema for cognitive consciousness to his four-termed schema of practical consciousness reveals no inconsistency in his doctrines” [MHD: 104]. This might be the case but one is justified in the belief that Mink is over-interpreting.

On these negative remarks, I shall conclude Chapter 2. I hope to have shown the dangers of an exegetical approach that focuses primarily on the “system” as opposed to the search for deeper meaning through a better understanding of the nature of the arguments.

Chapter 3

Historical Understanding

In this chapter, I shall investigate some (but not all) of the prominent features of Collingwood's philosophy of history. I shall aim neither at exhaustiveness nor, as I pointed out in the introduction, at a defence, over and above stating the *prima facie* case. The features that I am interested in are clustered around the key, central notion of "historical understanding". Collingwood is known for having expressed the controversial ideas that the historian discerns the thoughts that he is trying to discover "by re-thinking them in his own mind" and that "all history is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind" [IH: 215] but these central claims have been widely misinterpreted and need careful, detailed investigation. I shall therefore begin this chapter by a discussion of the notion of re-enactment in which I shall try and dissociate it from two closely related notions with which it is often conflated, Dilthey's notion of "reliving" (*Nacherleben*) and Croce's notion of "intuition" (*intuizione*). Central to Collingwood's theory is the possibility for the historian to think once more the thoughts of the historical agent. Collingwood needs to show that it makes sense to say that the historian thinks not only a merely numerically distinct copy of the thought that the historical agent had thought long time ago, at some other place—within his own skull, so to speak—but that the historian and the historical agent *literally think the same thought*. This 'sameness' of thought, whose very possibility was allowed for in the philosophy of mind, as we saw in Chapter 2, will be discussed in section 2. This is in a way the central plank of my interpretation of Collingwood, since it is the

basis for the strong objectivist flavour that distinguishes his ‘hermeneutics’ from the more relativistic approach of Gadamer, as I shall point out in Chapter 4. But before tackling this issue, I shall complete my survey of Collingwood’s theory of “historical understanding” by reviewing in section 2 his remarks on the role of imagination and on evidence. At that stage, I shall present my reasons to believe that some sort of “constructionist” reading of Collingwood is inadequate. I already spoke in the Chapter 1, section 2, of “anti-realism”, in the sense that truth is defined as an epistemic notion, it does not transcend the available evidence. I shall defend here the view that this is the correct interpretation of Collingwood but will refute the related “constructionist” approach which assumes that Collingwood derived from this that the real past cannot be known. I shall argue furthermore that Collingwood was not an ontological idealist, i.e., someone who simply does not believe the ontological reality of the past, or a precursor of the current “narrativism”.

§1. Re-enactment

As I pointed out in Chapter 2, section 1, Collingwood famously held that any historical event has an ‘inside and an ‘outside’. (I pointed out on that occasion that it was a mistake to read Collingwood as holding a form of Cartesian dualism.) He also famously defined, in ‘Human Nature and Human History’, the task of the historian in terms of these ‘inside’ and ‘outside’:

The historian is never concerned with either of these to the exclusion of the other. He is investigating not mere events (where by a mere event I mean one which has only an outside and no inside) but actions, and an action is the unity of the outside and inside of an event. [...] His work may begin by discovering the outside of an event, but it can never end there; he must always remember that the event was an action, and that his main task is to think himself into this action, to discern the thought of its agent. [IH: 213]

In short, the historian “must discern the thoughts within” the events [IH: 214]. But how would he or she be able to do so? According to Collingwood, there is only one way:

But how does the historian discern the thoughts which he is trying to discover? There is only one way in which it can be done: by re-thinking them in his own mind. [IH: 215]

In order to flesh out this idea, Collingwood gave two examples that are to be seen as parallel in that respect: reading and understanding a text by Plato and understanding the actions of Julius Caesar:

The historian of philosophy, reading Plato, is trying to know what Plato thought when he expressed himself in certain words. The only way in which he can do this is by thinking it for himself. This, in fact, is what we mean when we speak of ‘understanding’ the words. So the historian of politics or warfare, presented with an account of certain actions done by Julius Caesar, tries to understand these actions, that is, to discover what thoughts in Caesar’s mind determined him to do them. This implies envisaging for himself the situation in which Caesar stood, and thinking for himself what Caesar thought about the situation and the possible ways of dealing with it. The history of thought, and therefore all history, is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian’s own mind. [IH: 215]

These central theses in Collingwood’s philosophy of history¹ have often been misunderstood and, on the basis of such uncharitable readings, quickly dismissed. The idea that ‘understanding’ is ‘re-enactment’ of thoughts has certainly not escaped such treatment. For example, Patrick Gardiner spoke in *The Nature of Historical Explanation* of “some sort of telepathic communication with past thoughts” [Gardiner 1952a: 39] and he cursorily dismissed Collingwood’s theory in these few words: “the subject-matter of history is made to appear very mysterious indeed, demanding tentative handling and esoteric methods” [Gardiner 1952a: 49].

Although more astute in his reading of Collingwood, W. H Walsh also misrepresented the notion of re-enactment as “sympathetic understanding” or ‘intuitive insight’ [Walsh 1967a: 55-56]. Walsh described “idealism” in the philosophy of history as the view that:

Nature we must look at from the outside but thoughts and experiences are accessible to us from within. We can grasp them in a unique way because we can re-think or re-live them, imaginatively putting ourselves in the place of the persons, past or present, who first thought or experienced them. This process of imaginative re-living, it is maintained, is central in historical thinking, and explains why that study can give us the individual knowledge which other sciences fail to provide. [Walsh 1967a: 44]

It is misleading to speak here of “idealism”, since the idea that the world of thoughts is “accessible to us from within” is not a peculiarity of “idealism” but rather of those, like the historicists, who stand in the wake of Vico. It is Vico indeed who was the first to claim that “the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and [...] its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind” [Vico 1984: 96]. This generic presentation is also misleading because it is but a conflation of ideas from Dilthey, Croce and Collingwood; Walsh assimilates them [Walsh 1967a: 56]. But it is Collingwood who is singled out for critical treatment:

I conclude that Collingwood’s main thesis will not bear examination. It is not true that we grasp and understand the thought of past persons in a single act of intuitive insight. [Walsh 1967a: 58]

It is highly inappropriate to speak, like Gardiner, of an “esoteric method” in the case of Collingwood’s notion of “re-enactment”—perhaps the expression fits better Dilthey’s notion of *Verstehen*, since he himself recognized that it has a “divinatory aspect” [Dilthey 1996: 251]—; in order to see this, one must realize that it is not a notion such as that, admittedly obscure, of “intuitive insight”. (The interpretation of Collingwood by Gardiner and Walsh is often referred to as “intuitionist” for that reason.) I shall show that this interpretation is without foundation. Not only did Collingwood not hold such a view, he believed that to try “to explain history as ‘intuitive’ knowledge” actually “destroyed its reasoned, scientific, inferential character” [EPH:

¹ They are, for example, singled out by Dray in [Dray 1980: 10-11].

134]. In order to get this point across, I shall first give in this section reasons for believing that Collingwood's notion of "re-enactment" is neither akin to Dilthey's "reliving" (*Nacherleben*), nor to Croce's "intuition" (*intuizione*). Collingwood was of course aware of Dilthey's and Croce's work; he wrote critical presentation of their theories in *The Idea of History* [IH: 171-176 & 190-204] and wrote in 1921 a rather critical account of 'Croce's Philosophy of History' [EPH: 3-22]. In the following, with one exception, I shall not, however, rest my case on Collingwood's criticisms of Dilthey and Croce.

At first blush, when we compare texts from Dilthey and Collingwood, the similarities seem numerous:

We do not understand the processes of nature. [...] It is different in the domain of the moral world. Here I understand everything. What does it mean to understand something? Let us ask, What does it mean when I do not understand myself? I have a deep aversion for someone. I am familiar with the phenomenon of aversion, but I cannot re-create its cause. This is even more clear when I consider the past. I cannot re-create the motives of my past actions. When I do not understand someone else, I cannot relive the state of the other in myself. Thus all understanding involves a re-creation in my psyche. Where is this human capacity of re-creation to be located? Not in the capacity for abstract thought, but in an imaginative process. Scientific operations have their basis in the creative imagination. Imagination is an intuitive process in which I add to intuitive moments that are given some that are not. [Dilthey 1996: 230]

If it is by historical thinking that we re-think and so rediscover the thought of Hammurabi or Solon, it is the same way that we discover the thought of a friend who writes us a letter, or a stranger who crosses the street. Nor is it necessary that the historian should be one person and the subject of his inquiry another. It is only by historical thinking that I can discover what I thought ten years ago, by reading what I then wrote, or what I thought five minutes ago, by reflecting on an action I then did, which surprised me when I realized what I have done. In this sense, all knowledge of the mind is historical. The only way in which I can know my own mind is by performing some mental act or other and then considering what the act is that I have performed. [IH: 219]

The historical imagination differs from [perceptual imagination] not in being *a priori*, but in having as its special task to imagine the past: not an object of possible perception, since it does not now exist, but able through this activity to become an object of our thought.

The historian's picture of his subject, whether that subject be a sequence of events or a past state of things, thus appears as a web of imaginative construction stretched between certain fixed points provided by the statements of his authorities. [IH: 242]

In these passages, both Dilthey and Collingwood claim that one understands not only the thoughts of others but even one's own thoughts by "re-thinking", "re-creating" or "re-living" them and that an "imaginative process" or "*a priori* imagination" is involved in this "re-thinking", "re-creating" or "re-living". (I shall leave aside, until next section, the related point according to which imagination supplies missing details.) But analysis at a finer grain will show that under the surface, the conceptions diverge deeply.

This is not the place for an adequate presentation of W. Dilthey's rich and complex thinking about the *Geisteswissenschaften* and his attempt at a "critique of historical reason".² It suffices to say that he believed that man has two worlds, the "inner", which is his self-awareness of his own conscious states and the "outer", which is his awareness of an external, material world. There is therefore an "inner" experience having as its subject-matter human consciousness and an "outer" experience of nature. One should immediately note the resemblance with Collingwood's distinction between the "inner" and the "outer" of an event is superficial. As I have shown in Chapter 2, section 1, Collingwood's distinction does not imply a form of (Cartesian) dualism. This much cannot be said (at least without further argument) of Dilthey's distinction.

The distinction between the "inner" and the "outer", put forward in the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* [Dilthey 1989], legitimates the idea that there are two equally valid forms of knowledge, one for the sciences of the "outer", i.e., nature, the other for the sciences of the mind or spirit (*Geisteswissenschaften*), i.e., the complex formed of all the sciences that have an "internal" subject-matter: psychology, philology, history, linguistics, jurisprudence, theology,

² See [Hodges 1952] or [Makkreel 1992].

aesthetics, etc. The former is *explanation* (*Erklaren*) or subsumption of the particular event under laws, the latter *understanding* (*Verstehen*).

In this connection, Dilthey clearly held the (Cartesian) view, called by Ryle ‘Privilege Access theory’, that awareness of one’s own states is immediate and indubitable. Again, there is no parallel in Collingwood: in Chapter 2, section 2, when discussing his criticisms of introspection, I have shown that this underlying assumption was in fact rejected by him.

Dilthey speaks of a “lived experience” (*Erlebnis*). If past (lived) experiences are gone in time, they nevertheless contain an “inner” conscious side, which is available to the historian’s present (immediate, indubitable) experience when the experiences are “relived” or “re-experienced” (*nacherlebt*). So the true subject of history is, according to Dilthey, the “inner” side of events. And the method which results in the “reliving” of the “inner” is what he called *das Verstehen*; this expression can be translated roughly as ‘understanding’. Dilthey’s many remarks about *das Verstehen* are difficult to summarize into a brief adequate definition. He sometimes talks (e.g., [Dilthey 1996: 230]) as if *das Verstehen* means an projection of one’s self into another self or, alternatively:

We [...] call understanding that process by which we recognize, behind signs given to our senses, that psychic reality of which they are the expression. [Dilthey 1996: 236]

Already here one can detect deep differences between Dilthey and Collingwood. One should indeed note that, throughout, Dilthey’s manner of speaking always implies that he adhered to the Cartesian dualism and the ‘dogma of the Ghost in the Machine’ that Ryle criticized in *The Concept of Mind*. Indeed, the purpose of ‘reliving’ is to emulate someone else’s *private mental states*. It was pointed out in Chapter 2, section 1 that Collingwood did not adhere to this but

believed instead in the *publicity of thoughts* [PA: 157-158], thoughts being that which is “re-enactable”.

Although Dilthey speaks of *transposition* or of relocating (*versetzen*) oneself into something, his notion of *Verstehen* is not equivalent to *Einfühlung* or “empathy”, i.e., to this notion which originates in the work of Robert Vischer and which was popularized by the psychologist Theodor Lipps and the philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel. For example, Lipps defined aesthetic empathy as “not a sensation in one’s body, but feeling something, namely oneself, into the aesthetic object” [Lipps 1960: 381] and Simmel spoke in the first chapter of *The Problem of the Philosophy of History*, of an “immediate recreation of mental contents” [Simmel 1977: 66] and of the “projection of ideas and feelings onto an historical person” as “an irreducible, integral act” [Simmel 1977: 67]. But, according to Dilthey, it is the result of *Verstehen* which is a feeling of the same sort as that experienced by the other person (*Nachgefühl*), a feeling which may provoke in turn a “sympathic feeling” (*Mitgefühl*) [Hodges 1952: 120n.]. (One should further note that the *Nachgefühl* is a copy of the original; Dilthey can thus be said to adhere to the ‘copy theory’ that Collingwood rejected, as I shall point out in the next section.)

It has been rightly argued that Dilthey sometimes recognizes that empathetic projection can be an obstacle to ‘understanding’ and that he meant more to *das Verstehen* than mere “empathy” [Makkreel 1992: 252], [Makkreel 2000: 182]. What it really amounts to is, however, hard to specify. Dilthey speaks at times of a “rediscovery of the I in the Thou”, and at other places of discovering “a living system in the given” (passages quoted in [Hodges 1952: 119]). One reads, for example, in ‘The Understanding of Other Persons and their Life-Expressions’:

Understanding always has something individual as its object, and in its higher forms it argues from the inductive complex given in a work or a life, to the life-complex of a person or a work. But our analysis of lived experience (*Erleben*) and of self-understanding has shown that in the world of the mind, the individual is an object of

absolute value [...] As such we concern ourselves with him, not only as an instance of general human nature, but as an individual whole. [...] The secret of the individual draws us, for its own sake, into ever new and more profound attempts to understand it, and it is in such understanding that the individual and mankind in general and its creations are revealed to us. Here is the most characteristic accomplishment of the understanding for the human studies. [...] The material for carrying out the task is found in the experiential data [...] Each datum is individual, and is treated as such in the process of understanding. Each contains a significant element which makes understanding of its particular individuality possible. But the presuppositions of the process take on ever more complicated forms as they penetrate into the individual [...] and so the business of understanding goes further and further into the depths of mind. [Dilthey 1959: 219]

The idea seems to be that one relates, to use Rudolf Makkreel's expression, one's "structural nexus" of one's own experience to the structural nexus of the other [Makkreel 2000: 187]. But what this "structural nexus" really amounts to is not clear. It is clear at any rate that Dilthey held that to understand is not merely to know of someone that someone had a given experience *x*, it is also for oneself to "re-live" that *x*. This "re-experiencing" provides one with an "inherent likeness" [Dilthey 1996: 229], which seems to amount to *more than what can be expressed verbally or more than what can be inferred or rationally reconstructed*; a fact put rather obscurely by Dilthey:

The understanding of someone else's state can be conceived as *prima facie* as an analogical inference, proceeding from an external physical process, by virtue of its likeness to similar processes which we have found connected with certain inner states, to an inner state like these. But this account gives only a rough and schematic description of what is contained in the result of the reconstructive process (*die Nachbildung*). For this idea of it in the form of an inference severs the inner states, both that from which we infer and the other which is added by inference, from the complex of mental life at the time when each occurs, whereas it is only by its relation to this that the reconstruction obtains its certainty and its closer definition of detail. This can be confirmed by the following facts. The interpretation of other men's utterances (*Äusserungen*) varies very much according to our knowledge of the complex to which such an utterance belongs, or according to the type of mental life which in most cases is, quite unreflectively, laid at their basis. And the limit of our understanding always lies at the point where we can no longer reconstruct on the basis of the complex. But the elements in the reconstructive process are bound together not at all by logical operations, e.g., by an analogical inference. To

reconstruct is to relive (*Nachbilden ist eben ein Nacherleben*). (Quoted in [Hodges 1952: 118-119])

This is a major difference between Dilthey and Collingwood, who would not claim that re-enactment involves more than what could be expressed in (public) language and for whom re-enactment is of rational nature. To see this, one ought to recall from Chapter 2, section 2 that Collingwood sharply separated the “psychic” or “preconscious” level, which is formed by the flow of consciousness, from the level of consciousness or awareness. He did not believe that anything going on at the “preconscious” level could be re-enacted. Only thought in its mediation could be re-enacted. Therefore, according to Collingwood, anything resembling Dilthey’s “experience” *could not be fully re-enacted*; it would not be “historical”:

[...] even experience is not as such the object of historical knowledge. In so far as it is merely immediate experience, a mere flow of consciousness consisting of sensations, feelings, and the like, its process is not an historical process. That process can, no doubt, be not only directly experienced in its immediacy, but also known; its particular details and its general characteristics can be studied by thought; but the thought which studies it finds in it a mere object of study, which in order to be studied need not be, and indeed cannot be, re-enacted in the thinking about it. In so far as we think about its particular details, we are remembering experiences of our own or entering with sympathy and imagination into those of others; but in such cases we do not re-enact the experiences which we remember or with which we sympathize; we are merely contemplating them as objects external to our present selves, aided perhaps by the presence in ourselves of other experiences like them. [IH: 302-303]

One could object, as H. P. Rickman did, that “Dilthey would [...] have criticized Collingwood’s definition for singling out ‘thought’” [Dilthey 1961: 43], but that would be grist to the mill, since “thoughts” are linguistic and public. Alternatively, one could object, as Harold Hodges did, that Dilthey, although he became weary of clear-cut distinctions such as Collingwood’s, nevertheless had some notions equivalent to Collingwood’s “selective attention” or “imagination”, i.e, that he could explain the process that would bring elements of experience to awareness [Hodges 1952: 328]. But Hodges’ discussion shows clearly that Dilthey, with his

notion of “silent thought”, which is said to work at a level “prior to discursive thought and its expression in language” [Hodges 1952: 328-329], had not overcome the bounds of associationist psychology; if Collingwood did not free himself completely from the associationist imagery, his linguistic conception was not, as was shown in Chapter 2, section 3, relying on it. If in the above passage Dilthey implies that there is more to “reliving” than what can be expressed in language, then his conception cannot be similar to Collingwood’s. The idea that “re-enactment” must include more than the thoughts expressed was mocked by Collingwood:

We shall never know how the flowers smelt in the garden of Epicurus, or how Nietzsche felt the wind in his air as he walked on the mountains; we cannot relive the triumph of Archimedes or the bitterness of Marius; but the evidence of what these men thought is in our hands; and by re-creating these thoughts in our own minds by interpretation of that evidence we can know, so far as there is any knowledge, that the thoughts we create were theirs. [IH: 296].

In other words, according to Collingwood there may be (private, subjective) “inner states” at the “preconscious” level but these are of no interest; they cannot be re-enacted, only (public, objective) “thoughts” can be. For Collingwood, it is not a matter of putting oneself into mental states that match those of the person one is trying to understand; *it is not a matter of “understanding of someone else’s state” but of understanding why—the reasons, not the “states”—he or she did what he or she did.*³

According to Dilthey, ‘understanding’ is often mediated and made possible by what he calls, using an expression taken from Hegel, the “objective spirit” (here translated as ‘objective mind’). This “objective mind” is described as

[...] the manifold forms in which features common to individuals are objectified in the world of the senses. In this objective mind, the past is always present to us. Its domain reaches from ways of life and forms of social intercourse to the complex

³ As I said in the Introduction, I do not wish to deal with all possible objections to Collingwood’s positions. I should thus merely mention here that he has been accused of over-rationalizing history [Grant 1957: 69]. For replies to this objection, see [White 1972] or [HR: 115f.].

aims developed by society, to customs, rights, the State, religion, art, science and philosophy. [It] is the medium through which we understand other people and their expressions: for everything in which mind has been objectified contains within it something common to both oneself and others. [Dilthey 1959: 216]

There is, of course, no such thing in Collingwood's theory. Tradition plays, however, as significant role for him as it does for Gadamer, for example.

Finally, a further difference—and this is perhaps the most important and inescapable difference—has to do with the fact that Collingwood perceived “re-enactment” as “critical thinking”:

[Re-enactment] is not a passive surrender to the spell of another's mind; it is a labour of active and therefore critical thinking. The historian not only re-enacts past thought, he re-enacts it in the context of his own knowledge and therefore, in re-enacting it, criticizes it, forms his own judgement of its value, corrects whatever error he can discern in it. This criticism of the thought whose history he traces is not something secondary to tracing the history of it. It is an indispensable condition of the historical knowledge itself. Nothing could be a completer error concerning the history of thought than to suppose that the historian as such merely ascertains ‘what so-and-so thought’, leaving it to someone else to decide ‘whether it was true’. All thinking is critical thinking; the thought which re-enacts past thoughts, therefore, criticizes them in re-enacting them. [IH: 225-226] (See also [IH: 242-243].)

This critical dimension is entirely absent from Dilthey's writings. As a matter of fact, the phrase “a passive surrender to the spell of another's mind” would describe quite well *das Verstehen*. It is, however, crucial for the understanding of Collingwood's notion. Indeed, as William Dray never tired of explaining, starting from his doctoral dissertation on *Laws and Explanation in History* [Dray 1957a: chap. V], Collingwood propounded, with his notion of “re-enactment” an explanatory mode in history which is based on reasons and reasoning; in other words, it is a “rational explanation” [Dray 1957a: 123-124]. Dray puts the point across in this key passage of the book:

When Collingwood says that historical understanding consists of penetrating to the thought-side of actions—discovering the thought and nothing further—the temptation to interpret this in the methodological way is understandably strong. But

there is another way in which the doctrine can be formulated: ‘Only by putting yourself in the agent’s position can you *understand* why he did what he did’. The point of the ‘projection’ metaphor is, in this case, more plausibly interpreted as a logical one. Its function is not to remind us of *how we come to know* certain facts, but to formulate, however tentatively, certain *conditions which must be satisfied* before a historian is prepared to say: “Now I have the explanation”. [Dray 1957a: 128]

If we understand Collingwood’s remarks about “re-enactment” as making a logical point about the (rational) nature of historical explanations, it is then obvious that Dilthey’s approach to historical understanding could only appear to him as “psychological” and defective. In the section devoted to Dilthey in the historical part of *The Idea of History*, Collingwood put the point across effectively. He described Dilthey’s conception in these terms:

[Documents and data] offer [the historian] only the occasion for reliving in his own mind the spiritual activity which originally produced them. It is in virtue of his own spiritual life, and in proportion to the intrinsic richness of that life, that he can thus infuse life into the dead materials with which he finds himself confronted. Thus genuine historical knowledge is an inward experience (*Erlebnis*) of its own object [...] [IH: 172]

Collingwood had nothing but praise for the German philosopher: “This conception of the historian as [...] making his object live in him, is a great advance on anything achieved by any of Dilthey’s German contemporaries” [IH: 172]. But he saw that there was a problem:

[...] because life for Dilthey means immediate experience, as distinct from reflection or knowledge; and it is not enough for the historian to *be* Julius Caesar or Napoleon, since that does not constitute a knowledge of Julius Caesar or Napoleon any more than the obvious fact that he *is* himself constitutes a knowledge of himself. [IH: 172]

And that problem could only be solved by recourse to psychology. It may not be psychology as conceived positivistically, with explanations in terms of laws, but it is, according to Collingwood, psychology never the less:

This problem Dilthey tries to solve by recourse to psychology. By existing at all I am myself; but it is only by means of psychological analysis that I come to know myself, that is, to understand the structure of my own personality. Similarly, the historian who relives the past in his own mind must, if he is to be an historian,

understand the past which he is reliving. By simply reliving it, he is developing and enlarging his own personality, incorporation in his own experience the experience of others in the past; but whatever is so incorporated becomes part of the structure of his personality, and the rule still holds good that this structure can be understood only in terms of psychology. What this means in practice may be seen from one of Dilthey's last works, in which he deals with the history of philosophy according to his own formula, reducing it to a study in the psychology of philosophers, on the principle that there are certain fundamental types of mental structures, and that each type has a necessary attitude to, and conception of, the world. [...] Philosophy handled from this psychological point of view ceases to be philosophy at all. [IH: 172-3]

In a nutshell, Collingwood's "re-enactment" as "rational explanation" is not *psychologism*, but Dilthey's *Nacherleben* necessarily leads to it. For German philosophers, such as Gadamer, this criticism is hard to swallow [Gadamer 1992: 12], [Gadamer 1999: 514]. This important point notwithstanding, one should see, reading Collingwood on Dilthey, how far apart they stand.

The problem with Collingwood is that he sometimes expressed himself in a careless manner. For example, it is clear that the metaphor of 'projection' is only a metaphor and, as Dray put it in the above passage, the point is a logical one: in order to have an explanation of someone's actions, say, Caesar I must satisfy some conditions, which are that I should try and see the situation as evidence shows me that Caesar saw it. Then I must infer the motives and critically assess the actions. This is what Collingwood expressed by saying, in a passage that I already quoted:

So the historian of politics or warfare, presented with an account of certain actions done by Julius Caesar, tries to understand these actions, that is, to discover what thoughts in Caesar's mind determined him to do them. This implies envisaging for himself the situation in which Caesar stood, and thinking for himself what Caesar thought about the situation and the possible ways of dealing with it. [IH: 215]

But in the *Autobiography*, the same idea is carelessly put:

History [means] getting inside other people's heads, looking at their situation through their eyes, and thinking for yourself whether the way in which they tackled it was the right way. [A: 58]

To speak of “getting into other people’s heads” is strictly speaking just a *façon de parler*. This is likely to mislead, as one may derive from such statements the idea that Collingwood’s conceptions were akin to those of Dilthey, on the one hand, and Croce, on the other. To this topic, I shall presently turn.

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It is also impossible to provide here an appropriate description of the background to Croce’s philosophy of history, all the more so in his case since a valuable study is lacking of the sources of his absolute idealism in nineteenth-century Italian philosophy: de Sanctis, Labriola, Rosmini and Spaventa. In *What is Living and What is Dead of the Philosophy of Hegel* [Croce 1969], Croce gave a detailed presentation of Hegel’s dialectic of concepts, but he distinguished “opposite” from “distinct” concepts [Croce 1969: 10f.] According to him, “the opposite are opposed to one another, but they are not opposed to unity”, since true unity is “the synthesis of opposites” [Croce 1969: 19-20] but it is not the case with “distinct” concepts that cannot be synthesized in a higher unity. Croce argued that Hegel confused both kinds [Croce 1969: 95].⁴ According to Croce, spirit unwinds itself in four *distinct* “grades”. First, spirit is intuition or representation of the particular. This is the topic of his *Aesthetics* [Croce 1922]. The notion of intuition or *intuizione*, which derives from Kant’s *Anschauung*, thus seems to play a foundational role; it will also be discussed further in the next Chapter in connection with aesthetics. According to Croce, intuition is a non-conceptual form of knowledge, it is not just awareness of a particular representation either of an outside thing or, within inner sense, of an emotion. It gives form and

⁴ Croce thought that any worthwhile critique of Hegel should not be the mere recognition that parts of the “system” are superseded by recent advances but that the error of Hegel is “an essential error” [Croce 1969: 98] which is “to be sought in his logic” [Croce 1969: 62].

expression to what would otherwise be a mere rhapsody of stimuli. Secondly, spirit is then consciousness of the universal and its unity with the individual. This is the topic of *Logic as the Science of the Pure Concept* [Croce 1917], and it is to this “grade” that the philosophy of history pertains. These first grades concern the theoretical powers of man, to which is opposed the practical sphere of the will. Spirit is thus, thirdly, will of the particular or economic volition and, fourthly, will of the universal or ethics. The latter sphere will not be dealt with within this thesis; nor will I discuss Croce’s conception of the spirit as moving between the grades, conceptualizing what it intuits and then going back to intuition, in a cyclical pattern. The theoretical sphere thus concerns two forms of knowledge: intuitive knowledge of things or emotions in their particularity and logical knowledge of general concepts. In the philosophy of history, critics have assailed his use of “intuition” but they ignore that Croce held that history is a unity of both forms of knowledge:

History, being the individual judgement, is the synthesis of the subject and predicate, of representation and concept. The intuitive and the logical elements are both indispensable to it and both are bound together with an unseverable link. [Croce 1917: 279]

Be this as it may, I shall focus here on the role of “intuition” in history. One should note immediately one fundamental difference between Croce and Collingwood. As already mentioned in Chapter 2, section 3, Collingwood did not believe in the possibility of a non-conceptual knowledge. As pointed out, Collingwood argued in ‘Sensation and Thought’ (1924) that

The nature of all knowledge is fundamentally mediation or interpretation. If we could find any absolute datum which did not already contain mediation itself, it would not be knowledge. But in point of fact we cannot. Every starting point of thought is a product of thought. [Collingwood 1924: 74]

But Croce’s “intuition” is precisely that non-conceptual, “absolute datum”, which is meant to be the starting point of thought. Indeed, according to Croce’s conceptions, if a concept is

involved, the universal is involved, then there is judgement and we are outside the sphere of pure intuition. This is strongly denied by Collingwood. Awareness is already conceptual and, to an increasing degree from *The Principles of Art* to *The New Leviathan*, linguistic.

That something be intuited is, according to Croce, a necessary condition of historical knowledge. Being an historian himself, Croce derives this claim, in *Logic as the Science of the Pure Concept* [Croce 1917], from a methodological consideration typical of historians, namely that the historian must begin his or her work with the critical study of documents:

The search for veracity and the criticism of the value of sources are reducible in the ultimate analysis, to the isolation of this genuine resonance of fact, by its liberation from perturbing elements, such as the illusions, the false judgements, the preoccupations and the passions of the witness. Only in so far as this can be done, and in the measure in which it is successful, do we have the first condition of history as act of cognition—that something can be *intuited* and thereby transformable into the *subject* of the individual judgement, that is to say, into historical narrative. [Croce 1917: 280-281]

Narratives of past events find their place only because they place the historian “in direct contact with the thing that happened” so that he or she is able to intuit the particular thing. This is alternatively described as the ability to make the historian live the event again:

[...] narratives are valuable just in so far as it is presumed that they place us in direct contact with the thing that happened and make us live it again, drawing forth from the obscure depth of the memories that the human race bears with it. [...] An authentic narrative is both a document and a remains; it is the reality of the fact as it was *lived* and as it vibrates in the spirit of him who took part in it. [Croce 1917: 280].

But this is not at all Dilthey’s notion of *Nacherleben*. It is a matter of intuiting the facts. In that, the historian resembles the artist:

The intuitive faculty, indispensable in research, is not less indispensable in historical exposition; since it is necessary to intuit the actual fact, not in a fugitive and sketchy manner, but so firmly as to be able to express it and to fix it in words, in such a way as to transmit its genuine life to others. Hence the specially artistic character that must be possessed by true historians. Here they resemble pure artists, painting

pictures, as they do, composing poems and writing tragic dialogues. [Croce 1917: 283]

Again, the logical element is indispensable. This element seems to reduce, in Croce's theory to the existential judgement. The historian must first intuit the subject *x* and then judge *that x exists, i.e. that x has happened*. This allows Croce to demarcate history from art, the historical narrative from fiction:

Without the logical element it is not possible to say that even the smallest, the most ordinary fact, belonging to our individual and everyday life, has *occurred*; as, for instance, that I rose this morning at eight o'clock and took luncheon at twelve. For (to give no other reason) these historical propositions imply the concept of existence and actuality and the correlative concept of non-existence or possibility, since in affirming them I also deny that I only dreamed of rising at eight or of taking luncheon at twelve. All will agree that we cannot speak of a historical fact if we do not know that it is a fact, that is to say, something that has happened; even stories become the object of history, in so far as their existence as stories is attributed to them. A story, told without knowing or deciding whether it be or not a story, is poetry; [...] [Croce 1917: 286]

The matter is put slightly differently in *Theory and Practice of Historiography* [Croce 1921], where the notion of "intuition" is put side by side with that of "imaginative reconstruction":

[...] the vivid experience of the events whose history we have undertaken to relate, [...] means their re-elaboration as intuition and imagination. Without this imaginative reconstruction or integration it is not possible to write history, or to read it, or to understand it. But this sort of imagination, which is really quite indispensable to the historian, is the imagination that is inseparable from the historical synthesis, the imagination in and for thought, the concreteness of thought, which is never an abstract concept, but always a relation and a judgment, not indetermination but determination. It is nevertheless to be radically distinguished from the free poetic imagination, [...] [Croce 1921: 39]

A further passage from the same book gives us some indication about the nature of "intuition" in history:

Do you wish to understand the true history of a Ligurian or Sicilian neolithic man? First of all, try if it be possible to make yourself mentally into a Ligurian or Sicilian neolithic man; and if it be not possible, or you do not care to do this, content yourself

with describing and classifying and arranging in a series the skulls, the utensils, and the inscriptions belonging to those neolithic people. Do you wish to understand the history of a blade of grass? First and foremost, try to make yourself into a blade of grass, and if you do not succeed, content yourself with analysis the parts and even with disposing them in a kind of imaginative history. [Croce 1921: 134-135]

Although it seems from such passages that Croce adopted a version of the “empathy” (*Einfühlung*) theory, he wished, according to Carritt, to demarcate his own views from it [Carritt 1949a: 191], [Carritt 1953: 457]. This question need not detain us here. (But see Chapter 5, section 1.) This brief summary of Croce’s theory allows us to see clearly that it has nothing to do with Collingwood’s notion of “re-enactment”. When one speaks of projecting oneself into the mind of someone else, the metaphor of “projection” is really only a metaphor for Collingwood, but not so for Dilthey or Croce, who missed the critical dimension of “re-enactment”. Because Collingwood is merely asking that one understands the reasons why someone did something and merely points out that in order to do so one must envisage the situation from the point of view of that person. This is the point expressed in the above-quoted passage:

So the historian of politics or warfare, presented with an account of certain actions done by Julius Caesar, tries to understand these actions, that is, to discover what thoughts in Caesar’s mind determined him to do them. This implies envisaging for himself the situation in which Caesar stood, and thinking for himself what Caesar thought about the situation and the possible ways of dealing with it. [IH: 215]

“Re-enactment” remains within the ‘sphere of reasons’, so to speak, while *Nacherleben* and *intuizione* do not and imply more. It is precisely because the latter notions imply more than mere rational explanation that they are open to the charge, levelled wrongly against Collingwood by Gardiner, of being “esoteric methods”. This is also why they are close to, even if not similar to, the much criticized “empathy”.

Within Collingwood's lifetime, logical positivism, represented at Oxford by A. J. Ayer and F. Waismann, came to dominate the English-speaking philosophical scene. Today, almost every thesis that could be said to have been characteristic of "logical positivism" has been criticized and rejected: as a movement, logical positivism is dead. At any rate, within this movement, authors such as Karl Popper [Popper 1959], Ernst Nagel [Nagel 1961], and Carl Hempel [Hempel 1966a] developed a very influential conception of scientific explanation. According to this view, explanations are arguments in which the statement describing the fact or regularity to be explained is derived from premises, at least one of which is a law of nature. This simplified deductive model looks like this [Hempel 1966a: chap. V]:

$$\begin{array}{c} L_1, L_2, \dots, L_n \\ C_1, C_2, \dots, C_n \\ \hline E \end{array}$$

Here, E represents the fact to be explained, or *explanandum*. It is deduced from the statements L_1, L_2, \dots, L_n of the laws of nature involved and the statements C_1, C_2, \dots, C_n of the initial conditions, which form the *explanans*. Such arguments are typical in the natural sciences. One famous example is that of the calculation of the length of the shadow cast by the Empire State Building (E) from the height of the Empire State Building (C_1), the degree of the angle of the sun (C_2), together with the law of the rectilinear propagation of light (L_1) [Bromberger 1966: 92].

This model of explanation is referred to as the "deductive-nomological" or "covering-law" model.⁵ Another thesis which characterized the original logical positivist doctrine of the 1930s

⁵ I am of course remaining silent about differences between the conceptions of the authors just cited, nor am I discussing variants such as the inductive-statistical model that deals with statistical results. I also leave aside issues raised by the extension of the covering-law model to history: Are there specific historical laws? Are the laws about individuals or groups?

and 1940s, was the “unity of science”, namely the idea that there is only one scientific method. Defenders of the deductive-nomological model therefore considered that it was not just the proper method of the natural sciences but also that of the so-called *Geisteswissenschaften*; they naturally argued against the validity of the concurrent approach in terms of *Verstehen* or *Einführung*.

In a famous paper dating from 1942, ‘The Function of General Laws in History’, Carl Hempel argued for the applicability of the covering-law model to history.⁶ In a few paragraphs, he dismissed what he called the “method of empathic understanding”:

We have tried to show that in history no less than in any other branch of empirical enquiry, scientific explanation can be achieved only by means of suitable general hypotheses, or by theories, which are bodies of systematically related hypotheses. This thesis is clearly in contrast with the familiar view that genuine explanation in history is obtained by a method which characteristically distinguishes the social from the natural sciences, namely, *the method of empathic understanding*: the historian, we are told, imagines himself in the place of the persons involved in the events which he wants to explain; he tries to realize as completely as possible the circumstances under which they acted and the motives which influenced their actions; and by this imaginary self-identification with his heroes, he arrives at an understanding and thus at an adequate explanation of the events with which he is concerned. [Hempel 1965: 239].

Hempel presented only two arguments:

This method of empathy is, no doubt, frequently applied by laymen and by experts in history. But it does not in itself constitute an explanation; it rather is essentially a heuristic device; its function is to suggest psychological hypotheses which might serve as explanatory principles in the case under consideration. Stated in crude terms, the idea underlying this function is the following: The historian tries to realize how he himself would act under the given conditions, and under the particular motivations of his heroes; he tentatively generalizes his findings into a general rule and uses the latter as an explanatory principle in accounting for the actions of the persons involved. Now, this procedure may sometimes prove heuristically helpful; but it does not guarantee the soundness of the historical explanation to which it leads. The latter rather depends upon the factual correctness of the generalizations which the method of understanding may have suggested.

⁶ For another influential critique of the tradition of *Verstehen* from the point of view of logical positivism, see [Nagel 1952], [Nagel 1953], and [Nagel 1961: chap. 15].

Nor is the use of this method indispensable for historical explanation. A historian may, for example, be incapable of feeling himself into the role of a paranoiac historic personality, and yet he may well be able to explain certain of his actions by reference to the principles of abnormal psychology. Thus, whether the historian is or is not in a position to identify himself with his historical hero is irrelevant for the correctness of his explanation; what counts is the soundness of the general hypotheses involved, no matter whether they were suggested by empathy or by a strictly behaviouristic procedure. [Hempel 1965: 239-240]

First, Hempel contends that the method of empathy cannot provide *bona fide* explanations; it is only a heuristic device and it can merely provide what was later called an “explanation sketch” that needs “filling in”. Secondly, the scope of empathy is limited. The first argument certainly hit home. It is a mistake to confuse the method by which one arrives at hypotheses with the confirmation of these hypotheses. These critical remarks have generated a large debate in the 1950s, into which I do not wish to enter, because this is not the place for an extended discussion of methodological issues in history. I should like merely to point out in light of what has been said in the previous section that, first, what has generally been understood under the expression “method of empathic understanding” is a group of divergent theories and, secondly, that Collingwood’s theory of “re-enactment” is not one of them.⁷ I hope that this point needs not be argued for further. Therefore, as far as Collingwood is concerned, the criticisms launched by Hempel—but repeated by many, such as [Nagel 1952: 156], [Gardiner 1952a: 129]—simply do not hit their mark.

⁷ Contrary to what seems to be a widespread belief, this criticism also does not affect the position of neo-Kantians such as W. Windelband, who recognized in his famous rectorial address of 1894 that “general propositions are necessary at every stage of inquiry in the idiographic sciences. And these they can borrow only—with perfect legitimacy—from the nomothetic disciplines. Every causal explanation of any historical occurrence presupposes general ideas about the process of things on the whole. When historical proofs are reduced to their purely logical form, the ultimate premises will always include natural laws of events, in particular, laws of mental events or psychological processes” [Windelband 1980: 182-183].

I should like to limit myself to a few supplementary remarks. First of all, Dray was right to point out, in *Laws and Explanation in History*, that, with their wholesale rejection of “empathy”, logical positivists left out something rather precious, namely something that

[...] should be taken into account in a *logical* analysis of explanation as it is given in history [...] idealist theory partially, and perhaps defectively, formulates a certain pragmatic criterion operating in explanations of action given by historians. [Dray 1957a: 121].

This pragmatic criterion is fleshed out a little bit further by Dray, when he points out, using an example taken from Trevelyan’s *England under the Stuarts* that when the historian asks for the explanation of an action, he almost invariably asks for a reconstruction of the agent’s reasoning or *calculations*:

[...] in so far as we say an action is purposive at all, no matter at what level of conscious deliberation, there is a calculation which could be constructed for it: the one the agent would have gone through if had had time, if he had not seen what to do in a flash, if he had been called upon to account for what he did after the event, &c. And it is by eliciting some such calculation that we explain the action. It might be added that if the agent is to understand his *own* actions, i.e. after the event, he may have to do so by constructing a calculation in exactly the same way, although at the time he recited no propositions to himself. No doubt there are special dangers involved in such construction after the fact. But although we may have to examine very critically any particular example, the point is that when we do consider ourselves justified in accepting an explanation of an individual action, it will most often assume the general *form* of an agent’s calculation. [Dray 1957a: 123]

Although not meant to be an explication of the heart of Collingwood’s philosophy of history, i.e., of his theory of “re-enactment”, the above passage can be seen as one, a fact for which Dray makes no apology [Dray 1957a: 122]. Indeed, it fits very well Collingwood’s own practice as an archeologist and as an historian. To take only one illustrative example, it fits perfectly Collingwood’s bold treatment of Caesar’s motives for invading Britain in 54-55 B.C., in *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* [Collingwood & Myres 1936: 32f.]. The topic is introduced thus:

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 second, the mere narrative of his campaigns must remain unintelligible. [Collingwood & Myres 1936: 32]

Using evidence from Caesar's text to the effect that contingents from Britain had been fighting on the side of his enemies during his Gallic campaigns and that sometimes Britain was also the refuge of those resisting to him, Collingwood summarized Caesar's situation with the following dilemma:

As the event of his expedition showed, Caesar was on the horns of a dilemma. So long as Gaul was restless, Britain, a refuge and reservoir of disaffection within a few hours' sail, was an added danger: for the sake of Gaulish security, therefore, Britain must be made harmless. But so long as the restlessness of Gaul was acute a campaign across the Channel was hazardous: it was an incitement to revolt in Gaul while the Roman armies were overseas. Either way there was a risk. Caesar chose one risk and went to Britain. [...] The question which risk to take 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. [Collingwood & Myres 1936: 32-33]

The problem is that although Caesar must have had an answer to this question, "he has not told us what it was" [Collingwood & Myres 1936: 33]. After further discussion, Collingwood finally reaches his conclusion that "it can hardly be doubted that his plan was to conquer the whole island" [Collingwood & Myres 1936: 34]. It would take too much space to present Collingwood's arguments. I shall merely cite part of the argumentation, where one should note that Collingwood is merely reflecting on the available evidence:

The last thing [Caesar] did before sailing to Britain in 55 was to cross the Rhine and undertake a campaign in Germany; and in narrating the events of the campaign he ends with the statement that his plans had been fully carried out and his objects completely achieved. At the end of his British narrative he makes no such claim, and the contrast is significant. His reconnaissance in 55 was followed by a twenty days' thanksgiving at Rome to celebrate the happy commencement of a new adventure. Nothing of the kind followed the definitive campaign of 54. Whatever the object of the expedition [in 55], neither Caesar nor the Senate thought that it had been

fulfilled. For this reason it cannot be supposed that Caesar meant only to conduct a punitive war [...] [Collingwood & Myres 1936: 33]

This presentation of the situation, from the point of view of Caesar, reconstructed from available evidence, allows Collingwood to provide a motive for Caesar's actions, and thus to give a "rational explanation" of his actions. The most important feature of such "rational explanations", is that they *do not presuppose laws*. They afford us a "reconstruction of the agent's *calculation* of means to be adopted towards his chosen end in the light of the circumstances in which he found himself" [Dray 1957a: 122], but such explanations, according to Dray, merely require what he called a "principle of action", as opposed to a law, i.e., they require judgments of the form "When in a situation of type C_1, C_2, \dots, C_n the thing to do is x " [Dray 1957a: 132]. Such "principles of action" remind one of the weaker notion of *nomological generalization* which is used in what is now known in philosophy of mind as "folk psychology". As the above historical example shows, it is not clear that rational explanations require even such "principles" (see the Conclusion for further remarks). For example, in the above case of Collingwood's explanation of Caesar's motives for the invasion of Britain, there is no implicit reference to a principle of the sort "When confronted with such and such a dilemma, the thing to do is x ". I shall, however, leave the question of the status of such "principles of action" open, since to settle this question goes beyond the bounds of this thesis.

Without wishing to get enmeshed in this old debate about historical explanation, I should like to point out other influential criticisms of Hempel's model, such as those launched by Alan Donagan [Donagan 1959] and, especially, Michael Scriven, who has argued for a distinction between *explanation* and *justification*, which makes room for explanations that do not make an appeal to laws, and argued further that the "logical" arguments for the necessity of such laws are

simply unsound [Scriven 1959].⁸ On the other hand, there seems to be no such challenge to the rational explanation model developed and defended by William Dray on the basis of his interpretation of Collingwood.⁹ It remains, *prima facie*, a very good candidate for explanation in history.

At any rate, the whole edifice of logical positivism has by now fallen down. No one still holds the thesis of the unity of science. Furthermore, difficulties have led to the general abandonment of the covering-law model; although there are numerous alternative theories of “explanation” that are on the market, so to speak, there is no consensus at the moment on the matter.¹⁰ Among the many influential criticisms that led to this abandonment, one should mention an early paper by Michael Scriven [Scriven 1962], who pointed out the lack of a pragmatics of explanation: it is simply not clear that the covering-law model reveals the features that actually make explanations successful. In philosophy of history, one could say that this was the lesson provided by critics such as Donagan, Dray, and Scriven.

§2. Identity of Thoughts

I must now take a closer look at some specific elements of Collingwood’s theory.¹¹ In particular, the following two central issues must be dealt with. First of all, it is claimed that the historian must “re-think” the thoughts of the historical agent. But the result is not, according to

⁸ For Hempel’s defense of his model, see [Hempel 1963], [Hempel 1966b].

⁹ For further references, see [Dray 1959], [Dray 1963].

¹⁰ I am following here the survey in [Kitcher 1998].

¹¹ There are a number of subsidiary issues that will not be dealt with, for example the notion of cause employed in Collingwood’s rational explanations. Here, to “cause” an agent to do a certain action means affording her a motive (or reason) for doing it. See [IH: 214-215], [EM:290-295], [Dray 1993: 64-66].

Collingwood, that the historian thinks in her own mind a copy of the original thought. It *is* the same thought. For example, Collingwood wrote in his *Autobiography*:

Nelson's thought, as Nelson thought it and as I re-think it, is certainly one and the same thought. [A: 112]

How could Collingwood make such a bold claim? In the same passage, he claims that "No question in my study of historical method ever gave me so much trouble" [A: 112]. The matter is therefore not to be glossed over and deserves careful examination, especially in light of the fact that this is the most important part of Collingwood's "objectivism", as I already announced it in Chapter 1, section 2. In the Conclusion, this thesis will play a key role, as it is the most important feature demarcating Collingwood's 'hermeneutics' from more relativistic forms of hermeneutics such as Gadamer's.

One worry associated with "empathic understanding", *Verstehen* and the like is that one seems to postulate extraordinary powers of insight, whose results are unacceptably self-certifying. This sort of worry prompted Patrick Gardiner to write that:

This suggests that historians are in possession of an additional power of knowing which allows them to 'penetrate into' the minds of the subjects of their study and take, as it were, psychological X-ray photographs. [Gardiner 1952a: 128]

In order to show that the sort of rational explanations sought by Collingwood do not involve such self-certifying insight, it is not sufficient to point out, as I did in the previous section, that his conceptions had nothing to do with those of Dilthey or Croce, who might as well be found guilty of having postulated such insights. One must show further that *rational explanations do not go, in any damaging sense, beyond the bounds of empirical evidence*. I shall make two further points concerning the role of evidence and "historical imagination" in Collingwood's theory, in order to show that, indeed, rational explanations do not go beyond empirical enquiry. In doing so, I shall defend the view already expressed in Chapter 1, section 2, that Collingwood's

philosophy of history is of an ‘anti-realist’ nature. However, this anti-realism does not imply any form of ontological idealism, so, although I shall partly agree with the “constructionist” interpretation of Goldstein and Nielsen, I shall reject some of their stronger conclusions. To this, I shall add a few words about a possible interpretation of Collingwood’s remarks about the role of imagination in history that might turn him into a precursor of the current vogue of (post-modern) narrativism.

As was just mentioned, Collingwood believed that the historian must succeed in “re-enacting” or “re-thinking” the *same* thought as that of the historical agent (or, using the terminology of the last section, to “reconstruct” the calculations of the agent; all these expressions are clearly used interchangeably). Collingwood meant the phrase in its literal sense:

[...] the historian must be able to think over again for himself the thought whose expression he is trying to interpret. If for any reason he is such a kind of man that he cannot do this, he had better leave the problem alone. The important point here is that the historian of a certain thought must think for himself that very same thought, not another like it. [A: 111]

This thesis is argued for in the *Autobiography* [A: 111-113] and, more extensively, in *The Idea of History* [IH: 217-219, 282-302, 445-450]. Taking one of Collingwood’s examples, one could present the problem in the following manner. As is well known, during the battle of Trafalgar, Admiral Nelson was asked to take off his medals—which would make him an easy target for French sharpshooters—and he replied:

‘In honour I won them, in honour I will die with them’

The ordinary, naïve, view consists in seeing this first occurrence of the thought, within the skull of Nelson, on the Atlantic, not far from the coast of Spain, on October 21, 1805, as unique. Let us call it T_1 . Having re-thought this in Ottawa, Canada in October 21, 2002, I have

succeeded, in my mind, in thinking a thought T_2 of which one would naturally claim that it is a copy of the original, i.e., that:

$$T_1 = T_2$$

This is what Collingwood expressed by saying of the two acts of thinking: “The two acts are different acts but acts of the same kind” [IH: 285]. This naïve view implies that *the content of the acts of thoughts depend on the specific spatial and temporal contexts in which they are performed*. This is what was expressed by Collingwood when he wrote that “To Nelson, that thought was a present thought; to me, it is a past thought living in the present [...]” [A: 113]. This would explain that between Nelson’s thinking that ‘In honour I won them, in honour I will die with them’ and my thinking that ‘In honour I won them, in honour I will die with them’, there is, as he would put it, “a relation of numerical difference and specific identity” [IH: 285]. This is, according to Collingwood, proof that this naïve view is “a case of the copy-theory of knowledge” [IH: 285]. By ‘copy theory’¹², Collingwood meant the theory

[...] which pretends to explain how we know things by the hypothesis of images ‘inside’ our minds, mental images, copying the appearances of objects ‘outside’ our mind. [IH: 449-450]

That Collingwood rejected this theory should not be a surprise; ample evidence that he rejected Cartesian dualism was provided in Chapter 2, section 1.

As was already indicated by the use of subscripts, the copy theory implies that one can *individuate numerically* thoughts that have the same content on the basis of their spatial and temporal contexts. And the resulting identity (somewhat inadequately presented here as the equation $T_1 = T_2$) can be said to imply a correspondence theory of truth: my copy, T_2 , is a true

¹² It is possible to frame the above equation $T_1 = T_2$ in terms of the type-token distinction, of which Collingwood was unaware. It is possible that Collingwood’s arguments, which were specifically targeting the ‘copy theory’, are

likeness of Nelson's original, T_1 , it "corresponds to it". The copy theory leaves the door open for scepticism: in absence of the possibility to compare directly my thought T_2 with the thought T_1 , it is impossible in principle to ascertain that they are the same (i.e., of the same kind). I shall claim in the Conclusion that some such view is implicitly presupposed by Gadamer, when he argues against Collingwood. Now, Collingwood disagrees with the copy theory and he tried to refute it, this refutation being the hardest problem he had faced [A: 112]. It is not hard to point out absurdities underlying the copy theory. What was hard was probably shaking off the conviction in the copy theory, which comes so naturally to the mind that it is seldom questioned.

Collingwood's line of argumentation in 'History as Re-enactment of Past Experience' [IH: 282-302] consisted in refuting the underlying assumption that it makes sense at all of individuating numerically thoughts that have the same content on the basis of their spatial and temporal contexts:

Is it the case that when we speak of two persons performing the same act of thought or of one person performing the same act at two different times, we mean that they are performing different acts of the same kind? It is, I think, clear that we mean nothing of the sort, and that the only reason why anyone should fancy that we do is because he has accepted a dogma that whenever we distinguish two things and yet say that they are the same (which, as everyone admits, we often do) we mean that they are different specimens of the same kind, different instances of the same universal, or different members of the same class. The dogma is not that there is no such thing as identity in difference (nobody believes that), but that there is only one kind of it, namely specific identity in numerical difference. Criticism of the dogma, therefore, turns not on proving that this kind of identity in difference does not exist, but on proving that other kinds exist, and that the case we are considering is one of them. [IH: 285]

One must not get confused about the precise nature of Collingwood's argument: he is not denying that it is possible to individuate numerically any two things of the same kind, as when we say of two cigars that they are "the same", meaning that they are of the same brand: this cigar

thus of a limited scope. But my task is merely here to provide an interpretation of Collingwood's philosophy, within

C_1 and that cigar C_2 are both, say, Esplendidos. He merely wishes to argue that one cannot do so with “thoughts”. To use another terminology, thoughts have only *generic* identity, not *numerical* identity. I shall not reconstruct Collingwood’s argument in all its details, nor am I claiming to have defended Collingwood’s position against potential criticisms.¹³ I wish here merely to get the gist of Collingwood’s position right, on such an important point.

A first step in the refutation would be to ask the reader to make the following thought experiment: think that ‘the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal’—Collingwood’s own example [IH: 284f.]—, then wait five minutes and think again ‘the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal’. Or better: imagine that on both occasions you run through the actual proof that the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal. Ordinary language as it that one has thus had “the same thought” at an interval of five minutes. Presumably, if temporal context makes no difference when one speaks of five minutes, why should it make a difference when 197 years are involved, as in the above case of Nelson and me?

In the case of Nelson and me, there is the added issue of space. But what does it amount to? Let us suppose that two persons are in the same room, thinking ‘the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal’. Would the difference of spatial context merely reduce to the fact that both acts of thinking take place in different skulls? One could cite here a passage from Norman Malcolm, ‘The Privacy of Experience’, where he argued against the idea of privacy of sensations:

I hope it will not be thought insulting if I say that all of us are influenced by very *crude* imagery. We tend to think of a *mind* as an intangible volume of space, and of the *contents* of that mind as located inside that volume of space. Another mind is a

its context.

¹³ A full presentation of Collingwood’s argument is to be found in [Saari 1984: 63-84] and [Saari 1989: 77-89]. My reconstruction was greatly helped from this careful, convincing presentation. See also [D’oro 2000] for another defense of this point. For criticisms of Collingwood, however, see [Meiland 1965: 69-77].

different volume of space, and its content are numerically different from the contents of any other mind because they are located in a different space. I believe our strong temptation to assume that one person's thought, feelings, and "experiences" cannot be "numerically" the same as another's spring in part from this imagery—although that is not the whole story.

The assumption that your sensation and mine must be numerically different is a *bad* mistake, philosophically speaking, because it embodies the idea that the contents of your mind (your thoughts, feelings, sensations) are hidden from me. Thus it puts us on the road to skepticism about other minds, and even to solipsism. [Malcolm 1977: 120-121]

I should like to make a number of points. First, I should point out that Collingwood actually reasoned in terms entirely parallel to Malcolm's:

If [Euclid] thought 'the angles are equal' and I now think 'the angles are equal', granted that the time interval is no cause for denying that the two acts are one and the same, is the difference between Euclid and myself ground for denying it? There is no tenable theory of personal identity that would justify such a doctrine. Euclid and I are not (as it were) two different typewriters which, just because they are not the same typewriter, can never perform the same act but only acts of the same kind. A mind is not a machine with various functions, but a complex of activities; and to argue that an act of Euclid's cannot be the same as an act of my own because it forms part of a different complex of activities is merely to beg the question. Granted that the same act can happen twice in different context within the complex of my own activities, why should it not happen twice in two different complexes? [IH: 287-288]

And, like Malcolm, Collingwood argues that adopting the 'copy theory' leads to solipsism:

To reject this conclusion means denying that we have any right to speak of acts of thought at all, except such as take place in our own minds, and embracing the doctrine that my mind is the only one that exists. Against anyone who accepts that form of solipsism I shall not stay to argue. I am considering how history, as the knowledge of past thoughts (acts of thought), is possible; and I am only concerned to show that it is impossible except on the view that to know another's act of thought involves repeating it for oneself. If a person who rejects that view is driven in consequence to this kind of solipsism, my point is proved. [IH: 288-289]

However, Malcolm is arguing against the privacy of sensations, in effect developing a line of argument first expressed by Wittgenstein, while Collingwood actually admits that, at the 'preconscious' level, sensations are private and not re-enactable. In this sense, Wittgenstein and Malcolm are more radical in their repudiation of the naïve view in these matters. But one should

nevertheless note that the whole point of Collingwood's philosophy of mind, as presented in Chapter 2, is that awareness is linguistic and what is linguistic is already *public*. Secondly, the view attacked by Malcolm can be seen to be at work in a number of instances. It can certainly be argued that, for example, the theories of *Einfühlung* or of *Verstehen* presuppose the crude imagery mentioned by Malcolm. Indeed, this seems to be the whole point of taking seriously the metaphor of 'projection', as Dilthey, Lipps or Simmel did, each one in their own ways: there has to be a receptacle, a volume of space, a mind in which one is 'entering'. The fact that Collingwood rejected the copy theory of thoughts is a clear indication that his theory of re-enactment had nothing to do with the German theories (or their Italian variant) with which it is usually conflated.

To come back to the argument. This cannot be, however, the end of the matter, because one could still deny that, to begin with, in running twice through the proof that the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal at a five minutes interval, I ended up having 'the same thought'. One needs a criterion for the identity of thoughts. As Heikki Saari pointed out, Collingwood examines and rejects two likely candidates, 'empirical' criteria based, e.g., on behaviour, and 'subjective' criteria based on intuitive insights [Saari 1984: 73-79], [Saari 1989: 82-83]. I have already rejected the "intuitionist" interpretation of Collingwood in the previous section. A passage quoted in Chapter 1, section 2, is evidence that Collingwood favoured 'conceptual' criteria (my emphasis):

[...] whereas my experience can only be mine, and nobody else's, the concepts exemplified in it may be exemplified in other experiences. No two people can have the same tooth-ache, but they may both have tooth-ache. Thus concepts provide a common ground on which diverse experiences can meet. Any world of thought is a public world, accessible not indeed to every mind in common, but accessible in common to any two minds which enjoy similar experiences. [PH: 133-134]

By ‘conceptual’ criteria, I mean, following Saari, the rules governing our actual uses of the expression ‘the same’ and mental concepts, such as ‘tooth-ache’, ‘thought’, etc. As this remark of Collingwood implies, these conceptual criteria provide the intersubjective grounds on which judgments of identity are based. As Saari pointed out, the idea was put forth by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*:

If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. [Wittgenstein 1997: § 242]

What this means is nicely put by Saari (my emphasis):

If we apply this reasoning to the identity of mental events, this means that it is not a merely contingent fact that we agree in our judgements about the identity of people’s mental events, for this agreement is a necessary precondition for making judgments about identity of their mental states or processes. We cannot go beyond the actual use of our mental concepts in order to “check” whether our uses of them really accord with our mental reality. It is rather so that *the sense our mental concepts have for us shows what the reality of our mental life in general and the identity of our mental events in particular amounts to*. [Saari 1989: 85]

It is our rules for the use of mental concepts that are constitutive of the identity of our mental events and not the contrary. The contrary is to hold the impossible idea that each person gives inner meaning to our words by associating them (through, presumably, a private process of ostension) with mental states.

Collingwood’s discussion of ‘sameness of thought’ presupposes to a very large extent this Wittgensteinian account of meaning. On the other hand, the view to which both Wittgenstein and Collingwood are diametrically opposed can be found in one of the promoters of “empathy”, Georg Simmel:

[...] it is in principle possible for a mental process which takes place in one mind to be reproduced in another, just as precisely as the words which are telegraphed at one station are reproduced as another. [Simmel 1977: 67]

Collingwood expressed his point very clearly in the famous 1928 manuscript, written at Le Martouret, near Die, in France:¹⁴

For a certain kind of re-enactment *is* possible [...] and if the objector says that *no* kind of re-enactment is possible, merely because nothing can happen twice, we shall treat his objection with less courtesy [...] Is the binomial theorem as known to him, we should ask, the same theorem that Newton invented, or not? If he says yes, he has admitted all we want. If he says no, we can easily convict him of self-contradiction: for he is assuming that in our mutual discourse we have ideas in common, and this is inconsistent with his thesis. [IH: 446]

We understand what Newton thought by thinking—not *copies* of his thoughts—a silly and meaningless phrase—but his thoughts themselves over again. When we have done that, we know what Newton thought, not mediately, but immediately. The historian's thought, then, neither is nor contains or involves any copy of its object. [...] A person who failed to realize that thoughts are not private property might say that it is not Newton's thought that I understand, but only my own. That would be silly because, whatever subjective idealism may pretend, thought is always and everywhere *de jure* common property, and is *de facto* common property wherever people at large have the intelligence to think in common. [IH: 450]

The allusion to “subjective idealism” in this last paragraph brings us back to Chapter 1, section 2, where I gave evidence that the argument that I just presented is linked with Collingwood's philosophical background, i.e., with “objective idealism”. In that section, I have shown that the argument presented here is related to better-known arguments laid out by two readers of Lotze: Husserl and Frege. Here, I have endeavoured to show that Collingwood's own argument and position are close to that of the later Wittgenstein. It should thus be clear that the later Collingwood's position, although historically related to the neo-Platonism of the objective idealists, does not rely on such metaphysics but on a linguistic philosophy.

Now, it is easier to ascertain, in some cases, that one is successful in re-enacting someone else's thoughts. The mathematical examples chosen by Collingwood are obvious cases. On the other hand, re-thinking of Plato's doctrines [IH: 215, 301] is a less obvious case. In the

¹⁴ The manuscript is mentioned by Collingwood in his *Autobiography* has a turning-point in his own thinking about

Conclusion, I shall briefly mention an objection raised by Gadamer on exactly this point. Historical understanding seems to fall in between these cases. It is not reasonable to doubt, for example, that the Allied invasion of Normandy began on June 6, 1944. But concerning many cases, such as the extent of European navigation in North American waters prior to Columbus' 'discovery', the evidence available allows only for tentative hypotheses; in other cases, such as aspects of Beothuk culture, mystery remains. This brings us to the role of evidence.

§3. Evidence and Imagination

The proper understanding of the role of evidence (and imagination) in history according to Collingwood's theory is at the heart of a debate, among commentators, surrounding what has been called his "constructionism". As noted in Chapter 1, Collingwood came to reject the realist epistemology of his teachers, Cook Wilson, Prichard, and Carritt. He also became opposed to it because he believed that it was the sort of bad metaphysics that would allow for the rise of fascism and nazism, which were a real threat to liberal democracies in the late 1930s. As a result, Collingwood took every opportunity to scorn "Oxford Realism", in his later writings. I cited in Chapter 1, section 2, criticisms found in the *Autobiography*; in *An Essay on Metaphysics*, Collingwood wrote that this "realism" is

[...] based upon the grandest foundation a philosophy can have, namely human stupidity. [EM: 34]

Collingwood was understandably very concerned by the political events of his days, both books were written in the wake of the Munich affair. He believed that:

The Fate of European science and European civilization is at stake. The gravity of the peril lies especially in the fact that so few recognize any peril to exist. When Rome was in danger, it was the cackling of the sacred geese that saved the Capitol. I am only a professorial goose, consecrated with a cap and gown and fed at a college table; but cackling is my job, and cackle I will. [EM: 343]

It has been noticed [Collini 1999] that there is something pathetic in the fact that Collingwood's reaction to ominous events in the world's politics consisted merely in the parochial criticism of the "realist" metaphysics of his Oxford colleagues. This sort of cackling had probably no effect on British politics but it certainly helped confuse the minds of Collingwood's interpreters. Indeed, his steadfast criticism of "realism" led him to frame his own position, on a number of issues, in ways that are likely to and have caused confusion. In trying to reduce the amount of confusion, I should like, in this section, to provide an interpretation of Collingwood's remarks on evidence and "*a priori* imagination", as it relates to the following theses, that one usually associates with "realism":

- (i) The acquaintance theory of knowledge
- (ii) The thesis that "knowing makes no difference to what is known"
- (iii) The past renders our statements about it true or false independently of our cognitive abilities

What Collingwood said about these three theses is a matter of delicate interpretation. The problem is that, under one interpretation, he is likely to come out as holding a *prima facie* absurd view, in the sense that it denies common sense, according to which the past has no independent reality, not just because it is not in existence any more, but because it is literally created by the historian (in his own mind). And that interpretation is usually shored up by using passages where he says nasty things about "realism"; furthermore, all this easily confirms the prejudice according to which Collingwood is just an "idealist". One famous example of this sort of

confusion is provided by Collingwood's remarks in the *Autobiography*, against the "realist" doctrine that "there is no history of philosophy" and that "the problems with which philosophy is concerned were unchanging" [A; 59]. In this passage, Collingwood comes across as holding the contrary view that there are no eternal problems and this opens the door to the view that he was a relativist. (That he was not, I shall try and show in the next Chapter.)

Before looking in turn at these three theses I should like to take stock and make two basic points about Collingwood's alleged "idealism". First, if by "idealism" one means very crudely the belief that there is no mind-matter dualism but only mind, then one will find no grounds for attributing this thesis to Collingwood. In Chapter 2, section 1, I have argued that his rejection of Cartesian dualism, like Ryle's, doesn't entail a form of ontological monism. Secondly, I have just argued that re-enactment means the re-thinking of the same thought as that of the historical agent. That doctrine contradicts the very idea that the re-enactment is simply a subjective state in the mind of the historian, as this would mean that "instead of answering the question how the past is known we should be maintaining that the past is not known, but only the present" [IH: 284]. More than one commentator has seen this as a strong, inescapable argument in favour of realism [Martin 1989: 522], [Martin 1995: 240] [Code 1989: 554], [HR: 245]. One may argue, however, that the doctrine of re-enactment remains within the sphere of thoughts and that idealism could still be maintained. But thoughts, as the 'inside' of actions, are indissolubly linked with the 'outside' of events, and these are as material as anything can be. The insistence on thoughts is here merely linked with the fact that events that are past are considered by Collingwood *as past* and therefore without any actual reality (this is the basis for his doctrine of the "ideality of history", to be discussed shortly); all that is left in the present are traces of them, from which one must reconstruct what happened. The rejection of dualism and the argument

about the sameness of re-enacted thoughts are of a piece and form inescapable evidence that Collingwood could not have been an idealist in the crude sense of the word. This reasoning applies *mutatis mutandis* in the philosophy of art; in Chapter 5, I shall show that the attribution of such crude idealism to Collingwood cannot make sense.

The acquaintance theory of knowledge states that all knowledge is based on a primary sort of knowledge, acquired when the subject is in a direct, immediate relation to the object. This direct relation has been called ‘apprehension’ by Cook Wilson and ‘acquaintance’ by Russell. Both authors differ on the nature of the object of acquaintance: Oxford Realists believed that these are the objects themselves, Cambridge Realists believed that they are a representative of the object, e.g., sense data [Marion 2000: 316-325]. In that sense, Cambridge Realists defended a variety of the “subjective idealism” that Collingwood, along with Bradley and Cook Wilson, always rejected, even in his early “realist” phase. The thesis (ii), that “knowing makes no difference to what is known”, was already presented in the Introduction, section 2. It is a thesis on which Cook Wilson and his followers insisted heavily against the neo-Hegelian idealists and it is a distinguishing feature of the Oxford school of realism [Marion 2000: 307-316]. I also quoted Collingwood’s critique of that thesis, as he presented it in his *Autobiography* [A: 44]. In *The Idea of Nature*, he spoke, in relation to thesis (ii), of a “realist’s shibboleth” [IN: 167]. In the ‘Die’ manuscript from 1928, Collingwood argued jointly against theses (i) and (ii). Indeed, the realist theory of knowledge which is argued against in this passage is a mixture of (i) and (ii):

According to the realistic theory, the object of knowledge is always something actual, whose actuality is independent of all cognitive activity on the part of the mind that knows it. The mind and the object are generally, in such theories, conceived as two independent actually existing things, which come together in such a way that the mind ‘knows’ the object. [...] if the act of knowing an object produced alterations in it, the act would precisely not be one of knowing, since knowing *implies* that what we know is not altered by our knowing it.

It is at once clear that from the point of view of an ordinary realistic theory of knowledge, history is impossible. A theory which regards knowledge as 'apprehension' of an independent object is reasonable if perception is taken as the only legitimate example of knowledge [...] it has no shadow of plausibility in the case of history. The historian who writes a monograph on the battle of Marathon is not 'apprehending' a thing, namely the battle of Marathon, that exists independently of the apprehending and, as it were, stands there to be apprehended. The battle of Marathon was an event which ceased happening some 2,400 years ago; there is nothing there to apprehend; in the realistic sense of the term object, there is no object whatever for the historian to know. [IH: 448-449]

This argument deserves close examination. First, if it is the case that Collingwood believed that thesis (ii) is false, then one should note that nothing said in the above quotation can count as supporting the claim that knowing *alters* the object. The argument, in the second paragraph, is really only against thesis (i), because Collingwood has not provided us any reason to believe that in the eventuality that knowledge could be something else than perception, possibly this new form of knowledge would involve alteration of its object. I was able to find only one place where Collingwood actually stated that historical knowledge alters, *stricto sensu*, its object. It is a passage from 'The Philosophy of History' of 1930:

How can this be, if my thoughts about Julius Caesar differ from Mommsen's? Must not one of us be wrong? No, because the object differs. My historical thought is about my own past, not about Mommsen's past. Mommsen and I share in a great many things, and in many respects we share in a common past; but in so far as we are different people and representatives of different cultures and different generations we have behind us different pasts, and everything in his past has to undergo a slight alteration before it can enter into mine. Quite apart, then, from any error in his or my interpretation of the evidence, our views of Julius Caesar must differ, slightly perhaps, but perceptibly. This difference is not arbitrary for I can see—or ought to be able to see—that in his place, apart (once more) from all question of error, I should have come to his conclusions. [EPH: 139]

Commentators are at a loss to make sense of Collingwood's denial of (ii): Donagan calls this position "absurd" [LPC: 286-289], and Dray concurs [HR: 260-263]. The doctrine of sameness of thought, for example, flatly contradicts the idea that knowing alters the object, e.g., in this very passage from 1930. There could be no original thought to re-enact if any re-enactment

would alter it, there would be no ‘sameness’ involved and it would make no sense to speak of “eternal” objects in this context. (On the latter, see the Introduction, footnote 22.) It is in the manuscript, written at Die, in 1928, that Collingwood first developed the doctrine of re-enactment, which is the key to his later philosophy of history. The above passage dates from two years later and it is simply possible that Collingwood had not yet fully abandoned the idealist metaphysics of his youth. I shall present a picture of Collingwood’s philosophical development below. It seems to me that the doctrines of the ‘ideality of history’ and of ‘sameness of thought’, taken jointly, form the core of the later Collingwood’s philosophy of history and that, on the basis of them, he progressively shed some of his “idealism”. But why did he resurrect in the *Autobiography* his argument against thesis (ii), which dates from the early 1920s? I can only surmise, as does Donagan [LPC: 289], that Collingwood wanted so badly to demarcate himself from the “realists” that he argued so hastily.

The only way that I could make sense, within the later philosophy, of the idea that, in historical knowledge, knowing alters the object is by looking at Collingwood’s thesis that historians must perceive facts as evidence as a “seeing as” argument of the sort usually put forward using the famous duck-rabbit illusion. Indeed, Collingwood speaks of new evidence coming to light when historians learn how to look differently at fact that were hitherto useless to them:

The enlargement of historical knowledge comes about mainly through finding how to use as evidence this or that kind of perceived fact which historians have hitherto thought useless to them. [...] Evidence is evidence only when some one contemplates it historically. Otherwise it is merely perceived fact, historically dumb. [IH: 247]

At any rate, as with the case of Jastrow’s ambiguous image of the duck-rabbit, it can be argued that there is no essential modification of the object when differently perceived. That

artefacts uncovered in a dig are suddenly seen as loom-weights does not change their shape. But, perhaps the difference between seeing the object as a dumb artefact and seeing it as a loom-weight is what Collingwood meant by “altering” the object.

Secondly, Collingwood links this argument, which is really against the acquaintance theory, with his doctrine of the “ideality of history”, which he first argued for at length in the ‘Die’ manuscript:¹⁵

Now an event that is happening is actual: an event that has happened is not happening and is not actual. All events that are object of historical thought are events which are not happening because they have ceased to happen: they are therefore not actual.

This proposition I shall call *the Ideality of History*. By the word ideality I intend to signify the quality of being an object of thought without having actuality: thus an ideal thing would be an object of thought without being anywhere actually exemplified in any existing thing, an ideal event would be an event which was the object of thought without actually occurring. [IH: 439-440]

(One should note that by ‘ideality’, Collingwood only meant ‘non-actuality’ of existence, not sheer non-existence.) But these theses, i.e., the refutation of (i) and the ‘ideality of history’, must not be confused. I shall come back later to the latter. As was pointed out [Nowell-Smith 1957: 146], [HR: 264], Collingwood implicitly assumes the acquaintance theory throughout, despite his open hostility towards it. Indeed, Collingwood repeatedly claims that the basis for the historian’s inferences is solely *evidence*, but what is this if not traces in the present of past events, traces that are the object of immediate acquaintance of the historian? In the above quotation from [IH: 246], Collingwood speaks of evidence as “perceived fact”. In the essay ‘The Philosophy of History’ (1930), one finds a striking passage where the issue is skirted (my emphasis):

History is knowledge of the past, and the past consists of events that have finished happening. The past does not exist and cannot be perceived; our knowledge of it is

¹⁵ See also ‘Limits of Historical Knowledge’ [EPH: 99f].

not derived from observation, and cannot be verified by experiment. A “realistic” theory, according to which knowledge is the “apprehension of a really existing object” is ruled out as absolutely inapplicable to history. We come to know the past, not immediately, but by interpreting evidence. *This evidence (or data) is something that exists in the present and is perceived by the historian. How he comes to perceive it, we are not here asking.* [EPH: 136]

There is a sense, however, in which Collingwood is really opposed to the acquaintance theory of knowledge. It has to do with the fact that Collingwood believes that acquaintance or apprehension never gives us a pure, non-conceptual datum [Collingwood 1924: 74]. The evidence available is already conceptualized, the history is already part of a tradition, there is, as he calls it, a “history of history” [IH: 248, 461] or “second-order history” [A: 132] in which the historian finds herself in her own place, and a “history of history” that has already done the conceptualization, which will be her starting-point. (This point will become important when relating Collingwood’s ideas to Gadamer’s.)

Indeed, Collingwood does not believe that there is such a thing as “ready-made” evidence: “We already know what evidence is not. It is not ready-made historical knowledge, to be swallowed and regurgitated by the historian’s mind” [IH: 246]. In that section of *The Idea of History*, entitled ‘The Historical Imagination’, Collingwood is at pains to argue that “imagination” in history is more than mere interpolation in between given facts. Indeed, the historian must interpolate in an ‘imaginary’ but not arbitrary way:

I described constructive history as interpolating, between statements borrowed from our authorities, other statements implied by them. Thus our authorities tell us that on one day Caesar was in Rome and on a later day in Gaul; they tell us nothing about his journey from one place to the other, but we interpolate this with a perfectly good conscience.

This act of interpolation had two significant characteristics. First, it is in no way arbitrary or merely fanciful: it is necessary or, in Kantian language, *a priori*. [...] if our construction involves nothing which is not necessitated by the evidence, it is a legitimate historical construction [...]

Secondly, what is in this way inferred is essentially something imagined. If we look out over the sea and perceive a ship, and five minutes later look again and perceive it

in a different place, we find ourselves obliged to imagine it as having occupied intermediate positions when we were not looking. That is already an example of historical thinking; and it is not otherwise that we find ourselves obliged to imagine Caesar as having travelled from Rome to Gaul when we are told that he was in these different places at these successive times. [IH: 240-241]

But this conception is “seriously at fault”, according to Collingwood, because “it overlooks the no less important part played by criticism”:

We think of our web of construction as pegged down, so to speak, to the facts by the statements of the authorities, which we regard as data or fixed points for the work of construction. But in so thinking we have slipped back into the theory, which we now know to be false, that truth is given us ready made in these statements. We know that truth is to be had, not by swallowing what our authorities tell us, but by criticizing it; and thus the supposedly fixed points between which the historical imagination spins its web are not given to us ready made, they must be achieved by critical thinking. [IH: 242-243]

Therefore:

The web of imaginative construction is something far more solid and powerful than we have hitherto realized. So far from relying on its validity upon the support of given facts, it actually serves as the touchstone by which we decide whether alleged facts are genuine. [IH: 244]

One can see here that the “critical”, “rational” dimension is fundamental in Collingwood’s thinking about history. Now these remarks have been understood as giving support to a point of view about history that has been called variously “constructivist” [Nielsen 1981: 1, 26], “anti-realist” [Goldstein 1970: 10, 26] or, more frequently, “constructionist” (e.g., [HR: 241-64]). “Constructionism” can be taken to be the thesis that

The past that the historian evokes is not a real past as it was when it was present, but rather a construction of his own [...] devised as the best explanation of the evidence he has. [Goldstein 1962: 177]

Constructionism is thus the denial of “historical realism”, i.e., the thesis, repudiated in Leon Goldstein’s book *Historical Knowing*, that “the real past as it was when it was being lived is the touchstone against which to test for truth or falsity the products of historical constitution”, the

latter being defined as the “set of intellectual procedures whereby the historical past is reconstructed in the course of historical research” [Goldstein 1976: xxi-xxii]. Constructionism may mean here one of two things: first, that the real past cannot be known and, secondly, that the past has no ontological reality at all. I believe that there are no grounds for attributing either of these views to Collingwood. I have claimed in Chapter 1, section 2, that Collingwood held a form of “anti-realism” about the past, which amounts to the claim that truth does not transcend our cognitive abilities, i.e., what the available evidence can support. This is, as I understand it, the basis for Nielsen’s labelling of Collingwood as a “constructivist”. This is the denial of thesis (iii), above. *It is the only truthful way in which Collingwood may be said to be against realism.* (Not that Collingwood did not reject thesis (i), but one could still be a “realist” without adhering to the acquaintance theory of knowledge,¹⁶ or that he did not reject thesis (ii), but that rejection is hardly credible.) But the denial of thesis (iii) *does not imply* that the past cannot be known, as the “constructionist” would have it (or even, for that matter that it never existed and that it is a mere fiction). What is meant here is better understood using the analogy with mathematics, at the basis of Dummett’s thinking about these issues [Dummett 1993b]: the recognition that there is no concept of truth as transcending our cognitive abilities in the case of mathematics certainly does not imply that there is no sense in which one could speak of ‘mathematical truth’; it merely means that, although there are mathematical truths, there are mathematical statements for which we can never know whether they are true or false (and in order to handle these, one must use an alternative logic). Similarly, the denial of thesis (iii) merely sets limits to the applicability of the concept of truth; it does not imply the more radical thesis that the concept is simply inapplicable

¹⁶ As Dray would put it: “if all that [Collingwood] is denying is that we can ever know *by acquaintance* how things actually happened, plenty of room is left for the possibility of knowing it in some other way” [HR: 268].

to statements about the past. I shall now argue this point as a legitimate reading of Collingwood, against the “constructionist” reading.

First, it is clear, and nobody seems to deny this, that historians infer their conclusions on the basis of available evidence. Claims of that sort abound in Collingwood’s texts. For example:

[...] facts are [...] past event, to be apprehended not empirically but by a process of inference according to rational principles from data given or rather discovered in light of these principles. [IH: 176].

(The last clause is particularly striking in light of the above quoted remark about the solidness of imaginative constructions but this sentence is also striking because of the allusion to “critical thinking”, i.e., to “rational principles”.) Collingwood further claims that the historian “comes to know the past [...] by interpreting evidence [which is] something that exists in the present” [PH: 136], that he is led to his conclusions “by arguing from the facts before him” [IH: 251], and that it is a necessity for the historian, as it is for any scientist, to justify “any claim to knowledge by exhibiting the grounds upon which it is based”:

History has this in common with every other science: that the historian is not allowed to claim any single piece of knowledge, except where he can justify his claim by exhibiting to himself in the first place, and secondly to any one else who is both able and willing to follow his demonstration, the grounds upon which it is based. This is what was meant [...] by describing history as inferential. The knowledge in virtue of which a man is an historian is a knowledge of what the evidence at his disposal proves about certain events. [IH: 252]

This is what Collingwood meant by saying that historical knowledge in “inferential” or “inductive”. But can such “demonstrations” be conclusive in a strong sense? Can the historian reach the truth? In ‘The Limits of Historical Knowledge’ Collingwood compares history with a game:

One rule—the first—runs thus: “You must not say anything, however true, for which you cannot produce evidence”. The game is won not by the player who can reconstitute what really happened, but by the player who can show that his view of what happened is the one which the evidence accessible to all players, when

criticized up to the hilt, supports. [...] there is no way of knowing what view is “correct” except by finding what the evidence, critically interpreted, proves. [EPH: 97-98]

Further on, he claims that:

The so-called rules of the game are really the definition of what historical thinking is; the winner of the game is the historian proper—the person who thinks historically, whose thought fulfils the ideal of historical truth. For historical thinking means nothing else than interpreting all the available evidence with the maximum degree of critical skill. It does not mean discovering what really happened, if “what really happened” is anything other than “what the evidence indicates”. If there once happened an event concerning which no shred of evidence now survives, that event is not part of any historian’s universe; it is no historian’s business to discover it; it is no gap in any historian’s knowledge that he does not know it. [EPH: 99]

These passages show that Collingwood leaned towards the view that “true” means “true in relation to evidence” [Nielsen 1981: 28], [HR: 215-252]. This is the anti-realist thesis that I wish to attribute to him. However, the constructionist could argue further that the predicate “true” does not apply, or that “truth” and “past” are, as Margit Nielsen would put it “regulative ideas”:

If it is correct [...] that Collingwood regarded both “truth” and “past” as regulative ideas, nothing could possibly serve as the touchstone necessary for justifying a “construction” as actually being a “reconstruction”. [...] As far as I can see, the only thing “reconstruct” *can* mean in a position like this is that the evidence-based and evidence-justified construction *pretends* to be a “reconstruction”. “Reconstructions” must be possible, but a “reconstruction” cannot ever conclusively be shown to be one. It is only accepted as such until grounds are given for no longer accepting it. [Nielsen 1981: 26n.]

There is much that I agree with in this attribution of a form of Kantian constructivism, that I wish to call here “anti-realism”, to Collingwood but it seems to me to be incorrect to claim that Collingwood’s position entails that “a “reconstruction” cannot ever conclusively be shown to be one”. Moreover, the idea that “truth” is a regulative idea can also mislead, inasmuch as it entails that ‘truth’ is therefore an unattainable goal and thus that there cannot be ‘true’ inferences from evidence, only the illusion that there is. So “truth relative to evidence” means “relative truth”,

i.e., relativism. Evidence—no pun intended—for a relativist reading would be passages such as these:

Now—and this is the root of historical scepticism—we only have strictly limited quantity of evidence concerning any historical question; it is seldom free from grave defects, it is generally tendencious, fragmentary, silent where it ought to be explicit, [...] Hence the best may be the worst, because it lulls us into a false security and induces us to mistake its incompleteness for completeness [...] [EPH: 92]

In the text there follows an argument to the effect that, supposing that less evidence had been destroyed in the past, during catastrophes such as the destruction of the library at Alexandria, we would merely have more work going through it, but we would not be nearer the truth:

[...] even had these catastrophes not happened, our sources, though more extensive, would still be incomplete. We should have more to study, but our results would not really be more certain, except in the doubtful sense in which a larger finite quantity approximates more nearly to infinity. [EPH: 93]

There are limits to the use of such passages as evidence in support of a relativistic interpretation of Collingwood. The key here is the insinuation in the last sentence that evidence of the past is in *infinite* quantity. I shall in a moment give ample textual evidence, in Collingwood, against the view that in history there can be no conclusive inferences at all. One may therefore wonder if Collingwood's thinking on these issues is not simply incoherent. It is better to favour the hypothesis of an underlying change of mind. The passage quoted here is from a text written around 1928, a period when, according to his own avowal [A: 107f.], Collingwood's thinking about philosophy of history was in flux. There is one generally accepted hypothesis by Jan van der Dussen, already alluded to in the Introduction, section 2, according to which Collingwood's thinking about history fundamentally changed in 1926-1928, with, among other things, the introduction of the thesis of the "ideality of history" [HS: 6-7, 20-41]. (Rex Martin spoke of a "sea change" [Martin 1983: 74].) But, as I pointed out in the Introduction, van

der Dussen sees this as a change from realism to idealism. His main argument is that Collingwood was still adopting the realist theory of knowledge (of Cook Wilson, Prichard) in *Speculum Mentis*, namely that it is knowledge of facts independent of the knowing subject, but that he rejected it, with the consequences that we know. The move was not from realism to idealism but, I should like to claim, to “anti-realism”. First of all, the thesis of the “ideality of history” is not a specifically “idealist” thesis, in the sense that it is not a necessary and sufficient condition that one be an “idealist” to hold it. Some “idealists”, including his former self in *Speculum Mentis*, did not hold it. Moreover, Collingwood also abandoned a key part of the idealist doctrine during those years. A careful scrutiny of the texts would be needed to ascertain this, but Collingwood appears to have abandoned the “coherence” theory of truth along with the concomitant views such as that according to which, in the words of William Dray, “in order adequately to grasp the nature of something, one must grasp the nature of its relations to everything” [HR: 237]. Theses of the sort are typical of British idealism; they were expounded for example by H. H. Joachim, in *The Nature of Truth* [Joachim 1906], a close ally of J. A. Smith. (Collingwood mentions his book with approval in [A: 36].) According to Joachim, “the truth itself is one, and whole, and complete” and “all thinking and all experience moves within its recognition and [is] subject to its manifest authority” [Joachim 1906: 178]. Joachim defined the ‘coherence’ theory of truth (which he ultimately criticized) in these terms:

Truth in its essential nature is that systematic coherence which is the character of a significant whole. A ‘significant whole’ is an organized individual experience, self-fulfilling and self-fulfilled. [Joachim 1906: 76]

Of the latter, it is said that

[...] there can be one *and only one* such experience: or *only one* significant whole, the significance of which is self-contained [...] for it is *absolute* self-fulfilment, *absolutely* self-contained significance, that is postulated; and nothing short of *absolute* individuality—nothing short of *the* completely whole experience—can

satisfy this postulate. And human knowledge—not merely *my* knowledge and *yours*, but the best and fullest knowledge in the world at any stage of its development—is clearly not a significant whole in this ideally complete sense. Hence the truth, which our sketch described, is—*from the point of view of human intelligence*—an Ideal, and an Ideal which can never *as such*, or in its completeness, be actual as human experience. [Joachim 1906: 78-79]

In a nutshell, the predicate ‘true’ can only significantly be applied to the whole and improperly to the part. If one adds to this sort of ‘logical’ thinking that, as is assumed in *Speculum Mentis*, history is “an infinite world of facts” [SM: 213] or, as in the last sentence from the above passage from ‘The Limits of Historical Knowledge’, evidence is infinite in quantity, then one would immediately conclude that there is no ‘truth’ in history, no ‘knowledge’. There could be no arguments more representative of the logical thinking of the British idealists than these:

If universal history is an absolute and perfectly-organized individual whole, such that every part in it determines every other part, there is no escape from the conclusion that ignorance or error concerning any one part involves an essential and radical ignorance or error concerning every other. [SM: 232]

If history exists, its object is an infinite whole which is unknowable and renders all its parts unknowable. [SM: 234]

In these passages, Collingwood argues that it is not possible to get any specialized history right, i.e., get the truth about, e.g., the battle of Balaclava, unless we have knowledge of the whole of the universal history. (At least Joachim seemed to leave the door open to “degrees of truth” [Joachim 1906: 170].) So passages quoted in support of a relativistic reading, such as the above, from ‘The Limits of Historical Knowledge’, which is to the effect that there is no certainty possible for historical inferences, belong to an earlier idealist phase of Collingwood’s thought.

This is also why it is strictly speaking incorrect to speak, as van der Dussen does, of a move from *realism* to idealism. It is true that the realist theory of knowledge is present in the argument

of *Speculum Mentis*, and on the face of it, the famous sceptical conclusion seems to be derived from a “realist” premise about “access to the fact as it really was”:

As long as we pretend to write history, we must claim access to the fact as it really was. This fact, as we have seen, is inaccessible. History as a form of knowledge cannot exist. [SM: 238]

But what allows Collingwood to draw his sceptical conclusion from the realist premise is its negation and its negation is the result of the above idealistic argument. Scepticism is derived from idealist metaphysics. It is not just that a history of the whole, the “universal history”, is “never achieved” [SM: 231] because this would be an infinite task: historical knowledge is impossible if it is not knowledge of the infinite whole, because there can be no knowledge of any part if there is not already knowledge of the whole. And the latter is impossible so: “we can never know a single part as it actually is” [SM: 231]. This reasoning has nothing “realist” about it. No Oxford Realist would write the above or even this:

[...] if the object of history is such as we have described, it cannot be known. For an infinite given whole of fact cannot at any point be grasped by the mind. Every part implies the whole, and the whole is presupposed by every part. No part can therefore be known first. No process of thought with respect to such a whole is possible. We cannot come to know it. [...] This cannot be avoided by saying that the whole is roughly or confusedly known at first and by degrees known more precisely or adequately. It is no more possible to know a single aspect of the whole by itself than to know a single part of it by itself. To know anything about it whatever must be to know all about it. [SM: 239-240]

If anything, the Oxford Realists and their heirs, representatives of ‘ordinary language philosophy’, rebelled against that sort of writing, which borders on sophistry. It is at any rate an obvious falsehood that because I do not know everything about my neighbour I cannot be said to *know* her name.

It is thus also incorrect to describe, as van der Dussen did, Collingwood's change of mind in 1926-1928 from "realism" to something else. This undermines a key argument of Goldstein's "constructionist" reading of the later Collingwood. According to Goldstein:

[Collingwood's] *Speculum Mentis* is by no means a realistic work, yet, [...] its account of historical knowledge is clearly quite skeptical. [Goldstein 1970: 10].

In a footnote, Goldstein makes explicit the claim that the sceptical conclusion at [SM: 238] is derived from "realist" premises. However, he merely cites *Religion and Philosophy*: "History [is] objectivity [...] a fact is something independent of my own or your knowledge of it" [RPh: 49]. This is irrelevant. And Goldstein does not realize that the key reasoning leading to scepticism in *Speculum Mentis* functions on idealist premises. Therefore it is not true that Collingwood evolved from "realism" to "constructionism", as Goldstein would have us believe in 'Collingwood's Theory of Historical Knowing' [Goldstein 1970]. The reality is the reverse: (1) he merely shed some of the logico-metaphysical theses that he got from the British idealists and (2) came to adopt other theses that are honestly better qualified as "realist". Indeed, (1) the later Collingwood rejected the coherence theory of truth (Bradley, Bosanquet, Joachim), because it "presupposed [...] the principle of propositional logic" [A: 36], as opposed to his "logic of question and answer". So, one of the pillars of the above reasoning to the effect that no historical knowledge is possible or that—this is equivalent—there is no truth in history, has gone. Not only the logico-metaphysical arguments to the effect that the impossibility of any knowledge of part of history unless there is knowledge of its whole (universal history) are gone by 1928, in the 'Die' manuscript there is a long section on 'Quantity' which is a defence of the "specialism of modern historical research". (After all, his own historical research on Roman Britain makes his having held to idealist views of *Speculum Mentis* totally absurd.) He calls this specialism "a necessary and a fine thing", "a school of disinterested accuracy, of cool and logical thinking and

of careful observation” whose achievements are as “equally real” as those of the natural sciences

[IH: 460-461]. A 180° turn. And (2), truth is now possible, albeit relative to evidence:

A view which is right for us to hold will be wrong when the next important new find of evidence has been made.

One or two consequences follows. Either the attainment of truth, even on points of small detail, is deferred until *all* new finds of evidence have been made—that is, deferred for ever, because in the nature of things further evidence might always turn up—in which case every historical view is exactly as false as every other, that is, absolutely false: or else *the truth* about any point means the truth relatively to the evidence possessed by the person who raises the point. The principle of the ideality of history makes it perfectly clear that the second answer is the right one. The first answer implies the denial of that principle, for it implies that historical fact is an unknown and unknowable thing in itself [...] [IH: 459]

The thesis of ‘ideality of history’, which is often confused with a ‘constructionist’ thesis, plays here an anti-idealist role, since it undermines the scepticism of *Speculum Mentis* and ‘The Limits of Historical Knowledge’. Moreover, the doctrine of “re-enactment”, also elaborated for the first time around 1928, flatly contradicts the relativistic interpretation, since successful re-enactment is of the very thought of the historical agent. It has strong realist, objectivist import.

Before looking at even stronger support for the view that Collingwood had a substantial, albeit ‘anti-realist’, notion of truth in terms of inferences warranted by available evidence, I should point out that Collingwood considers that history is an open-minded task: “in history, as in all serious matters, no achievement is final” [IH: 248]; “The historian’s work is never finished; every historical subject [...] is open at the end, and however hard you work at it the end always remains open” [EM: 65]. These passages offer no help to the constructionist. In a sense, that history is an unfinished business is a truism; this truism in no way entails a strong form of relativism and I should like to believe that Collingwood was not a relativist in any strong, unpalatable sense of the term. (To this question, I shall come back in the next Chapter.) There are moreover many other passages where Collingwood is leaning towards a stronger concept of truth

in history. To begin with, in the section of *The Idea of History* on 'Historical evidence', Collingwood states that the historian's business is "not to invent anything, it is to discover something" [IH: 251]. The whole argument of the previous section, on 'The Historical Imagination', leads to the comparison between two works of imagination, the historian's work and the novelist's. And here Collingwood is as clear as one can be (my emphasis):

Where they do differ is that *the historian's picture is meant to be true*. The novelist has a single task only: to construct a coherent picture, one that makes sense. The historian has a double task: he has both to do this, and *to construct a picture of things as they really were and of events as they really happened*. [IH: 246]

The requirement of "coherence" in this passage has been used by Hayden White as the proof that Collingwood is a precursor of his own notion of "emplotment", i.e., "the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as component of specific *kinds* of plot structures" [White 1978: 83]. White's "narrativism" suggests to him a "constructionist" reading of Collingwood:

The late R. G. Collingwood insisted that the historian was above all a storyteller and suggested that historical sensibility was manifested in the capacity to make a plausible story out of a congeries of "fact" which, in their unprocessed form, made no sense at all. [White 1978: 83]

White finds evidence for this in Collingwood's remarks about "constructive imagination". None of the remarks above justify such a reading. Moreover, White blatantly disregards statements in the same sections of *The Idea of History* which contradict his reading, e.g., the claims just quoted that "the historian's picture is meant to be true" and that the historian's task is "to construct a picture of things as they really were and of events as they really happened" [IH: 246]. The requirement that the historian's picture be 'coherent' means for White that "constructive imagination" was meant to be not just *a priori* but also "structural". And White puts the following spin on this:

But surely the historian does not bring with him a notion of the "story" that lies embedded within the "facts" given by the record. For in fact there are an infinite

number of such stories contained therein, all different in their details, each unlike every other. What the historian must bring to his consideration of the record are general notions of the *kinds of stories* that might be found there. [White 1978: 60]¹⁷

By “kind of stories”, one must read coherent ones. Nothing Collingwood ever wrote entails this. The requirement of ‘coherence’, when specified, turns out to be of an altogether different nature, having to do precisely with the *anti-narrativist notion that there is only one reality*:

[...] all history must be consistent with itself. Purely imaginary worlds cannot clash and need not agree; each is a world to itself. But there is only one historical world, and everything in it must stand in some relation to everything else, even if that relation is only topographical or topological. [IH: 246]

So Collingwood was not a proto-narrativist, a post-modern historian *avant la lettre*. Even less explainable on any relativistic reading is the fact that Collingwood clearly believed that it is possible in specific cases to infer conclusions that are certain:

[...] history is a kind of thinking whereby absolutely cogent inferences about the past are drawn from interpretation of the evidence it has left behind. [EM: 58]

One hears it said that history is ‘not an exact science’. The meaning of this I take to be that no historical argument ever proves its conclusion with that compulsive force which is characteristic of exact science. [...] Many historians of the present writer’s generation, brought up at a time when this proverb was accepted by the general opinion of intelligent persons [...], must be able to recollect their excitement on first discovering that it was wholly untrue, and that they were actually holding in their hands an historical argument which left nothing to caprice, and admitted of no alternative conclusion, but proved it point as conclusively as a demonstration in mathematics. [IH: 262-263]

One may of course feel dissatisfied with such a strong conclusion. The fact remains that it is Collingwood’s. The ‘Epilegomena’ to *The Idea of History* contains a long section [IH: 266-278] devoted to the analysis of a murder case, whose plot resembles that of one of Agatha Christie’s

¹⁷ One should note that in a given “record”, “there are an infinite number of such stories contained therein, all different in their details” is an utterly unsubstantiated premise; moreover how could one generate out of a “record” with presumably a finite numbers of “fact” “an infinite number” of stories that are “different in their details”?

novels,¹⁸ the gist of it is to point out the parallels between the deduction from evidence, disregarding some testimony, reached by the sleuth, and the work of the historian. Collingwood does not neglect the obvious differences (e.g., in the criminal case, a confession is possible while it is not the case in history) but he nevertheless sees “the analogy between legal methods and historical methods” to be “of some value for the understanding of history” [IH: 268], not the least because it brings forth the certainty of some inferences in both cases.

Therefore, one must ultimately disagree with Nielsen’s relativistic characterization, as cited above, if it implies that one can never infer with certainty in history. *Collingwood’s position is that ‘true’ means ‘true relative to available evidence’ but not that truth is always relative: at times, evidence can lead to unshakable truths.* There is no contradiction in such a position. If the past is made of determinate events that did occur and if some of them left enough traces being for us to ascertain that they did occur, what else is needed?¹⁹

The constructionist may still deny this last remark by citing the thesis of the ‘ideality of history’, or passages where Collingwood seem to deny the ontological reality of the past.²⁰ Again, as cited above, the thesis of the ‘ideality of history’ is the mere claim that past events are what they are, i.e. past events and not actual events. Collingwood’s claim is not that there never

¹⁸ See [Levine 1978]. It is interesting to note here that Jaakko Hintikka also developed his ideas about the “question-answer relation” by using examples taken from murder novels, this time Arthur Conan Doyle. See [Hintikka 1984]. On another note, I am aware that C. A. J. Coady has defended the traditional notion of ‘testimony’ which is criticized in this section of *The Idea of History* in [Coady 1975], reprinted in [Coady 1992: 233-248]. But there is no space to enter in this debate here.

¹⁹ Who would doubt, for example, that the First World War stopped on November 11, 1918? Or that the Russians had a scorched-earth policy to starve Napoleon’s army? Or that in 1745 the Scots marched towards London in the hope of recuperating their independence from the crown of England? Etc., etc. Collingwood’s defense of his claim may look hard-nosed: to the opponent claiming that “the question is a philosophical one and ought therefore to be settled by reasoning”, he replies: “I am not arguing, I am telling you” and further mocks her attitude [IH: 263]. One senses exasperation on the part of Collingwood, against philosophers who insist, *for purely philosophical reasons and against the common sense of the practitioners*, on denying certainty in history. Surely, this defense is unsatisfactory, but it is telling about Collingwood’s own position on these matters and, at any rate, it is the philosopher who insists so strongly against the practitioner’s common sense who should justify his views and not the contrary.

were a present time in which given events occurred which are no longer happening. That would be a straightforward denial of all ontological reality (or ‘objectivity’ as Collingwood himself would put it) to the past. In that case, the past would literally be created or constructed by the historian’s mind, in the (eternal) present. There is not a shred of evidence that Collingwood ever held such a metaphysical view. I quoted in Chapter 1, section 2, a passage where he roundly criticized Gentile for holding it. I could have added the passage where he criticized Simmel for holding that the historian can make his vision of the past ‘objective’ by “projecting it into the past”: according to Collingwood, this would make history merely “the illusory projection of our own states of mind upon the blank screen of the unknowable past” [IH: 175]. Michael Oakeshott, with whom Collingwood shares so much, is also criticized within a lengthy discussion [IH: 151-159] for holding the view that “the historical past is the world of ideas which the present evidence creates in the present” [IH: 154]. In the Chapter 1, section 2, I already quoted this other telling passage:

The objectivity of historical fact is this: that *there was* such a fact. Historical fact has its objectivity precisely in being past. To be past here means to be past in the historical sense of the word past. The *mere* past is that which merely was; the historical past is that which not only was, but remains historically knowable. [PH: 222]

There is no denial of the *objectivity* of the past. Otherwise, how could Collingwood describe the past as “consisting of particular events in space and time which are no longer happening” [IH: 5] or again, that “the past consists of events that have finished happening” [EPH: 136] and define the object of history as “actions of humans that have been done in the past” [IH: 9]? There

²⁰ This ontological claim is not necessarily held by constructionists. See, e.g., [Goldstein 1977].

are more passages that should be discussed here, but a full appraisal of Collingwood's numerous remarks on these questions would by now become tedious.²¹

²¹ There is an extended discussion by Dray, who holds the same view on these matters, in [HR: chap. 7]. See also his early paper, [Dray 1994].

Chapter 4

Historicism and Relativism

In this chapter, I shall tackle the extremely delicate and controversial issues of historicism and relativism. As I mentioned in the introduction, Malcolm Knox claimed in the introduction to *The Idea of History* that Collingwood converted in 1936-38 to a radical form of historicism [Knox 1946: x-xi]; a view which is still widely shared today, outside the narrow circle of experts.¹ As evidence, Knox quoted a rather telling sentence from a manuscript which was at the time unpublished, ‘Note on Historiography’: “philosophy as a separate discipline is liquidated by being converted into history” [PH: 238]. Ever since, it has been widely assumed—outside the narrow circle of the specialists, who mostly concur with the judgement that he never underwent such a conversion—that Collingwood held indeed a radical form of historicism. Part of this “radical” form is the idea of relativism, which is apparently expressed by Collingwood in another passage quoted by Knox:

St. Augustine looked at Roman history from the point of view of an early Christian; Tillemont, from that of a seventeenth-century Frenchman; Gibbon, from that of an eighteenth-century Englishman; Mommsen, from that of a nineteenth-century German. There is no point in asking which was the right point of view. Each was the only one possible. (Quoted in [Knox 1946: xii])²

¹ For example, the entry on ‘Historicism’ in the recent *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, still describes Collingwood as pertaining to that movement. See [Thornhill 1998].

² When citing this much-quoted passage, Knox wrote that it was taken from “a manuscript written in 1936” but no one could trace it back to any known manuscript until Jan van der Dussen was able to show that it came from a letter written to Knox, deposited in St Andrews University Library [van der Dussen 1993: xxii-xxiii].

Other sympathetic scholars such as Errol Harris [Harris 1950] and Nathan Rotenstreich [Rotenstreich 1957] gave early credibility to this hypothesis. Harris writes that Collingwood “obfuscated what seven years earlier he had so lucidly explained” [Harris 1950: 235] and even claims that he has “forgotten what he had written in earlier works” [Harris 1954: 38]. Alan Donagan, while disagreeing on matters of details, gave further credit to the hypothesis in *The Later Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood* [LPC: 251f.].

I shall try and refute the charges of radical historicism and relativism. The evidence is, when scrutinized, very unconvincing. I shall also look at further arguments levelled against Collingwood by influential thinkers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Leo Strauss. My aim will be to emphasise that there was *no* conversion, *no* significant change of mind, and to point out that Collingwood held a rather weak, if not trivial, form of historicism (in a sense yet to be defined) which does not imply any substantial form of relativism. Any other interpretation of Collingwood would be incoherent, as it would not, for example, square with the key argument about sameness of thought presented in Chapter 3, section 2. It would at any rate simply go, as many commentators noted, against the brunt of Collingwood’s work; it would, for example, undermine his own attempt at developing in *The New Leviathan* a “dynamic” version of the social contract theory as a defence of liberal democracies.

§1. Definitions and Misconceptions

Since I shall examine the charge that Collingwood might have been an historicist or a relativist, I should make some prefatory remarks concerning these concepts. These are typical “struggle-

concepts” involved in numerous controversies,³ they have as a result acquired a variety of meanings, and prudence is required in handling them. I should therefore try and give some more or less precise, hopefully satisfactory, definitions, to which I shall adhere throughout the chapter. It should not be forgotten, however, that the conclusions reached will be based on these definitions.

‘Historicism’ is an ambiguous word whose usage covers a variety of authors, from Hegel to von Ranke; it is hard to find a satisfactory definition. For example, Ernst Troeltsch defined ‘historicism’ in 1922 as

[...] the historicizing of our entire knowing and experience of the spiritual world, as it has taken place in the course of the XIXth century. (Quoted in [Rand 1964: 505])

While Croce famously wrote in *History as the Story of Liberty* that

“Historicism” (the science of history), scientifically speaking, is the affirmation that life and reality are history and history alone. [Croce 1955: 63]

These definitions, which point to a *Weltanschauung*, are wide enough but for that reason lack precision; they are not illuminating. The term certainly refers to a school, movement or, rather, way of thinking, which blossomed in Germany during the nineteenth century, as a reaction to the universalist tendencies in eighteenth-century rationalism.⁴ Friedrich Meinecke spoke enthusiastically of “one the greatest intellectual revolutions that has ever taken place in

³ Although the origins of the term ‘*Historismus*’ can be traced back to the late eighteenth century, its current usage derives mainly from a polemic in the mid-nineteenth century among economists: Carl Menger had accused some economists of making economic theory unduly dependent upon historical considerations and called such a view ‘*Historismus*’ or ‘historism’. The term was as deprecatory as its analogue ‘*Psychologismus*’. On this, see, e.g., [Mandelbaum 1967b]. It is possible that the current term ‘historicism’, which slowly replaced ‘historism’ since the 1930s and 1940s came from the Italian ‘*storicismo*’ coined by Croce. As for the term ‘relativism’, it appears to be of recent coinage and it does not describe at all a movement or school of thought. It is used to describe a variety of positions in ethics, history, sociology and anthropology, more often than not with deprecatory intention.

⁴ Two excellent books dealing with the history of this way of thinking are Meinecke’s *Historism. The Rise of a New historical Outlook* [Meinecke 1972] and Georg Igger’s *The German Conception of History* [Iggers 1983].

Western thought” [Meinecke 1972: liv]; he saw the origins of historicism in the breaking down of

[...] the rigid ways of thought attached to the concepts of Natural Law and its belief in the invariability of the highest human ideals and the unchanging human nature that was held to be constant for all ages. [Meinecke 1972: 3]

Accordingly, Meinecke saw in the philosophies of Shaftesbury, Leibniz and many others, including Vico, the sources of this historicist movement; his discussion of Möser, Herder and Goethe occupies half of his book on *Historism* [Meinecke 1972: 250-495].⁵ Croce, who coined the word ‘*storicismo*’ in Italian and who is also usually identified as an historicist, disagreed and insisted on seeing Vico as the sole forerunner [Croce 1955: 69]. Historicism can also be said to have originated, after the so-called demise of the Hegelian system, in the writings of the historians J. G. Droysen and Leopold von Ranke, who did not part entirely with the Hegelian doctrine. Droysen wrote in his influential *Outline of the Principles of History* that “History is humanity becoming and being conscious concerning itself. The epochs of History are... stages of... self-knowledge” and that “History is humanity’s self-knowledge” [Droysen 1967, § 83 & 86], while von Ranke wrote that the worth of every epoch “rests on its own self”, that “every epoch has its justification and its worth in and by itself” [Ranke 1973: 53-54].⁶ Finally, among the main ‘historicist’ figures in nineteenth-century German philosophy, one finds Wilhelm

⁵ As Rand pointed out, [Rand 1964: 513] some of the authors designated by Meinecke as precursors of historicism, such as Shaftesbury, were also considered by Dilthey as early representatives of “objective idealism”, which is precisely the tradition referred to in the introduction in conjunction with Lotze and Bradley. One is brought back again to the question of the legacy of these two authors. Alas, only through a further study of unpublished manuscripts by Collingwood relating to “objective idealism” could one clarify this point and thus shed new light on the issue of Collingwood’s ‘historicism’. In absence of such a study, the conclusions in this chapter must remain somewhat incomplete.

⁶ This association with “positivism” in history, to which the name of von Ranke is often attached, explains why historicism is also sometimes confused with “scientism”. See, e.g., [Schnädelbach 1984: 34].

Dilthey, whom I have already discussed. It is notoriously difficult to find a common feature to all these thinkers, i.e., to frame a definition that would be neither too broad nor too narrow.

A narrower definition is, however, preferable and, in trying to frame one, I shall begin by following Calvin Rand and distinguish two meanings of 'historicism' as a way of thinking, namely as either (1) a methodology or as (2) a *Weltanschauung*:

As a methodology, historicism will mean a body of formal concepts and principles to guide the historian in his study of past events. As a *Weltanschauung*, historicism will designate a comprehensive view of man and his world, based upon an analogous body of concepts. [Rand 1964: 506]⁷

The first attempts at defining historicism, in the 1920s and 1930s, e.g., by Troeltsch and Mannheim, resulted in presenting it as a *Weltanschauung* [Mandelbaum 1967b: 23], i.e., as a way of looking at the world as a whole. The historicist outlook may thus be characterized [Rand 1964: 511] as the recognition that (a) the world is primarily flux and change, that (b) this process of change contains only individuals (with their own ends and values) that emerge, rise and fall, at a unique time and place, in non-recurring patterns, and that (c) this process has no goal. This *Weltanschauung* is usually associated with (d) attempts at 'historicizing' any discipline, for example, the elimination of philosophy as a discipline independent from history by Croce (e.g., [Croce 1955: 139]) and, if we are to believe Knox, Collingwood.

A definition in terms of *Weltanschauung* is, however, problematic. First, it is difficult to get a clear picture of the *Weltanschauung* in question (the above definition in (a)-(d) is debatable). Secondly, it is too broad, as Maurice Mandelbaum pointed out:

Since it is misleading to regard positions as divergent as those of, say, Hegel, Comte, Marx, and Spengler as representative of one and the same *Weltanschauung*, it is preferable to conceive of historicism as a methodological principle. [Mandelbaum 1967b: 24]

⁷ For another useful attempt at defining the meaning of 'historicism', see [Lee & Beck 1954].

One could add to Mandelbaum's list: Croce, Dilthey, Ranke, already mentioned, but also others such as Ortega y Gasset,⁸ etc. It seems indeed preferable, for the sake of clarity, not to define historicism in terms of *Weltanschauung*.⁹ At any rate, elements of that *Weltanschauung* may be gleaned here and there in Collingwood's texts. For example, his discussion of "substantialistic metaphysics" in *The Idea of History*, as implying "a theory of knowledge according to which only what is unchanging is knowable" may lead one that he adopted (a) above. (See, e.g., [Strauss 1952: 567].) It is not clear, however, that Collingwood was, at the time, holding any such "metaphysics". It is more fruitful to look at his definition of metaphysics as the science of absolute presuppositions (as I shall do later in this section), than to hold him responsible for views expressed in a survey of Greek thinking on history. More to the point would be, for example, to point out that he believed, like Droysen in the above quoted passage, that "history is 'for' human self-knowledge":

Knowing yourself means knowing what you can do; and since nobody knows what he can do until he tries, the only clue to what man can do is what man has done. The value of history, then, is that it teaches us what man has done and thus what man is.
[IH: 10]

One could also point at the remarks where Collingwood tries, in line with (d), a *rapprochement* between philosophy and history, through an historicization of philosophy. This point will be discussed below. Collingwood also tried to 'historicize' natural sciences in the bold concluding remarks to *The Idea of Nature*, where he argues that nature depends on its existence on history [IN: 175-177]. He argues further that

A scientific theory not only rests on certain historical facts and is verified or disproved by certain other historical facts; it is itself a historical fact, namely the fact that someone has propounded or accepted, verified or disproved, that theory. [IN: 177]

⁸ E.g., "man has no nature [...] Man is [...] his life" [Ortega y Gasset 1961: 199-200].

⁹ This conclusion is also shared by Rand, albeit for a different reason [Rand 1964: 518].

A definition in terms of methodology is also a complex affair and, in order not to extend unduly these remarks, I shall limit myself to three points. The first methodological feature of historicism is taken from (a), above: (e) an adequate assessment of the value of anything is to be gained “by considering it in terms of the place it occupied and the role it played within a process of development” [Mandelbaum 1967b: 25]; “every particular is treated with relation to the process of change out of which it arises” [Mandelbaum 1967a: 89]. Secondly, following (b), above, and in accordance with Meinecke’s approach, historicism demarcates itself through (f) its emphasis on the concreteness and uniqueness of the individuals that it is seeking to describe. Each individual is rooted in its own time and place and possesses unique characteristics. This is the “genetic principle”. (Points (e) and (f) are framed as methodological beliefs about explanation and evaluation, not as characteristics of a *Weltanschauung*.) Thirdly, historicists believe in (g) a particular method that distinguishes moral sciences (or ‘*Geisteswissenschaften*’ as they came to be called in Germany) from the natural sciences. The best example here is Dilthey’s *Verstehen*.

I shall adopt here this methodological definition of historicism in terms of (e)-(g). I should like, however, to collapse, for the purposes of the discussion of Collingwood’s case, below, theses (e) and (f), into a single thesis. I shall therefore keep two theses and renumber them:

(i) All explanations concern unique individuals, and a proper explanation has to be in terms of their place in a process of development, i.e., in terms of any individual’s roots in a unique time and place. I shall call this thesis ‘situatedness’.

(ii) There exists a peculiar method for such explanations, e.g., *das Verstehen*.

I should like now to rule out three further possible meanings of ‘historicism’. First of all, ‘historicism’ should not be equated with moral or cultural ‘relativism’, as is often the case. Since

I have not discussed those terms yet, I cannot deal with this issue fully. However, this much can be said at the outset: if by ‘relativism’ one means that there is no absolute scale on which to rank various cultures or no privileged standpoint from which one could adjudicate between conflicting values, then *historicism does not entail relativism*. Although it is true that it is often the case that one is both an historicist and a relativist, it is not *necessarily* always the case. Historicism, as a methodology includes under (f) a form of contextualism, i.e., the idea that every value or culture is rooted in a particular time and place. This contextualism does not imply the absence of any scale or privileged standpoint or the impossibility of any rational argumentation. This must be a supplementary assumption that the relativist must make. There is an even stronger meaning to the word ‘relativism’, namely the thesis of the incommensurability of cultures; it is claimed, in the fashion of Spengler, that not only can one not rank a culture above another one, a culture cannot understand another one. Here, some form of scepticism is implied. This strong form of relativism is no more implied by historicism than the weaker form.

Secondly, the term ‘historicism’ does not designate any deterministic philosophy of history. In *The Poverty of Historicism* and in *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Karl Popper launched an influential, in many ways successful, epistemological critique of the notion of ‘historical inevitability’, i.e., the idea that there are historical laws or cycles that are inevitable, and of the concomitant idea of “historical prediction”, i.e., the idea that historians, through knowledge of those laws, could aim at prediction—or ‘prophecy’ [Popper 1986: 41]. Although the obvious target of Popper’s attacks was the Marxist ideology (also aimed at were Mill, Comte), he erroneously called this position ‘historicism’.¹⁰ Indeed, in *The Poverty of Historicism*, Popper wrote:

¹⁰ In connection with Popper’s criticisms, one should note [Hayek 1943].

I mean by ‘historicism’ an approach to the social sciences which assumes that *historical prediction* is their principal aim, and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the ‘rhythms’ or the ‘patterns’, the ‘laws’ or the ‘trends’ that underlie the evolution of history. [Popper 1986: 3]

And in *The Open Society and its Enemies*, he wrote:

Instead of recognizing that historical interpretations should answer a need arising out of the practical problems and decisions which face us, the historicist believes that in our desire for historical interpretation, there expresses itself the profound intuition that by contemplating history we may discover the secret, the essence of human destiny. Historicism is out to find The Path on which mankind is destined to walk; it is out to discover The Clue to History [...], or The Meaning of History. [Popper 1945: II, 255-256]

This characterisation of historicism is rather inaccurate. Historicists, even when discerning ‘tendencies’, would never speak of them as predictable. So Popper’s identification of the word ‘historicism’ with the ideas of ‘historical inevitability’ and ‘historical prediction’ is just a misnomer. It certainly does not describe Collingwood’s philosophy. As a matter of fact, Popper’s own positive views on history are actually rather close to Collingwood’s. For example, they both shared the view, to be presented in Chapter 3, section 1, that historical explanations are not causal but rational explanations [Skagestad 1975: chap. 1]. Indeed, Popper developed the idea of a “situational logic”, which is “an idealized reconstruction of the *problem situation* in which the agent found himself” in terms of which one can “make understandable” actions of historical agents, i.e., make them “adequate to his situation as he saw it” [Popper 1972: 179]. (But Popper attributed to Collingwood, on the other hand, an “intuitionist” position of the sort discussed in Chapter 3, section 1 [Popper 1972: 187-189].)¹¹

Thirdly, for the very same reasons, one should also rule out Hegel as an historicist. The whole point of the historicist reaction to eighteenth-century rationalism was a rejection of the

¹¹ Popper wrote later in his life that he agrees “with Collingwood and with Dilthey and with Hayek” about “historical understanding” and that “science is much more like history and historians think” [Popper 1969: 189-190].

idea of an universal human nature, which remains stable across time and space, across cultures, in favour of a view of it as developing through time; it is (if we are to follow Meinecke) an emphasis on the individual and the particular. That the development through time can be in turn explained, as with Hegel (and, in a different way, with Marx), in dialectical terms and thus subjugated to a new form of rationalism, defeats the very purpose of the historicist reaction to eighteenth-century rationalism. It is well-known that historicism arose in the domain of historiography precisely on the ashes of the Hegelian system, in the work of Droysen and Ranke. Incidentally, Collingwood himself rejected the “pigeon-holing enterprise” of philosophies of history that tried to discern a pattern in human history [IH: 264]. In the ‘Die’ manuscript, he wrote that “history is too complicated a thing to be expressible in the form of a single chain of continuous progress” [IH: 434]. One should note the empiricist nature of these objections. Leo Strauss’ attempt at portraying Collingwood as an Hegelian fails to convince because it cannot account for these criticisms. Furthermore the evidence adduced by him is totally unconvincing. Indeed, on the sole basis of his reading of *The Idea of History*, Strauss draws some strange conclusions. For example, one reads:

It is because of its “autonomy” that history must be universal history (246): truth is totality. Collingwood should not have hesitated to call his view “idealistic”. [Strauss 1952: 565]

As I pointed out, it is true that Collingwood held, prior to, roughly, 1928, an “idealist” account of history, which led him straight to a sceptical conclusion. There is no such view expressed after 1928 and certainly not in *The Idea of History*. In the above, Strauss refers to page 246. The idea that “because of its “autonomy” that history must be universal history” is simply nowhere to be found on that page. However, one finds a clear rejection of the idea of a universal history in [IH: 263-266]. There are other texts, not read by Strauss, where Collingwood

condemns the idea of a universal history, e.g., in ‘The Philosophy of History’, he claims that it is “foredoomed to failure” [EPH: 138]. Strauss also claims that Collingwood “cannot abandon “Hegel’s belief that history is rational” without abandoning history itself (122)” [Strauss 1952: 564]. The passage incriminated does not hold Strauss’ contention, since it is immediately preceded by a passage in which Collingwood explicitly says that “everyone must admit” that Hegel’s philosophy of history is “somehow unsatisfactory” and he describes as “the right criticism” of Hegel’s philosophy of history that “This is what comes of treating political history by itself as if it were the whole of history” [IH: 122]. It is not clear at any rate if Collingwood merely means by “history is rational” that it is, *qua* composed of rational actions, knowable. Finally, Strauss lifts out of context another quotation, this time from a discussion of Bury: “by speaking of the contingency of history” the historian “expresses [the] final collapse of his thought” [Strauss 1952: 564]. In all these cases, no attention is given to the context from which the quotations are taken and no evaluation of their respective values as indicative of Collingwood’s considered opinion, in light of other evidence, is ever given. We are simply led to believe that this is Collingwood’s thought, *simpliciter*. One therefore wonders if Strauss, who lectures Collingwood for his “lack of acquaintance with” Nietzsche’s critique of ‘scientific history’ [Strauss 1952: 563] or for his “insufficient familiarity” with early German Romanticism, should not be told in turn that he is insufficiently familiar with Collingwood’s writings, or if it is indeed true that “competent men in earlier times” were “more careful readers than we have become” [Strauss 1952: 573-574]. After all, he has paid no attention to the lengthy discussion of “re-enactment” and the doctrine of “sameness” of thought, the objectivist conclusions of which should have pleased him. I shall come back to Strauss’ reading of Collingwood towards the end of this section.

Perhaps this is also the place to refute one of Gadamer's more punctual criticisms of Collingwood, in *Truth and Method* [Gadamer 1999]. He believes that

Collingwood gets involved, against his will, in psychological particularity. He cannot get out of it without a theory of someone who acts as "representative of the world spirit"—i.e., without Hegel. [Gadamer 1999: 515]

That Collingwood got involved in "psychological particularity" is, in light of the distinction between his notion of re-enactment and Dilthey's and Croce's notions, a totally unfounded claim. Gadamer does not explain, however, what he means, when he further claims that to get out of this problem, Collingwood *must* assume an Hegelian type of universal history. At any rate, the accusation is slightly dishonest since, as he himself remarks [Gadamer 1999: 515], Collingwood is openly against Hegel's philosophy of history. Nevertheless, this is an accusation also to be found earlier in the book [Gadamer 1999: 371-372], where an example from the *Autobiography* is used as the starting point:

As an example [of the logic of question and answer] Collingwood cites the Battle of Trafalgar and Nelson's plan on which it was based. The example is intended to show that the course of the battle helps us to understand Nelson's real plan, because it was successfully carried out. Because his opponent's plan failed, however, it cannot be reconstructed from the events. Thus, understanding the course of the battle and understanding the plan that Nelson carried out in it are one and the same process.

But yet one cannot conceal that fact that the logic of question and answer has to reconstruct two different questions that have two different answers: the question of the meaning of a great event and the question of whether this event went according to plan. Clearly the two questions coincide only when the plan coincide with the course of events. But we cannot suppose such coincidence as a methodological principle when we are concerned with a historical tradition which deals with men, like ourselves, in history. [...] The conclusion to be drawn [...] is that the interpreter of history always runs the risk of hypostasizing the connectedness of events when he regards their significance as that intended by the actual actors and planners.

This is a legitimate undertaking only if Hegel's conditions hold good—i.e., the philosophy of history is made party to the plans of the world spirit and on the basis of this esoteric knowledge is able to mark out certain individuals as having world-historical importance, since there is a real correlation between their particular ideas and the world-historical meaning of events. But it is impossible to derive a hermeneutical principle for the knowledge of history from such conjunctions of the subjective and objective in history. [Gadamer 1999: 371-372]

In other words, Gadamer warns us of the “risk” for the historian of assuming an Hegelian stance. It is granted that there would thus be no room for hermeneutics but the claim that Collingwood had no choice but to take this Hegelian stance is just gratuitous. Reading any work of archeology or history by Collingwood would have shown him that this is *as a matter of fact* never the case. It would have shown Gadamer that Collingwood was not interested in “the meaning of great events” and with “world-historical individuals” as “representatives of the world spirit”, but in trying and find out, for example, the purpose of Hadrian’s wall or framing hypotheses about the survival of Celtic art through Roman occupation; both examples being in the *Autobiography* [A: 128-130, 139-140]. The latter example is also interesting here since it is the occasion for Collingwood to make a methodological point in which he agrees with the famous positivist critique by Popper, in *Poverty of Historicism* [Popper 1986], of vacuous but harmful notions of “the spirit of x”:

[...] there were those who argued that Celtic art was the product of the ‘Celtic temperament’ [...] [This argument’s] dependence on an occult entity like the ‘Celtic temperament’ forbade me to take it seriously. With entities of that kind we have left behind us the daylight, and even the twilight, of history, and have entered a darkness peopled by all the monsters of *Rassentheorie* and Jungian psychology. In that darkness what we find is not history but the negation of history; not the solution of historical problems, but only a heady drink which gives us the illusion of having solved them. [A: 139-140]

Reading Collingwood’s *Roman Britain and its English Settlements* would have also shown Gadamer that it is impossible, for example, to write the narrative of Caesar’s campaigns in Britain without any attempt at coming to terms with his intentions (this is also discussed in the *Autobiography* [A: 131]). (Clearly, Collingwood’s attitude is dictated here by his practical concerns as an historian, while Gadamer merely insists on a philosophical agenda against intentionalist theories of meaning.) There is no implicit appeal to Hegelian “world spirit” or to its

“representative” in any historical writing by Collingwood, because there need not be. Gadamer assumes the contrary merely because he falsely believes that Collingwood collapsed the questions of the meaning of a great event and that of whether this event went according to plan. How could one claim that Collingwood had an interest in the meaning of a “great event”, when that locution is taken in an Hegelian sense? There is no shred of evidence for this. It is just, in the case at hand, that the narrative of the Battle of Trafalgar makes no sense without an attempt at explaining Nelson’s plan. (Could Gadamer produce such a narrative? And is every historian who has explained Caesar’s actions in terms of his intentions or calculations an Hegelian?) Collingwood’s point is merely that Nelson’s plan can only be reconstructed from evidence, i.e., the actual details of the movements of the boats, etc. and not by any appeal to an “insight” into the mind of Nelson that would deliver his intention. (This would be denied by Gadamer, too, but he seems to endorse the claim that we could not infer anything about Nelson’s plan.) At any rate, it has been pointed out, if it were true that Collingwood assumed an Hegelian stance, then he would have had no qualms about reconstructing Villeneuve’s failed plan instead of claiming, as he did, that it cannot be understood [Bertoldi 1984: 222]. I should like to conclude that Gadamer’s critique has plainly missed its target; only ignorance of Collingwood’s work may lead one to believe that it did not. I have thus given enough evidence that *Collingwood’s philosophy of history has simply nothing Hegelian to it*. In that sense, he is an historicist. (But so are many others, for that matter, and this is therefore not a valid distinguishing feature.) What is intriguing, however, is that both Strauss and Gadamer wish to portray Collingwood as simultaneously an Hegelian and an historicist; an unlikely combination.

It is still frequent to see Hegel described as an historicist,¹² although this is so obviously erroneous: he shares with the historicists only one of the above characteristics, (f). It is rare, however, to see Croce discounted, but he is clearly a borderline case.¹³ Indeed, Croce hinted at times at a rather systematic philosophy of history:

Historicism is a logical principle: it is, in fact, the very category of logic; it is logicity in its full acceptance, the logicity of the concrete universal. [Croce 1955: 74]

On another occasion, still in *History as the Story of Liberty*, he expressed himself in clearly recognizable Hegelian terms:

Our history is the history of our Soul and the history of the human Soul is the history of the world. [Croce 1955: 109]

Furthermore, even if it is true that Croce's identification of life and reality with history in his famous definition [Croce 1955: 63] and his attempt at 'historicizing' philosophy [Croce 1955: 139] fit in nicely point (d) of the above definition of the historicist *Weltanschauung*; the latter was ruled out by the methodological definition that I have adopted.

There are nevertheless good reasons to see Croce as an historicist, according to the above definition. First of all, historicism cannot be a philosophy of history that discerns a 'pattern' in history. (See (c), above.) It is true that Croce claimed two 'speculative'¹⁴ philosophers of history, Vico and Hegel, as his precursors (e.g., [Croce 1969: 71-72, 86]). But Croce criticized the idea of a systematic philosophy of history in both *What is Living and What is Dead of the Philosophy of Hegel* [Croce 1969] and *Theory and Practice of Historiography* [Croce 1921]. In the former book, Croce gave a detailed presentation of Hegel's dialectic of concepts, in which he

¹² E.g., in the entry on 'Historicism' in the recent *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [Thornhill 1998].

¹³ For an exception, see [Rand 1964: 515].

distinguished ‘opposite’ and ‘distinct’ concept, arguing in fact for the fact that the dialectic of ‘distinct’ concepts is more fundamental. He also criticized Hegel for having abused the dialectic of ‘opposites’ when applying it to domains such as the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of history, and argued for the abandonment of these parts of his philosophy.

As a result, Croce frankly declared that the Hegelian idea of a philosophy of history is “a contradiction in terms” and “the annulment of history” [Croce 1969: 137]. Croce’s principal objection was against Hegel’s failure to recognize the “autonomy” of history or historiography [Croce 1969: 137, 175]. Croce, who had antiquarian interests and himself wrote many history books (in particular about the history of his own hometown, Naples), believed that “the study of documents is the indispensable point of departure for history” [Croce 1969: 142] and he condemned Hegel for ignoring this:

Hegel affirms that this [philosophy of history] should have its own method, different from the method of ordinary historiography, and he claims for it the character of an *a priori* construction. [...] but the *a priori* that he introduces is not the logical element, the interpretation of intuitive data, which has been recognized [...] as indispensable for all historical work. Rather, it is a *history already complete*, which needs only to be clothed in names and dates. [...] Before Hegel seeks the data of facts, he knows what they must be; he knows them in anticipation [...] [Croce 1969; 139-140]

Furthermore, he criticized Hegel’s distinction between “essential” and “unessential” facts [Croce 1969: 145-149], which allows him to suppress the latter. Croce roundly condemned Hegel for suppressing facts that do not fit his dialectic, triadic scheme [Croce 1969: 181f.] and he mocked Hegel’s antipathy towards historians:

And the attitude of antipathy toward professional historians, is likewise significant; almost as though a philosopher of art should quarrel with professional poets and painters. [Croce 1969: 144].

¹⁴ The word ‘speculative’ is used here following William Dray’s famous definition: “The aim of the speculative philosopher of history is to discover in past events an overall pattern or meaning which lies beyond the ordinary purview of the historian” [Dray 1993: 1].

Incidentally, there are no reasons to believe that Collingwood did not agree with such criticisms.

In *Theory and Practice of Historiography*, Croce also rejected the very idea of a “universal history”, which he described as the attempt at forming “a picture of all the things that have happened to the human race, from its origins upon the earth to the present moment” [Croce 1921: 56]. His argument consists of pushing historical scepticism to the limit:

But if we cannot know anything but the finite and the particular, always indeed only *this* particular and *this* finite, must we then renounce (a dolorous renunciation!) knowledge of *universal history*? Without doubt, but with the double corollary that we are renouncing what we have never possessed, because we could not possess it, and that in consequence such renunciation is not at all painful. [Croce 1921: 55-56]

Moreover, Croce also condemned the idea of a “universal philosophy” or “closed system”:

And since history, properly understood, abolishes the idea of a *universal history*, so philosophy, immanent and identical with history, abolishes the idea of a *universal philosophy*—that is to say, of the *closed* system. [Croce 192: 62]

Croce considered “universal history” as linked with the “strange proposal of closing the infinite progression” [Croce 1921: 56]. Therefore if there is progress in history, something that Croce believed in, it cannot be said to come to an end, as, e.g., a Marxist would like us to believe, but it goes on *ad infinitum*. This is not to deny any systematicity to philosophy, even if it is reduced to the mere “methodological moment of historiography” [Croce 1921: 151]. As Croce wrote:

History, herein differing from art, presupposes philosophical thought as its condition; but, like art, it finds its material in the intuitive element. History, therefore, is always narration, and never theory and system, though it has theory and system at its foundation. [Croce 1969: 135]

But this systematic aspect is not sufficient to disqualify Croce as an historicist. It is in fact not surprising that he never wrote a ‘philosophy of history’ such as Hegel’s; he never believed in

its very possibility. Therefore, it is better to classify Croce as an historicist, according to the above definition. In light of the alleged influence of Croce on Collingwood, the foregoing remarks may lead one to believe that Collingwood was an historicist. Before answering that charge, I should like first quickly to define what I mean by 'relativism' and make points of exegesis as I go along, in order to clear Collingwood of that subsidiary charge and, thus, to clear a few of the remaining hurdles to a fuller understanding of Collingwood's position.

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'Relativism' is also an ambiguous term but it is not used to describe a historical movement or *Weltanschauung*, although one can point out that it harks back to Protagoras. In order to clarify issues, I shall distinguish between two forms of relativism, namely moral or cultural relativism and historical relativism. The former was already presented above, when it was distinguished from historicism. It can be said to have a weaker and a stronger form. I shall define weak moral/cultural relativism as the claim that there is no independent standpoint from which one could assess, or no scale on which one could rank, conflicting values and different cultures. (The underlying claim—sometimes called 'descriptive relativism', e.g., in [Brandt 1967]—that there exists conflicting sets of values and that they may be embodied within different cultures is trivial, so weak a claim that it cannot be used to define relativism.) Furthermore, I shall define strong moral/cultural relativism as the claim that there cannot be any understanding between different sets of values or the different cultures that embody them. Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* contains a famous statement of strong moral/cultural relativism, especially with respect to mathematics: according to Spengler, in chapter II, there is not one but many mathematics, specific to each culture [Spengler 1932: 59] and mathematics in foreign cultures, including

Greek culture, is not reducible to ours, not even comprehensible by us [Spengler 1932: 67]. Collingwood's criticisms of Spengler in *The Idea of History* [IH: 181-183, 225] are very revealing.¹⁵ As would be expected, given his criticisms of Hegel, Collingwood considers Spengler's work "radically unsound" [IH: 181]. In typically empiricist and rationalist fashion, he criticizes Spengler for constantly perverting and deforming facts "to fit his thesis" [IH: 182]; he considers that no one ever went farther "in the reckless and unscrupulous falsification of facts" [IH: 183]. Collingwood does, however, add two further criticisms. First, he points out that Spengler operates with a purely positivistic conception of cultures as organisms, which live and die according to a quasi-natural process; a conception which leads him to the "claim to foretell the future"—a claim that Collingwood calls "the conclusive mark of non-historical thought" [IH: 182]. And Collingwood further points out that it is from this very positivist stance that Spengler derives his strong relativistic conclusions:

[...] at every point the idea of historical process as a mental process, where the past is conserved in the present, is elaborately denied. [...] the unique characteristic which marks off any one culture from any other and pervades all its details (the Greekness of Greek culture, the Western-Europeanness of Western European culture, and so on) is conceived not as an ideal of life worked out and achieved by the men of that culture through a spiritual effort, whether conscious or unconscious; it belongs to them as a natural possession [like the colour of their skin]. The whole groundwork of the theory is thus based on a deliberate and painstaking attempt to extrude from history everything that makes it historical, and to substitute at every point a naturalistic conception of principle for the corresponding historical one. [IH: 182]

The fallacy [...] is the confusion between a natural process, in which the past dies in being replaced by the present, and an historical process, in which the past, so far as it is historically known, survives in the present. Oswald Spengler, vividly realizing the difference between modern mathematics and that of the Greeks, and knowing that each is a function of its own historical age, correctly argues from his false identification of historical with natural process that to us Greek mathematics must be not only strange but unintelligible. But in fact, not only do we understand Greek mathematics easily enough, it is actually the foundation of our own. It is not the dead

¹⁵ There are further criticisms in 'Oswald Spengler and the Theory of Historical Cycles' [EPH: 57-75].

past of a mathematical thought once entertained by persons whose names and dates we can give, it is the living past of our own present mathematical inquiries, a past which, so far as we take any interest in mathematics, we still enjoy as an actual possession. Because the historical past, unlike the natural past, is a living past, kept alive by the act of historical thinking itself, the historical change from one way of thinking to another is not the death of the first, but its survival integrated in a new context involving the development and criticism of its own ideas. [IH: 225-6]

If we leave aside the slightly perverse way of denouncing “positivism” through relativism, the upshot of these passages is that Spengler’s strong form of moral/cultural relativism is simply rejected. Under such conditions, to attribute this position to Collingwood would be to find him guilty of a contradiction. The question therefore reduces to the notion of a weaker form of moral/cultural relativism.

Leo Strauss actually raised a very interesting question with respect to the weaker form of moral/cultural relativism. He pointed out that there is a distinction between cultures that are ancestors to the culture of the historian, such as the Greek culture to modern European cultures, and cultures that are completely alien to it, such as, e.g., Chinese civilization. It is all well to say that the continuous tradition from the Greek epoch to this day offers the possibility of understanding Greek culture, but this could hardly be the case for alien civilizations:

If the modern Western historian studies Greek civilization, he may be said to re-enact the genesis of his own civilization, which has formed itself “by reconstructing within its own mind the mind of the Hellenic world” and thus to enter upon the possession of his inheritance (163, 226-227); he may be said to attempt to understand himself as modern Western man, or to mind his own business. But the case of the modern Western historian who studies Chinese or Inca civilization is obviously different. Collingwood did not reflect on this difference. He justly rejected Spengler’s view that “there is no possible relation whatever between one culture and another.” But he failed to consider the fact that there are cultures which have no actual relations with one another, and the implications of this fact: he dogmatically denied the possibility of “separate, discrete” cultures because it would destroy the dogmatically assumed “continuity of history” as universal history (161-64, 183). [Strauss 1952: 563]

Of course, Collingwood never “dogmatically assumed” the “continuity of history” as universal history. One cannot blame Strauss, however, for not knowing manuscript evidence that contradicts him on Collingwood’s lack of awareness of the differences between ancestor and alien cultures. Collingwood actually addressed the issue in a draft of ‘Human Nature and Human History’ and what he had to say is quite revealing:

However remote from each other two historical traditions may be, each of them represents an achievement of mind; and mind is never wholly alien to mind, never a mere spectacle to be watched from outside, but always something that can be penetrated and seen from within by re-living its thoughts. (Quoted in [HS: 344].)

Nevertheless, [the European] can find there certain ways of thinking which, though new to him, are intelligible. He is conscious, as he masters them, of a new growth of powers within himself [...] for what Chinese art and literature have taught him is that he possessed powers of which hitherto he had been ignorant; he had fancied himself something altogether alien to Chinese civilization, and now he knows that he is not; he knows himself as heir to a tradition from which he had imagined himself cut off. (Quoted in [HS: 344].)

As van der Dussen put it, Collingwood endorsed the view that *nihil humanum a me alienum*. In other words, there is no basis for the attribution of strong or weak moral/cultural relativism to Collingwood. (Today, one would rather argue against relativism *via* Davidson’s use of the ‘principle of charity’, but Davidson is closer to the Tyler-Frazer approach that Collingwood rejected.)

Historical relativism, which is simply the denial of the objectivity of historical knowledge, is an entirely different issue. It has been adequately dealt with during Collingwood’s lifetime by Maurice Mandelbaum in *The Problem of Historical Knowledge. An Answer to Relativism* [Mandelbaum 1967a], whose first edition appeared in 1938. (Collingwood appears to have been unaware of the existence of that book.) I shall use it as my point of departure. After a careful study, Mandelbaum found only three arguments in support of historical relativism:

We may say that the doctrine of relativism holds that no historical account can faithfully depict the past since, first, the actual occurrences of history are richer in content than any account of them can possibly be; second, because the continuity and structure which historical works necessarily possess do not afford a true parallel to the continuity and structure which characterize the events of history; and third, because the historian of necessity passes value-judgments, and these are relevant to the present but not to the past. [Mandelbaum 1967a: 36]

When asked if Collingwood was an historical relativist, one should try and see if he propounded any of these three arguments. I should merely point out for the moment that historicism and historical relativism will obviously be seen as connected if one confuses, to begin with, historicism with moral/cultural relativism: if historicism is taken to mean that no statement by an historian can be taken to be true or false independently of the time at which it was formulated, then historicism is basic to the third of the above arguments in favour of historical relativism, i.e., the idea that, in Mandelbaum's words, "because the historian of necessity passes value-judgments, and these are relevant to the present but not to the past". My contention is simply the following: As for the first reason indicated by Mandelbaum, the early Collingwood can be found guilty of historical scepticism. I have shown that in *Speculum Mentis* Collingwood derived from "idealist" premises a strong sceptical conclusion. I have also argued that Collingwood had evolved away from this position by the late 1920s. Concerning the second of Mandelbaum's theses, namely that "the continuity and structure which historical works necessarily possess do not afford a true parallel to the continuity and structure which characterize the events of history", I have argued at length in Chapter 3, section 3 against the 'constructionist' account, and the upshot of this discussion is precisely the denial of that thesis. There remains, therefore, only the third thesis to be discussed, as the only possible meaning of 'relativism' that could be attributed to Collingwood. I shall refute a possible attribution by citing at length a very telling passage from the manuscript 'What 'Civilization' Means', where Collingwood defends,

against the conceptions of ‘historical monism’ and ‘historical relativism’ a form of ‘historical pluralism’. ‘Historical monism’ is described as “the chief defect of nineteenth-century thought”:

[...] it rests on a presupposition which is no longer made: namely that the civilizing process, wherever it goes on and whenever it has gone on, is and has been always and everywhere one and the same process, directed towards one and the same goal; so that the only differences between one civilization and another are differences in the degree to which that process has been operative and that goal approached. [NL: 488]

In other words, Collingwood speaks of “historical monism” because this underlying assumption allows historians and others to rank the various cultures along a progressive scale. Collingwood is not explicit here, but he presumably perceived for political reasons that he rejected this mode, along with many others in his generation: it implies that the European civilization stands at the highest point in the scale and other cultures are (sometimes quite explicitly demeaned). One should recall here Collingwood’s very critical remarks against the anthropological theories of Tylor-Frazer and Lévy-Bruhl in the chapter on magic in *the Philosophy of Art* [PA: 57-77], which were alluded to in Chapter 1, section 1; without using such words, he basically accused these theorists of Eurocentrism and of unacceptable *mépris* towards other cultures. In contrast with this defective view, historians have adopted, according to Collingwood, a form of ‘historical pluralism’ that rejects the possibility of ranking the various cultures.

Twentieth-century historians take for granted the idea of an ‘historical pluralism’, the idea that at different periods and among different peoples different ideals have been envisaged and correspondingly different processes enacted. Hence we speak of Chinese civilization and European civilization, for example, as different things, realizing or attempting to realize different ideals, and not capable of being described as merely different in the degree to which one single ideal has been realized. They are different, we think, in kind; [...] [NL: 488]

The problem with such a stance is, according to Collingwood, the very threat of relativism:

Thus the present-day conception of the relation between civilization and barbarism is that any given society at any given time has its own standard of civilized life, and thinks of itself as civilized in so far as it recognizes that standard, and of other societies as barbarous in so far as they do not. The attempt to be a civilized European is an attempt to live one kind of life; the attempt to be a civilized Chinaman is an attempt to realize a life of another kind. It is not surprising that Europeans think Chinamen barbarous and that Chinamen think the same of Europeans. Each rightly thinks that the other when judged by his standard, fails to satisfy it.

The question with regard to any given society, then, is not how high it stands in the scale of civilization, for there is no one scale, still less whether it is just civilized or just barbarous, for every society is civilized, or it would not be a society: but in what way it is civilized. And, from the point of view of any one civilization, any other is merely one of the innumerable forms of barbarism.

This may seem a dangerous opinion [...] This is called 'historical relativism', and is rightly regarded with suspicion, because it really amounts to denying what it professes to explain. It amounts to denying that there is any such thing as an ideal of civilized conduct; not merely that there is one single ideal valid for all societies and all times, but that there are many ideals each valid for one society at one time. [NL: 489]

The worry is that adoption of a form of 'pluralism' would imply the negation of an important ideal, that of "an ideal of civilized conduct". This is unacceptable to Collingwood, because it would mean that there is no way in which one could say that there has been progress towards greater civility, i.e., from barbarism to civilization, and the threat of a return to barbarism, which was looming large in world affairs during the late 1930s, could not be (at least theoretically) contained.

But Collingwood did not believe that the 'pluralism' that he adopted implied an unacceptable form of relativism. The whole enterprise of *The New Leviathan*, as a piece of political philosophy, would otherwise simply make no sense: the key idea of a 'dynamical' approach to the social contract, in which societies move towards greater civility by progressively suppressing the element of violence in social relations, could not get off the ground. 'Pluralism' could not be, therefore, the straightforward denial of "an ideal of civilized conduct". It is rather the respectful recognition of an existing plurality of such "ideals". And these "ideals" *qua* ideal

must possess a common dimension—presumably, the movement towards greater civility—, otherwise one could not even speak of “ideals”. This common dimension, which is implicitly recognized in the ‘pluralist’ stance, saves it from the threat of relativism:

The conception here defined [...] does not [...] imply ‘historical relativism’. It does not imply the negation of all ideals and the substitution for social ideals of social facts. All it asserts is that the social facts which are called civilizations are orientated towards different ideals. To say that Chinamen and Europeans have different ideals of civilized conduct is not to say that neither has any ideal of civilized conduct. On the contrary, it is to say that each of them has an ideal.

It has a further implication. It implies that different ideals of civilized conduct like the European and Chinese, though in one way divergent, are in another way convergent; for they are both called ideals of civilized conduct, and unless this purpose means that in some way they are the same ideal it means nothing. Thus the historical pluralism of the present day does not exclude a certain kind of historical monism. The plurality of civilizations does not exclude a sense in which civilization is one. [NL: 490]

It will be granted that the very nature of this ‘historical pluralism’ remains vague: it is not clear how the “sense in which civilization is one” differs from the nineteenth-century ‘historical monism’ that Collingwood rejected. Would the two notions eventually collapse? Is this form of ‘historical pluralism’ not at bottom incoherent? Collingwood’s text does not provide us with the details that would allow us to answer such questions. It is, after all, a mere manuscript, not intended for publication. But, as a statement of his intention, this text show very clearly that, first, Collingwood was perfectly aware that his stance could not be acceptable unless he could demarcate it from relativism and, secondly, the insufficiencies of his explanation notwithstanding, *he cannot be said to have held a strong form of relativism*. Collingwood’s pluralism may be ill-defined and ill-argued in this passage but it is clearly not a strong form of relativism; it is rather a very weak form, based on a truism about the plurality of values. The claim that there exists a plurality of irreducible and conflicting values is not of itself harmful, if

the door remains open to a dimension of assessment. In the above passage, this is exactly what Collingwood did: he left the door open.

The above definition of 'historical relativism' according to Mandelbaum had three points. The third point was that "the historian of necessity passes value-judgments, and these are relevant to the present but not to the past" [Mandelbaum 1967a: 36]. The above remarks partly settle the issue here: according to Collingwood, the historian can indeed pass value-judgements. It is implied in his 'historical pluralism'. But the door is open to a dimension of assessment. Taken together with the critical remarks about Spengler and the manuscript passages that postulate a universal basis for human understanding across unrelated cultures, these remarks show that no strong form of moral/cultural relativism is entailed by Collingwood's position. But one aspect of the third argument for historical relativism must still be addressed: are the value-judgments of the historian threatening to their objectivity? Is the door once more open to 'constructionism' in history? I do not believe that it is the case. Collingwood repeated often the claim that "every age must write history afresh" [EPH: 138] or that "every new generation must rewrite history in its own way" [IH; 248], if only because the preoccupations of the present from which they start always change. That view does not necessarily entail that history lacks objectivity, i.e., that the past cannot be known or that there is no past to be known, only narratives. The refutation of 'constructionism' in Chapter 3, section 3, along with the presentation of the very strongly objectivist thesis of 'sameness' of thought in section 2 gives me reason to believe that Collingwood was far from wishing to reintroduce scepticism by the back door, when he allowed for the open-endedness of history (at [IH: 248] and [EM: 65]). It is not to be denied that there are passages where historical scepticism is argued for (e.g., [SM: 238] as was discussed above in Chapter 3, section 3 or [EPH; 99-100]) but these belong to an earlier

phase of Collingwood's thought and some of the underlying pillars here were to be abandoned. As far as I know, there are no passages where Collingwood expresses the view, famously expressed by the historians Carl Becker [Becker 1955] and Charles Beard [Beard 1973] that the necessary fact that the historian makes value judgments undermines the objectivity of their work. Only such a passage would allow us to claim that Collingwood was a relativist in any strong sense of the word. And he would thus appear merely to contradict himself, as it was shown that other parts of his doctrines have an undeniably strong objectivist import.

§2. The Radical Conversion Hypothesis

Was Collingwood a historicist? The above definition of historicism is composed of two theses: (i) the thesis of situatedness and (ii) the idea that history (and any 'historicized' discipline) requires a peculiar method. I shall begin my answer with a brief remark concerning the second thesis. Commentators such as Goldstein or Nielsen that have favoured a 'constructionist' interpretation of Collingwood have argued that "re-enactment" was his method. But it has been argued, rather convincingly, by Alan Donagan, William Dray, Rex Martin and others that the thesis that 'to understand an action in history is to re-enact the thought which it contains' is a thesis about the goal of historical inquiry, not its method. I shall not go into this debate.¹⁶ In Chapter 3, section 3, I have also rejected the 'constructionist' reading. And in Chapter 3, I have given my reasons for rejecting any "intuitionist" reading of re-enactment, such as Gardiner's or Walsh's. These methodological interpretations rejected, I obviously opt for a non-methodological reading, i.e., *Collingwood's thesis that to understand an action in history is to*

¹⁶ See the survey in [HS: 96-109].

re-think the thought that it expresses is a thesis about the goal of historical enquiry, not about its method. In this, I concur not only with commentators such as Alan Donagan, William Dray, or Rex Martin but also with Paul Ricoeur, whose reading of Collingwood is more circumspect than that of Gadamer and Strauss:

Re-enactment is not a method of understanding [...] it does not designate an alternative method but the result aimed at by documentary interpretation and by the constructions of imagination. [Ricoeur 1984b: 5-6]

(More will be said about Ricoeur in the Conclusion.) Amazingly enough, if there were a candidate for a method, it should have been the “logic of question and answer”—Collingwood himself speaks about it as an “historical method” [A: 39]—but commentators seem to have all overlooked it. I shall ultimately claim that there is no more ‘method’ in Collingwood than there is in Gadamer. But before, I must recall a few basic points.

In his *Autobiography*, Collingwood laid down three principles of historical enquiry, which he derived from his work as an historian and, in particular, his *practise* as an archeologist [A: 24, 30, 122]. The principles are:

The principle of question and answer [...] [A: 126]

A second principle was that, since history proper is the history of thought, there are no mere ‘event’ in history: what is miscalled an ‘event’ is really an action, and expresses some thought (intention, purpose) of its agent; the historian’s business is therefore to identify this thought. [A: 127-128]

A third principle was that no historical problem should be studied without studying what I called its second-order history; that is, the history of historical thought about it. [A: 132]

The second principle has already been dealt with in Chapter 3 and there is no need to come back to it. I should like to say a few things about the first principle, the “logic of question and answer”, which Collingwood laid out in two short chapters, in *An Autobiography* [A: 29-43] and in *An Essay on Metaphysics* [EM: 22-33]. (The ideas were already present *in nuce* in the

paragraph on 'Knowledge as Question and Answer' in *Speculum Mentis* [SM: 76-80].) In the former book, he wrote:

For a logic of propositions I wanted to substitute what I called a logic of question and answer. It seemed to me that truth [...] was something that belonged not to any single proposition, nor even as the coherence-theorists maintained, to a complex of propositions taken together; but to a complex of questions and answers. The structure of this complex had, of course, never been studied by propositional logic. [A: 36-37]

And:

What is ordinarily meant when a proposition is called 'true', I thought, was this: (a) the proposition belongs to a question-and-answer complex which as a whole is 'true' in the proper sense of the word; (b) within this complex it is an answer to a certain question; (c) the question is what we ordinarily call a sensible or intelligent question, not a silly one, or in my terminology it 'arises'; (d) the proposition is the 'right' answer to that question. [A: 38]

So Collingwood wanted to link 'truth' to a complex of questions and answers. According to him, "Every statement that anybody ever makes is made in answer to a question" [EM: 23]. So every statement presupposes a question to which it is the answer. In turn, "Every question involves a presupposition" [EM: 25], as in the case of 'Have you stopped beating your wife?', which presupposed that one is beating one's wife [EM: 38]. This is the basic mechanism of the structure of the question-and-answer complex.

One may think that there may be many such presuppositions but, Collingwood claims, only one immediately "arises" [A: 38], [EM: 25] and:

Unless this immediate presupposition were made, the question to which it is logically immediately prior could not be logically asked. [EM: 25]

That a thing causes a question to 'arise' is called the "logical efficacy" of that thing and:

The logical efficacy of the supposition that the mark means something is identical with the logical efficacy of the proposition that it means something. [EM: 27]

One can thus proceed along, from statement to question and from question to presupposition; this presupposition can be seen in turn as an answer to a further question, which involves a new presupposition, and so forth. But that process must terminate and there must therefore be presuppositions that are “absolute” because they stand “relatively to all questions to which [they] are related, as [presuppositions], never as [answers]” [EM: 31]. This is the doctrine of “absolute presuppositions”, of which I shall say just a few things. First of all, “absolute presuppositions are not propositions” [EM: 32], precisely because they are not answers to any question and they are never propounded. These absolute presuppositions are often postulated unconsciously, so to speak [EM: 48n.]. Metaphysics is defined as “the science of absolute presuppositions” [EM: 41], as it investigates what absolute presuppositions were made on a given occasion [EM: 51], by someone, analysing “the records of his thoughts” [EM: 60], i.e., “by the interpretation of evidence” [EM: 67]. (This leads Collingwood to declare that “all metaphysical propositions are historical propositions” [EM: 51], and that the methods of metaphysics are “historical methods” [EM: 62]; statements to which I shall come back later.) Absolute presuppositions are said to form, for a given period, a “constellation” [EM: 66], as they are said to be each “consupponible” with all the others [EM: 66]. One can form their “*catalogue raisonné*” [EM: 68]. In history, one finds “an indefinite number” of such constellations [EM: 71]. These “consupponible” absolute presuppositions are further claimed to “form a structure which is subject to strains of greater or less intensity”; “if the strains are too great, the structure collapses and is replaced by another, which will be a modification of the old” [EM: 48n., 74].

I shall discuss later the notion of “absolute presupposition”. (I should merely point out that, once more, this is an original doctrine set forth by the later Collingwood which makes strictly no sense under a ‘constructionist’ reading.) For now I should like to claim, however, that the “logic

of question and answer” is not, *stricto sensu*, a method. First, although it is possible to investigate the logical aspects of this doctrine, it is not to be understood as an ancestor of today’s formal systems of erotetic logic.¹⁷ Collingwood acted in a needlessly polemic way when he opposed his “logic of question and answer” to propositional logic [A: 35-36].¹⁸ He called Russell & Whitehead’s *Principia Mathematica* “typographical jargon” [A: 36n.] and rejected flatly all theories of truth based on propositional logic. [A: 36]. It goes without saying that the “logic of question and answer” is but a *misnomer*. It is not a ‘logic’ and it is not in competition against modern propositional logic, which it is not going to displace at all. Although there are some possible connections with Jaakko Hintikka’s logico-philosophical ideas concerning the “question-answer relation” [Hintikka 1984], it seems better to follow Louis Mink and look at Collingwood’s “logic of question and answer” as an “hermeneutics” [MHD: 131], [Hogan 1987: 265], [Hogan 1989: 44].

Indeed, Collingwood intended here to explicate the approach of the archeologist to the results of his excavation, as well as the attitude of the historian *vis-à-vis* texts. This first principle must be read in conjunction with the other two: every text or report of findings can be seen as answer to a question and it is necessary, in order to capture the full meaning, to find out what that question is (first principle); when settling about, one must first study the “history of history” (third principle), i.e., one’s tradition of understanding of the text (or artefacts) at hand in order, when apprised of it, that a question “arises”, which leads to an immediate presupposition. The process thus never begins with “the collection or contemplation of crude facts as yet

¹⁷ See [Agassi 1975: 536]. For an early formal investigation of the logic of presuppositions, see [Rescher 1961]. On erotetic logic, see [Belnap & Steel 1976].

¹⁸ It is possible that Collingwood was here influenced by Cook Wilson, whom he cites with approval [PA: 265]. Cook Wilson also had doubts about propositional logic, he believed that conditionals of the form ‘if *p* then *q*’ are a

uninterpreted” but by “the asking of a question which sets one off looking for facts which may help one to answer it” [EPH: 137]. Continuing thus the process of finding questions and presuppositions, one should obtain a fuller understanding, a re-thinking or re-enactment (second principle).

There are some striking parallels with Gadamer’s hermeneutics.¹⁹ First, Gadamer himself recognized that Collingwood’s idea that we can understand a text “only when we have understood the question to which it is an answer” is parallel to “an axiom of all hermeneutics”, namely the “fore-conception of knowledge” [Gadamer 1999: 370]. Secondly, Gadamer’s “openness of the question” is prefigured in Collingwood’s claims to the effect that “questioning is essentially a suspension of the activity of asserting” [SM: 78].²⁰ Thirdly, for both authors, a question “arises” or “presents itself” [A: 37-38], [EM: 25-28], [Gadamer 1999: 366]. Fourthly, the role of tradition in Gadamer and “history of history” or “second-order history” in Collingwood is essentially the same; for example, Gadamer’s request that “the reconstructed question be set within the openness of its questionableness—i.e., that it merges with the question that tradition is for us” [Gadamer 1999: 374] is but the echo of Collingwood’s remark on the fact that “the historian [...] is part of the process he is studying, has his own place in that process, and can see it only from the point of view which at this present moment he occupies within it” [IH: 248] and his request—the third principle above—that he studies “the history of historical thought” about his chosen question [A: 132]. Fifthly, both authors see the process of understanding as open-ended. Even in the reputedly most systematical of his books, Collingwood

“relation of problems [questions], not statements” [Cook Wilson 2002: 552]. See also [Somerville 1989: 526-527, 532].

¹⁹ These have been studied, along with Gadamer’s criticisms of Collingwood, in [Bertoldi 1984], [Fell 1991], [Hogan 1987], which is reprinted in [Hogan 1989: chap. 2].

denied any “finality” to philosophical work. In that book, he entertained the idea that philosophy might just be a “scale of philosophies”; the description could very well serve as a description of “tradition” as in such a case there would only “relative end”:

‘A philosophical system’, it was said, ‘claims finality, but the claim must always be false because the doors of the future are always open’. The contradiction vanishes when it is realized that the philosopher, in constructing a system, has his place in a scale whose structure is such that every term in it sums up the whole scale to that point; however far up the scale he goes, he never comes to an absolute end of the series, because by reaching this point he already comes in sight of new problems; but he is always at a relative end, in the sense that wherever he stands, he must know where he stands and sum up his progress hitherto, on pain of making no progress henceforth. [EPM: 191].

Sixthly, it is quite clear from the discussion in Chapter 3, section 1, that Collingwood’s notion of “re-enactment” ultimately bears resemblance with Gadamer’s “fusion of the horizons” [Gadamer 1999: 306f.]. These parallels should not mask divergences, some of which will be briefly presented in the Conclusion, but they provide grounds for declaring that the reasons for which Gadamer does not consider his hermeneutics to be a method apply *mutatis mutandis* to the “logic of question and answer”. I should like therefore to claim that there is no ‘method’, in any strong sense of the word, in Collingwood. On that score, one can hardly associate him with historicists.

In order to complete my answer to the charge of historicism as it is now reduced to adoption of the thesis of “situatedness”, I must discuss Knox’s hypothesis that I presented at the beginning of this chapter, and the following two topics: Collingwood’s doctrine of “absolute presuppositions” in *An Essay on Metaphysics* and his denial in that book and in the *Autobiography* that there are “eternal philosophical problems”. These topics are related since the idea that absolute presuppositions vary from epoch to epoch is usually seen to be of a piece with

²⁰ Again, one might find here echoes of Cook Wilson, according to whom, “In an inquiry, first comes [the]

the idea that there are no philosophical problems that do not vary from epoch to epoch. These topics have been discussed at length in the secondary literature and I do not wish to marshal all the points made in it. I shall merely say enough to show that the later Collingwood did not hold a strong historicist view. It is one thing to recognize that philosophical conceptions have an historical context and this historical context must be taken into account when one wishes to understand them. This claim borders on the trivial. It is another thing to claim that a philosopher's conceptions are 'determined' by his time and place. This second claim, which is the basis of the so-called 'sociology of knowledge', was never made by Collingwood. It is also another thing to claim further that there is no evaluation possible and philosophy can only 'describe'. This third claim is never made by Collingwood. It is very bad exegesis to impute to Collingwood the second or the third claim on the basis that he agreed with the first. Some supplementary assumptions must be made in both cases, which are everywhere missing in his writings.

I should begin with a few, brief critical remarks about Malcolm Knox's statement of the "radical conversion hypothesis", as it came to be known since Lionel Rubinoff coined the expression in the 1960s [Rubinoff 1966]. To begin with, the (two) statements cited by Knox offer no convincing textual support. The remark about "philosophy as a separate discipline" being "liquidated by being converted into history" [PH: 238], should not have been taken so seriously as it was first of all quoted outside of its context and, secondly, because the *rapprochement* that Collingwood wanted to achieve between philosophy and history is a life-long meandering project, which could not and should not be summed up in one sentence, all the more so in a sentence which is quoted out of context. Lionel Rubinoff has written a whole book,

questioning activity" [Cook Wilson 2002: 36].

Collingwood and the Reform of Metaphysics, in order to show the continuity of Collingwood's thoughts on this very topic and to demonstrate the falsity of Knox's hypothesis [Rubinoff 1970a]; his case seems incontrovertible and I shall not discuss this point further. Secondly, the other cited remark is hardly more convincing:

St. Augustine looked at Roman history from the point of view of an early Christian; Tillemont, from that of a seventeenth-century Frenchman; Gibbon, from that of an eighteenth-century Englishman; Mommsen, from that of a nineteenth-century German. There is no point in asking which was the right point of view. Each was the only one possible. (Quoted in [Knox 1946: xii])

The last sentence, "Each was the only one possible" does the work, providing support for the claim that "There is no point in asking which was the right point of view"; and it admits of two readings. It is either an irrefutable truism: Augustine could not have written a history of Rome from the point of view of an eighteenth-century Englishman, etc., or it is meant to be a *determinist* claim, of the sort put forward by Nathan Rotenstreich:

[Collingwood] looked at metaphysics as an historicist and assumed that a metaphysical system is determined by the state of science in an era. [Rotenstreich 1972: 197]

The determinist claim would be that the social or cultural conditions being what they were during his lifetime, Augustine could not have written any other history of Rome than the one he did write. But, as Tariq Modood has pointed out, this second determinist reading is just "false on straightforward historical grounds" [Modood 1989: 107]: first, during Augustine's time, other individuals did not share his views; secondly, Augustine was precisely a creative thinker in that sense that, not being compelled to adopt common views, he developed his own. There are no reasons to believe that Collingwood adhered to a deterministic reading of the last sentence, which renders it obviously false. It is on the contrary most probable that he saw his remark as a

truism. If it is, then the whole passage appears under a new light, as expressing a much more innocuous and very weak form of relativism.

My second point is that Knox has seriously misrepresented the nature of Collingwood's evolution. I have argued in Chapter 3, section 3, that Collingwood had abandoned some underlying "idealist" theses in the late 1920s with the result that he could not hold the historical scepticism of *Speculum Mentis* [SM: 238]. I have argued in the previous sections of Chapter 3 for the strong objectivist import of the doctrine of "re-enactment", with the thesis of "sameness of thought", also originating in the late 1920s. These are important moves away from the more standard "idealism" of the earlier works. Perhaps Knox, himself an orthodox neo-Hegelian, merely perceived these moves as an increasing "historicization", having completely missed their "realist" or "objectivist" import. What is actually striking is that it is exactly where he is claimed to have changed that Collingwood never changed his mind. I shall merely give some of the evidence to be found from printed texts. (Such evidence has been marshalled in [Martin 1995], [Oldfield 1995] and [D'oro 2002].) It is hardly believable that the radical conversion hypothesis was allowed to stand even in absence of further proof from the unpublished manuscripts. There is now available further massive, incontrovertible manuscript evidence recently brought to light by Guido Vanheeswijck [Vanheeswijck 1998], [Vanheeswijck 2001], and by James Connelly in the case of the manuscripts on political philosophy [Connelly 1990]. This evidence clearly renders the radical conversion hypothesis untenable.

Thus, for example, it is claimed that Collingwood came to view philosophical problems as changing and never "eternal". This is the view that he expresses in the *Autobiography*, about Plato's and Hobbes' conceptions of the State:

[...] you would find that the differences between them were not superficial but went down to essentials. You can call the two things the same if you insist; but if you do, you must admit that the thing has got *diablement changé en route*. [A: 61]

Eugene Bertoldi has urged that we pay closer attention to the fact that Collingwood may have embroiled himself in conceptions that do not fit his overall outlook, out of criticism of the Oxford Realists [Bertoldi 1985: 390]. Indeed, he accused Cook Wilson, Prichard and their ilk of paying insufficient attention to the historical context of the philosophers they were criticizing: they merely wanted to ask of any philosopher's statement 'Is it true?', in ahistorical, absolute terms. Collingwood believed that one could not compare philosophers so easily, because that would imply that they are answering the same question and that they think in terms of the same presuppositions:

But what is thought to be a permanent problem P is really a number of transitory problems $p_1 p_2 p_3...$ whose individual peculiarities are blurred by the historical myopia of the person who lumps them together under the one name P. It follows that we cannot fish the problem P out of the hyperuranian lucky-bag, hold it up, and say 'what did So-and-so think about this?' We have to begin, as poor devils of historians begin, from the other end. We have to study documents and interpret them. [A: 69]

Can it be claimed that Collingwood denied any possibility of comparison between two conceptions? It seems not to occur to many that, supposing that this were Collingwood's considered opinion, it would have made nonsense of the first part of *The Idea of History*, which, as its title indicates, consists of a survey of the various conceptions of history from the Greeks to his days. Moreover, it means that he could not, for example, criticize Plato's views on education in *The New Leviathan* [NL: 37.4], Plato's and Aristotle's "substantialism" in metaphysics [IH: 42f.], to describe Plato's theory of art as "technical" and condemn it as a "vulgar error" [PA: 18f.], etc., etc. It is one thing to ignore historical context. Collingwood wished merely to point out that it often means that two philosophers that are on the face of it giving different answers to the same question may in fact not be contradicting each other because they are not answering the

same question [A: 40-41, 61-62]. It is another to claim that, in absence of any possibility of comparison, because of the alleged non-existence of eternal problems, philosophies are *incommensurable*. There are no grounds in Collingwood's writings for the attribution of this stronger thesis. It is striking that, a page later in the *Autobiography*, Collingwood states clearly that Plato's and Hobbes' conceptions are not incommensurably different:

There is, of course, a connexion between these two things; but it is not the kind of connexion that the 'realists' thought it was. Anybody would admit that Plato's *Republic* and Hobbes's *Leviathan* are about two things which are in one way the same thing and in another way different. That is not in dispute. What is in dispute is the kind of sameness and the kind of difference. The 'realists' thought that the sameness was the sameness of a 'universal', and the difference the difference between two instances of that universal. But this is not so. The sameness is the sameness of an historical process, and the difference is the difference between one thing which in the course of that process has turned into something else, and the other thing into which it has turned. Plato's *polis* and Hobbes's absolutist State are related by a traceable historical process, whereby one has turned into the other; [...]
[A: 62]

This thought is prefigured in a text dating from 1935:

[...] there is a sense in which, at particular periods of history, particular philosophical problems are, as it were, in season, and claim the special attention of a philosopher anxious to be of service to his age. In part, the problems of philosophy are unchanging; in part, they vary from age to age, according to the special characteristics of human life and thought at the time; and in the best philosophers of every age these two parts are so interwoven that the permanent problems appear *sub specie saeculi*, and the special problems of the age *sub specie aeternitatis*. [IH: 231-232]

If the two conceptions are not claimed to be *incommensurable*, then no unpalatable form of relativism is implied and whatever changes in details of the differences there may be, the simple recognition of differences is just another harmless truism.

The doctrine of "absolute presuppositions", with the concomitant claim that metaphysics, as the "science of absolute presuppositions", is an historical discipline, has also been taken as evidence for an indictment on the charge of 'historicism' and 'relativism'. There are many issues

into which it is not necessary to enter, as they are tangential, such as the debates concerning Collingwood's rejection of the idea that it is a science of "pure being" (see, e.g., Rotenstreich' remark that Collingwood's "metaphysics" is "metaphysics without ontology" [Rotenstreich 1972: 181])²¹ or Collingwood's perceived "metaphysical neutralism". As Walsh pointed out, with the doctrine of absolute presuppositions, it looks as if:

Like Wittgenstein, the later Collingwood thought that philosophy cannot judge or explain; at bottom it can only describe. [Walsh 1972: 149]²²

What follows should incidentally show that this is a misunderstanding of Collingwood's position. I should merely go straight to what seems to me the real underlying problem with the doctrine as presented above; a problem first stated by Stephen Toulmin [Toulmin 1972a: 1.2], [Toulmin 1972b]. In a very challenging and sympathetic paper, which gave Collingwood his due credit for the novelty and importance of *An Essay on Metaphysics*, Toulmin nevertheless ultimately presented him as a precursor, with the doctrine of absolute presuppositions, of contemporary relativists such as Paul Feyerabend [Toulmin 1972b: 221]. The heart of Toulmin's argumentation is the idea that Collingwood implicitly closes the door on the possibility of any rational discussion of the causes or reasons for the move from one given constellation of absolute presuppositions to another. In a nutshell, in order to discuss the connection between two given constellations, one would need to stand outside of them and, when wishing to explain how the move from one to the other is "rationally justified", we should need some "super-absolute' presupposition", which is not available to us, as the very idea of this standpoint contradicts the doctrine [Toulmin 1972a: 211]. This "radical incomprehension" is, of course, a strong form of relativism. Toulmin set his point in clear, if not concise, terms as follows:

²¹ On these issues, Guido Vanheeswijck's interpretation seems the most adequate and it agrees with my understanding of Collingwood's doctrine. See [Vanheeswijck 1998].

- (i) At any given stage of development, the intellectual content of a discipline can be presented as a system of concepts and principles that operate on different levels of generality;
- (ii) Our reasons for accepting concepts and propositions on the lower levels of generality are 'relative to'—and must be explained in terms of—those on the higher levels, and such lower-level concepts and propositions are presupposed only 'relatively' to those on the higher levels;
- (iii) Our reasons for accepting concepts and principles on the highest level of all cannot be explained in this way, and these upper-level concepts and propositions are accordingly presupposed—at that stage in the development of the discipline—not relatively, but 'absolutely'.
- (iv) We can make rational comparisons between propositions and concepts current at any one stage in the development of a discipline, to the extent that they are both operative 'relative to' the same constellations of absolute presuppositions;
- (v) On the other hand, if we attempt to compare propositions or concepts which are 'relative to' different constellations of absolute presuppositions, or if we attempt to compare different constellations of absolute presuppositions as wholes, we shall find no common, agreed set of rational principles or procedures for judging them;
- (vi) So a proposition can be rationally appraised only 'relative to' a given constellation of absolute presuppositions and, once we leave this particular framework, we leave also the scope of rational comparison and judgement. [Toulmin 1972b; 212-213]

According to Collingwood, the metaphysician's business is to study the process that leads from one constellation to another:

The essential thing about historical 'phases' is that each of them gives place to another; not because one is violently destroyed by alien forces impinging on its fabric from without by war or from within by revolution, but because each of them while it lives is working at turning itself into the next. To trace the process by which one historical phase turns into the next is the business of every historian who concerns himself with that phase. The metaphysician's business, therefore, when he has identified several different constellations of absolute presuppositions, is not only to study their likenesses and unlikenesses but also to find out on what occasions and by what processes one of them has turned into another. [EM: 73]

But, if Toulmin is right, the metaphysician can say nothing about *reasons*. (This already sounds an impossible conclusion on Collingwood's terms.) One way out would be to talk in terms of *causes*. (Again, this is 'uncollingwoodian', since Collingwood believed that in history causes are reasons [EM: 290-295].) When Collingwood, in a footnote, remarks that changes in

²² The allusion here is to [Wittgenstein 1997: § 124].

constellations brought about by internal strains as “created by a process of unconscious strain”, Toulmin calls this a “dodge” [Toulmin 1972b: 211], which reveals that Collingwood cannot escape the above relativistic conclusion:

Yet Collingwood never took the final step, of replacing ‘reasons’ by ‘causes’ completely. [...]

Collingwood lapses into final silence at a particularly tantalizing and ambiguous moment. Still, for our purposes, his hesitation between a rational and a causal account of conceptual change is the essential clue we need, if we are to recognize the weak point in his whole position. For this is the price he pays for keeping his ‘absolute’ presuppositions entirely independent and self-sufficient; and, once that step is taken, he landed in an historical relativism from which he cannot retreat. [Toulmin 1972b: 212]

It is difficult to respond to Toulmin’s argument. The fault seems to lie in steps (iv) and (v), which appear to misdescribe Collingwood’s position. Although Toulmin claims the contrary, absolute presuppositions are, in *An Essay on Metaphysics*, primarily only to disciplines and sciences, not epochs, which are said usually to contain more than one constellation. But the real heart of the problem is the notion of change. Like Adrian Oldfield, I think that Collingwood perceived the change from one constellation to another as continuous and ‘dialectical’

[...] in the sense of something struggling to become that which it is not, which, when it becomes what it is not, does not lose but retains a connection with what it was. [Oldfield 1995: 194]

This is supported by Collingwood’s remark (my emphasis) that in change “the structure collapses and is replaced by another, which will be a *modification* of the old” [EM: 48n.] and by his description of the “dynamic logic” of civilizations:

[Civilization] works itself out by a dynamic logic in which different and at first sight incompatible formulae somehow contrive a precarious coexistence; one dominant here, another there; the recessive formula never ceasing to operate, but functioning as a kind of minority report which, though the superficial historian may ignore it, serves to a more acute eye as evidence of tendencies actually existing which may have been dominant in the past and may be dominant in the future. [EM: 75]

Gibbon is Collingwood's example of an historian who was insensitive to strains. Is incommensurability implied in any sense here? The above quoted passage about the variation in the conception of the State from Plato to Hobbes makes it clear that Collingwood believed that there is a dimension of sameness alongside the differences:

The sameness is the sameness of an historical process, and the difference is the difference between one thing which in the course of that process has turned into something else, and the other thing into which it has turned. [A: 62]

If looked at from the point of view of re-enactment, the doctrine of absolute presuppositions offers no obstacle, there is no inconsistency as Rex Martin believed [Martin 1981: 101]. It is everywhere stated in the above passages from *An Autobiography* and *An Essay on Metaphysics* that the access to doctrines such as Plato's or Hobbes' or to the absolute presuppositions of a given science at a given period in a given civilization is through the interpretation of evidence, from which one will frame inferences, through the "logic of question and answer". So the process is entirely "rational", even though at the level of absolute presuppositions most people concerned cannot be said to have acted in full knowledge of them. In that sense, Martin is right to claim that one does not "re-enact" absolute presuppositions, since they were not thought to begin with [Martin 1981: 100f.]. But this is beside the point. What needs to be emphasized here is that there is no stumbling block such as steps (iv)-(v) in Toulmin's argument since the present historian sits at the present end of history and the present culture is a context which embodies (Collingwood would say "encapsulates") the past. This is the dimension of assessment, the "unity" from which one can, *pace* Toulmin, discuss rationally the various constellations and their changes. This comes out clearly in Collingwood's vigorous attack against Spengler, in his 1927 review:

If history is possible, if we can understand other cultures, we can do so only by re-thinking of ourselves their thoughts, cherishing within us the fundamental idea

which framed their lives; and in that case their culture lives on within ours, as Euclidean geometry lives on within modern geometry and Herodotean history within the mind of the modern historian. But this is to destroy the idea of atomic cultures, and to assert not a mere plurality of cultures but a unity of that plurality, a unity which is the present culture, the heir of all its past. [EPH: 71]

One finds echoes here in the remark, from the manuscript 'What 'Civilization' Mean' that I quoted: "The plurality of civilizations does not exclude a sense in which civilization is one" [NL: 490]. There is, therefore, room for re-thinking, for critical thinking; once more, no strong form of relativism is entailed by Collingwood's doctrines.

I therefore conclude that Collingwood can only be considered as an historicist or a relativist in a very weak sense. There is no equivalent for thesis (ii), concerning the existence of a 'method', in his philosophy and nothing that he wrote which can be seen as support for the thesis (i), i.e., 'situatedness', can be said to entail any strong form of historicism or relativism. His remarks are almost always better read as the expression of these trivialities that Wittgenstein saw the result of genuine philosophical thinking [Wittgenstein 1997: § 128]. To my mind, Collingwood's commitment to these views derives merely from his acceptance of truisms that are philosophically harmless; it is only their denial that forces one to adopt philosophical views that open in turn the door to scepticism. This is of course not the place to defend such claims, as my brief is merely to interpret and not go beyond pointing out the *prima facie* cogency of Collingwood's positions.

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I should like to close this chapter with a few remarks concerning two German readers of Collingwood, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Leo Strauss. Collingwood is not a "canonised" philosopher and it is most likely that the average philosopher will know of him through

influential writings such as Gadamer's *Truth and Method*. It is therefore disappointing that both Gadamer and Strauss repeatedly accused Collingwood of being a "radical historicist" [Strauss 1952: *passim*], [Gadamer 1992: *passim*], [Gadamer 1999: 369-367, 513-516]. Their accusations, although based on very partial knowledge of Collingwood's writings (even as was available to them) and on what is frankly insufficient reflection on the materials they had under their hands—this should be clear to the reader of this Chapter—, are unwarrantedly unmitigated. Gadamer even spoke of "radical historical scepticism" [Gadamer 1992: 13] and of "a strange and exotic form of historicism" which is "just historicism in the service of a national tradition and of liberal ideals" [Gadamer 1992: 14].

It is true, however, that Gadamer also praised Collingwood, whom he sees as his only ally, along with Plato [Gadamer 1999: 370] and that he was responsible for the German translation of the *Autobiography*. He further praises Collingwood for his critique of 'realism' [Gadamer 1999: 370], although he himself probably knew precious little about Oxford Realism, and he claims that Collingwood's 'logic of question and answer' can be of help in getting rid of neo-Kantian approaches to the history of philosophy in terms of "problems" [Gadamer 1992: 11-12]. (The above discussion shows that, when truly understood, Collingwood's ideas do not lend support to this claim.) Gadamer even describes German Romanticism and historicism (from Hegel to Dilthey) as Collingwood's "spiritual home" [Gadamer 1992: 10]. But van der Dussen correctly pointed out that "Collingwood's philosophy of history is both too rational and empirical for this contention to be justified" [HS: 3]. Gadamer, who is unsurprisingly sensitive to the differences in "national traditions", rightly points out, on the other hand, that there are difficulties linked with the understanding of Collingwood in Germany [Gadamer 1992: 10], as he could complain in turn of Collingwood's inappropriate understanding of some German figures such as Dilthey

[Gadamer 1992: 12]. Gadamer and Strauss stand at opposite ends of the spectrum in the German debate about historicism.²³ It is through this debate that they perceived Collingwood and it is to be deplored that they did not take time to apply their hermeneutical skills to his texts. I have given above some reasons to be dissatisfied with Strauss' treatment of Collingwood. Strauss ends his discussion of Collingwood by a telling statement of his own preoccupations in this debate:

History, i.e., concern with the thought of the past as thought of the past, take on philosophic significance if there are good reasons for believing that we can learn something of utmost importance from the thought of the past which we cannot learn from our contemporaries. History takes on philosophic significance for men living in an age of intellectual decline. Studying the thinker of the past becomes essential for men living in an age of intellectual decline because it is the only practicable way in which they can recover a proper understanding of the fundamental problems. Given such conditions, history has the further task of explaining why the proper understanding of the fundamental problems has become lost in such a manner that the loss presents itself at the outset as a progress. If it is true that loss of understanding of the fundamental problems culminates in the historicization of philosophy or in historicism, the second function of history consists in making intelligible the modern notion of "History" through the understanding of its genesis. Historicism sanctions the loss, or the oblivion, of the natural horizon of human thought by denying the permanence of the fundamental problems. It is the existence of that natural horizon which makes possible "objectivity" and therefore in particular "historical objectivity." [Strauss 1952: 585-6]

The accusation of historicism, throughout the paper, is thus a damning condemnation in his eyes. But my reading of Collingwood shows that he is in fact much more an ally than an enemy here. As I argued, Collingwood did not open the door to any strong form of historicism or relativism, over and above some truisms. It may be that even the weaker forms of historicism or relativism that are entailed by Collingwood's positions are not to Strauss' liking. But this is quite another debate, in which I cannot enter here.

It is a pity that Strauss did not understand the true meaning of Collingwood's re-enactment theory, with its strong realist, objectivist import. Strauss further wrote in the same paper that:

²³ See for example the lengthy critical discussion of Strauss in [Gadamer 1999: 532-540].

If one denies the legitimacy of the goal which we called adequate understanding of Plato's thought, i.e., if one denies the possibility of historical objectivity, one merely substitutes a spurious right of subjectivity and of arbitrary assertions for the honest confession that we are ignorant of the most important fact of the human past. [Strauss 1952: 584]

Gadamer criticized Strauss for maintaining that an "objective interpretation" of a text is possible, because the author, unless he was confused, meant what he said in only one way [Gadamer 1999: 535], because he believes himself that the meaning of a text always goes beyond the original intention of the author [Gadamer 1999: 183, 296, 372]; as he says, texts are "inexhaustible" [Gadamer 1999: 373]. In the Conclusion, I shall come back to this purely philosophical thesis, which is made to play such a significant role in Gadamer's critique of Collingwood. For the moment, it should be clear that Collingwood's doctrine of 're-enactment', with the idea that it leads to re-thinking the thought of the historical agent, definitely places Collingwood on the side of Strauss. This is no reason to claim that "the dimension of hermeneutical mediation which is passed through in every act of understanding still escapes [Collingwood]", as Gadamer claims [Gadamer 1999: 516].

On the other hand, however, when Gadamer claims that "every historian and philologist must reckon with the fundamental non-definiteness of the horizon in which his understanding moves" [Gadamer 1999: 373], he was not saying anything new to Collingwood, who also had a notion of "history of history" or "second-order history", as I have shown. The difference between Gadamer and Collingwood boils down to this that Collingwood believes that some inferences that are certain are possible, as they are indeed often made *in practise*, while Gadamer denies this and opens the door to a stronger form of relativism. This difference can be explained in terms of their respective backgrounds. Gadamer comes to the problem from the, to my mind, more *limited* background of hermeneutics, whose concerns are derivative from those of Protestant theology,

while Collingwood, who was also a reader of texts, was moreover an accomplished archeologist and historian. As an archeologist and historian, Collingwood could certainly not accept the purely philosophical (not to say metaphysical) thesis of the inexhaustibility of texts. It implies a form of relativism which does not square with the *reality* or *practise* of archeology and history. Moreover, as was shown, to hold such a thesis in history, one must use an essentially *metaphysical* argument, of an idealist nature, about the impossibility of any true partial inferences prior to the knowledge of the whole of a presumed *infinite* quantity of evidence.

With these remarks, I have opened a debate that I wish not to pursue here or at least not until the concluding remarks, when I shall try and situate Collingwood among contemporary views about understanding. Before, I must examine Collingwood's philosophy of art as providing another topic for the his ideas on understanding. My detailed examination of the doctrines of "re-enactment" and of "sameness" of thought and my rejection of the charges of historicism and relativism should now start to bear fruit, as the true meaning of Collingwood's ideas on art should be easier to discern to those whose mind is not encumbered with many falsehoods about these underlying conceptions.

Chapter 5

Interpretation in Art

So strong are our prejudices that it is perhaps the hardest task in philosophy to give flesh to the sense that in art there is something objective. It is therefore very tempting to dismiss to Collingwood's *The Philosophy of Art*. It is not just that it has been misread as a defence of an outmoded form of 'expression' and 'ideal' theories, associated with British and Italian idealism. It is also that, as I read him, Collingwood wanted to get across that there is something truly intersubjective, i.e., objective in art and the social value of art resides in it.¹ The very last sentence of the book expresses it: "Art is the community's medicine for the worst disease of the mind, the corruption of consciousness" [PA: 336]. Collingwood's remarks comes after a remarkable discussion of T. S. Eliot's poem, *The Waste Land*, which is meant to give flesh to this idea [PA: 333-335]. For simplicity's sake, I could choose here the more straightforward examples of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *1984*, two English books of the same era, as illustrations of Collingwood's thesis about the social role of art. Both books conveyed very vividly our fear of the totalitarian state, of 'Big Brother'. In that sense, they were successful, according to Collingwood's theory, in fighting against the corruption of consciousness, i.e., they succeeded in eliciting the community's awareness of *fear* (an emotion) of the totalitarian state. As a first approximation, this is what was meant by the social role of art according to Collingwood.

¹ On an historical note, Samuel Alexander also defended in the 1930s the idea of objectivity in *Beauty and other Forms of Value*: "Beauty, or rather the beautiful, is objective, first, in the sense that it is communicable or shareable.

(Some of the things just said are actually inaccurate or simply potentially misleading; this should become clearer in what follows.) Someone said a long time ago that Collingwood's account of the interconnection between moral and aesthetic issues "cannot be lightly dismissed" [Hepburn 1963: 259]. I agree. As a matter of fact, much of the interest that Collingwood's philosophy of art should command today derives from this aspect. It is as engaging as it is fundamental.

For art to be said to fulfil such a social, political role would simply be impossible if theories that adopt a subjectivist stance to explain the relation of the audience to the work of art were true. According to this line of reasoning, subjectivist theories must be false. So there must be a sense of objectivity in art if art to play a social role and I believe that Collingwood's *The Principles of Art* is an attempt to flesh it out.

It is hoped that the work of the previous chapters will have brought this to the fore: Collingwood's philosophy of mind was devised to give foundations to a philosophy of history that attempted to give us a sense that the past is retrievable with objectivity, albeit partially, while still recognizing the necessary limits of the historian's point of view, as she is always standing at a particular time and place. The key to this objectivism is the idea that one can re-think the thoughts of historical agents and that, when one does so, one re-thinks the *same* thought. This argument blocks the way to the scepticism inherent to positions based on the Cartesian dualism that Collingwood rejected.

This defence of objectivism, with the concomitant undermining of scepticism, should be kept in mind when reading *The Principles of Art*. What I have in mind is this: put very crudely, I read Collingwood as having propounded or aimed at propounding a general a theory of "interpretation" or of "understanding" according to which understanding actions (of which

Its communicability or publicity arises from its physical character" [Alexander 1933: 172]. For reasons that shall

understanding actions of an historical agent is merely one case), understanding language and interpreting art are basically the same activity. The aim of such a theory is to provide an unified explanation in these three cases; to show that, *mutatis mutandis*, one single explanation holds for all these cases.

According to this line of interpretation, Collingwood must explain how it is possible in the case of the work of art for the artist and the audience to share a content, i.e., something objective. To put it again crudely, if postmodernism were right, there would be no sharing of an objective content between the artist and her audience. Collingwood's *The Principles of Art* is, in that sense, plainly anti-post-modern:

If the artist paints his picture in such a way that we, when we look at it using our imagination, find ourselves enjoying an [...] experience [...] like that which he enjoyed when painting it, there is not much sense in saying that we bring this experience with us to the picture and do not find it there. The artist, if we told him that, would laugh at us and assure us that what we believed ourselves to have read into the picture was just what he put there. [PA: 150]

One should not take pretext of such remarks to dismiss Collingwood in an off-handed manner. On the contrary, it is worth trying to find out what Collingwood has to offer in the way of arguments in order to support such a claim. This I intend to do in this chapter. However, it should be born in mind that, in light of the main thesis of my interpretation, according to which Collingwood was aiming at an unified treatment of understanding of action, language, and art, a good deal of the work has already been done in the previous chapters.

In this chapter, I shall not attempt at an exhaustive presentation of Collingwood's aesthetics and philosophy of art and my remarks can be seen as a defence of them only inasmuch as bringing out their coherence and the *prima facie* case for them constitutes a defence. Moreover,

emerge in this chapter, the grounds on which Alexander stand are quite different from Collingwood's.

the limited nature of the case put forth by Collingwood should be also kept in mind. As he himself put it in the preface to *The Principles of Art*:

Everything written in this book has been written in the belief that it has a practical bearing, direct or indirect, upon the condition of art in England in 1937 [...] [PA: vi]

We should take Collingwood to his word and simply remember that there is no reason for him to have foreseen current debates. By this I mean the following: Collingwood's position could be seen *today* as a crude form of "intentionalism", i.e., precisely of the sort of theory that was objected too by William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley in a famous paper on 'The Intentional Fallacy', published just a few years after Collingwood's death, in 1946 [Wimsatt & Beardsley 1995]. This paper has influenced the debate on these issues since; it is unfair to ask from Collingwood an answer to standard arguments against "intentionalism" such as the idea that knowledge of the intention of the artist is irrelevant to the evaluation of her work, that the "intention" is "not available", etc. Not that one could not supply such counter-arguments or find the basis for them in Collingwood's text —this has been done—²; my intention is simply to understand the nature of Collingwood's case in its own terms, within the context of the pre-second world war British philosophy. As for the argument against the 'copy' theory, in Chapter 3, section 2, on "Identity of Thoughts", Collingwood is reacting against a line of argument which is now superseded and this may give to his own arguments a limited range. Here again, Collingwood's arguments for objectivity in art are mainly in reaction against a (Cartesian) form of scepticism which is now outmoded. So Collingwood's arguments, which supplement those

² For a defense of Collingwood against Wimsatt & Beardsley, see [LPC: 119f.] and [Hepburn 1963]. More recently, Michael Baxandall's *Patterns of Intention* [Baxandall 1985] can be seen as a defense of Collingwood's approach. For Baxandall, "intention" is not a particular psychological state or mental event but "a general condition of rational human action which I posit in the course of arranging my circumstantial facts or moving about on the triangle of re-enactment" [Baxandall 1985: ??]. This is in line with my interpretation of Collingwood in Chapter 3, section 1.

laid out in the previous chapters and which make up a case for the possibility of objectivity in art, are not sufficient to settle the issue, especially in light of the enormous literature generated since his death on this topic. At best, they form an hitherto non-exploited basis from which to provide fresh arguments within contemporary debates. But within this Chapter, my aim is much more modest: it is merely to extract the core of Collingwood's aesthetics and philosophy of art.

The chief difficulty in the way of a proper understanding of Collingwood's aesthetics is the notion, already mentioned in the Introduction, of a "Croce-Collingwood" theory. Richard Wollheim's brief criticisms of that theory [Wollheim 1980: 99-100] were enormously influential. So my first task is to point out the key differences between Croce's aesthetics and Collingwood's. I shall point out that Croce's notion of intuition (*intuizione*) is *internal* and *pre-linguistic* and has no equivalent in Collingwood, for whom there is no such thing as a pre-formed intuition that the artist would express for herself without 'externalizing' it at the same time, and that, therefore, Collingwood never held the so-called "ideal theory". There is therefore no such thing as a "Croce-Collingwood" theory and Wollheim's criticisms do not apply to Collingwood. Furthermore, for Collingwood "expression" is always linguistic and he defines art as language ("language" being defined as the sum of bodily gestures of which speech is only part), therefore art is always public. So what Collingwood said about the publicity of linguistic meaning also holds for art. This much will be presented in section 3, where I shall also present the link with the most important idea of Collingwood's philosophy of art, namely that art plays a social role, because of its "collaborative" and "concreative" nature, which is being "the community's medicine for the worst disease of the mind, the corruption of consciousness" [PA: 336]. (This should render patent the deep coherence of Collingwood's philosophy.) Before doing so, however, I shall examine in section 2 the role of "imagination" in art and the key notion of "total

imaginative experience". Here too, I shall firstly criticize misreadings of Collingwood which block the way to a proper understanding of his views. His remarks on the role of "imagination" have simply to do with the idea that, in art, the role of the audience is not merely passive; it is no more passive than that of a hearer listening to a lecture. The underlying idea here is that understanding is the result of a common endeavour, from the speaker and the hearer or from the artist and the audience, and it is of something as objective in the latter case as it is in the former case. Collingwood's argument will be seen as devised to undermine scepticism, thus to provide a basis to the belief, crudely put, that *the meaning extracted from the work of art by the audience is the same as that expressed by the artist.*

§. 1 Art as Expression

Collingwood's aesthetic theory is said to belong to a class of theories referred to as "expressionism" or "expressivism", or as "expression" or "expressive" theory. These are variants on the thesis that, vaguely put, *art is the expression of emotion*. As opposed to another traditional definition of art as form, i.e., either representation or imitation, it focuses on the artist's activity of expression in producing a work of art. According to Harold Osborne, expression theory goes back to the Renaissance period [Osborne 1955: 141],³ and the work of the Italian Renaissance musicologist Gioseffe Zarlino, who maintained that the components of melody (speech, harmony and rhythm) must conform to each other in order to make the melody suitable to the expression of feelings of joy or sadness, etc. [Strunk 1950: 256-257]. The painter Albrecht Dürer, who was one of the first Germans to be influenced by Italian Renaissance

³ But see the list in [Carritt 1953: 454].

painters, set a canon of proportion as a canon of expressiveness [Panofsky 1955: 264]. Expression theory has a close affinity with the Romanticism of artists such as the early Goethe, Schiller and the *Sturm und Drang* movement, for which, according to Gordon Graham, “true art always embodies sincere feeling” [Graham 2000: 24]. This element is also to be found in Collingwood’s philosophy of art, in the view that true art is the result of a successful fight against the corruption of consciousness. (I shall come back to this point in section 3.)

The expression theory of German romanticism was refined in Germany by Dilthey, while in England it influenced authors such as F. H. Bradley, B. Bosanquet and S. Alexander. In Italy, Benedetto Croce gave “classical” form to the theory, in his *Aesthetics*, in 1901 [Croce 1922]. Collingwood’s former tutor, E. F. Carritt, was deeply influenced by Croce’s aesthetics. He had already read Croce’s *Aesthetic* in the early 1900s and was thus one of the first philosophical allies of Croce in Oxford. Croce’s influence on Collingwood has already been documented in Chapter 1, section 1⁴. There are traces of it in the philosophy of history, as was seen in Chapter 3 and 4, and it does extend to *The Principles of Art*, where one also finds many similar sounding claims. Because of this, Collingwood’s aesthetic theory is often described as a variant of the expression theory.⁵ Of itself, this would be harmless and not at all far from the truth, since he himself defines “art proper” as “expression of emotion” [PA: 114, 275] or more precisely as “an activity by which we become conscious of our own emotions” [PA: 292]. But the association with Croce brings about another element, that I shall call, after Ridley, the “ideal theory”, i.e., the claim that a work of art is “something that might exist solely in the artist’s head—as something, in other

⁴ See, e.g., [Collingwood 1932: 336] for an avowal.

⁵ See, e.g., [Scruton 1982: 16], [Osborn 1955: 142]. Gordon Graham calls Collingwood’s theory “expressivism” in order to avoid any confusion with the expressionist school of painting [Graham 2000: 24]. On the other hand he also argues that Collingwood’s “expressivism” is more sophisticated than that of, say, Tolstoy and Croce [Graham 2000: 36].

words, that need never receive external embodiment” [Ridley 1997: 264]. One could thus describe the ideal theory as the thesis that the artist first entirely conceives the work of art in her mind, then she expresses or externalizes it through some medium by creating a physical, public work of art. Since the two steps are clearly separated, it is possible for the artist to keep her work of art only to herself, i.e., never to externalize it. This is the view held by Croce in his *Aesthetics*, where he spoke of the obligation to “cross the *Pons Asinorum* of expression” [Croce 1922: 11]. It is, according to him, a test of, say, one’s visual “intuition” that one should take a pencil and start drawing. The fact that one is unable to draw as well as a great master is not, according to Croce, an indication that one’s technical ability is much poorer, it is rather an indication that one’s power at intuiting the image is poorer:

People think that all of us ordinary men imagine and intuit countries, figures and scenes like painters, and bodies like sculptors; save that painters and sculptors know how to paint and carve such images, while we bear them unexpressed in our souls. They believe that any one could have imagined a Madonna of Raphael; but that Raphael was Raphael owing to his technical ability in putting the Madonna upon canvas. Nothing can be more false than this view. [Croce 122: 9]

One must carefully distinguish expression from ideal theory: *to hold the ideal theory is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for holding the expression theory*. It is possible without contradiction to adhere to the expression theory without adhering to the ideal theory. Indeed, it is my claim in this chapter that this is exactly Collingwood’s position. To my mind, no one has done more damage to Collingwood’s reputation in aesthetics than Richard Wollheim, who attributed to him the view just sketched and conflated Collingwood’s with the idealist aesthetics of Croce. Wollheim’s *Art and Its Objects* has had a great influence on aesthetics, during the second half of the twentieth century. In it, he defines the “idealist theory” in such terms:

First, that the work of art consists in an inner state or condition of the artist, called an intuition or an expression: secondly, that this state is not immediate or given,

but is the product of a process, which is peculiar to the artist, and which involves articulation, organization, and unification: thirdly, that the intuition so developed may be externalized in a public form, in which case we have the artefact which is often but wrongly taken to be the work of art, but equally it need not be. [Wollheim 1980: 36-7]

In a nutshell and in slightly different words: the artist has an intuition and goes to the process of developing it. Only then, does he externalize it by the production of a work of art. (This is also referred to as the process of “doubling-up” [Ridley 1997: 265].)

Wollheim then proceeds to argue against this theory with the following two points:

The first is that by making the work of art something inner or mental, the link between artist and audience has been severed. There is now no object to which both can have access, for no one but the artist can ever know what he has produced. [...]

The second argument is that the Ideal theory totally ignores the significance of the medium: it is a characteristic fact about works of art that they are in a medium, whereas the entities posited by the Ideal theory are free or unmediated. [Wollheim 1980: 40]

These criticisms certainly contributed to the final demise of idealism in aesthetics. Wollheim did not claim to have invented an imaginary position and referred explicitly to the “Croce-Collingwood theory”:

Let us begin with the Idealist theory. It is usual nowadays to think of this as the Croce-Collingwood theory, and to consider it in the extended form that it has been given by these philosophers, who, moreover, differ only in points of detail or emphasis. [Wollheim 1980: 31]

Wollheim claims that Croce and Collingwood “differ only in points of detail or emphasis”: in other words there is essential common ground between them. I should like to quote further from

Wollheim:

[...] not only can the artist create a particular work of art without in point of fact ever externalizing it, but his capacity in general to create works of art, or his attainment as an artist (as we might put it) may flourish quite independently of there being in existence any means of externalization. The artist is an artist solely in virtue of his inner life... [Wollheim 1980: 99]

[...] we must appreciate that it is an essential feature of the Croce-Collingwood thesis that not only can the artist make works of art to himself, but that he may be in the situation in which he can only make works of art to himself. [Wollheim 1980: 100]

It seems that Wollheim considers as a defining feature of the idealist theory shared by Croce and Collingwood that the work of art is first and foremost a private matter. This is nothing short of attributing the ideal theory, as defined above, to Collingwood. Against this theory, Wollheim has argued that, like language, art must be public in nature [Wollheim 1980: 90-91]. Wollheim pointed out to the importance of the artist's tackling with the medium. In this, he was followed by the majority of aestheticians since, and rightly so. I have no qualms with this but with the interpretation of Collingwood, who actually held exactly the same view, despite the fact that he wrote remarks that look on the surface almost like paraphrases of Croce. (A very good example of this will be presented in this section.)

As a matter of fact, although Wollheim popularized the notion of a "Croce-Collingwood" theory, he was not the first to present an interpretation of Collingwood along those lines. It was initiated before him, it seems, by Vincent Turner and John Hospers. Turner suspected that Collingwood's "theory of art is but one facet of a theory of spirit, and that this theory is an extreme form of, after all, absolute idealism" [Turner 1958: 280] and he further identified it with Croce's theory. Hospers also believed that the two philosophers are "so substantially alike on all important points" [Hospers 1956: 291]. He believed that both Croce and Collingwood take intuition as an important element in their theories. For example, he claimed that "intuition" is for them "the terminus of the art-process" because "the intuition is the expression" [Hospers 1956: 292-293]. This internal process of expression is said to be afterwards externalized by technique. However, according to Hospers, this is absurd because, e.g., in the case of sculptor, the skill to

chisel stone requires a lot of experience before “the hand obeys the head” [Hospers 1956: 296]. Even Donagan seems to attribute such views to Collingwood [Donagan 1958: 163].

Most critics of Collingwood have taken for granted the Turner-Hospers-Wollheim interpretation.⁶ Here are a few examples to labour the point. First, there are those who focus on ‘idealistic’ or ‘intuitionistic’ side of the Croce-Collingwood theory. For example, Roger Scruton believes that both Croce and Collingwood “borrow the intellectual framework of idealism” [Scruton 1982: 2]. They are said to share an expressionism that contains a “contrast between intuition and conception” [Scruton 1982: 15-6]. Scruton further claims that Collingwood’s “quasi-idealist aesthetics” makes room for a version of the theory of ‘empathy’, “with the distinction between literal and emotional representation” [Scruton 1982: 72]. Noël Carroll also describes Collingwood as an intuitionist and claims that Croce and Collingwood have the same “preoccupations with the artist and his expression of intuitions” [Carroll 2001: 7]. Secondly, a commentator such as Garry Hagberg focuses on the ‘doubling-up’ aspect and interprets Collingwood’s aesthetic theory as a kind of representation theory, saying that “art and language are essentially alike in their serving as physical expressions of pre-existent mental or imaginary objects” [Hagberg 1986: 257]. He then describes Collingwood’s alleged procedure as a twofold process:

[...] first—this is the imaginative act—the imaginary object which is still to be expressed is created in the imagination out of the raw sensory particulars. Second, this imaginary object—which is the expressive act—finds, contingently, its outward manifestation. [Hagberg 1986: 261]

These authors’ criticisms of expression theory are probably on the right track as far as Croce’s theory of art is considered. But it is hasty to conclude that there are no significant differences between Collingwood and Croce. As Richard Sclafani pointed out, the term

“intuition”, which is central to Croce’s theory, never appears in *The Principles of Art* [Sclafani 1976: 357-8]. Sclafani also points out that Collingwood’s ‘imaginative activity’, which is the term used by Collingwood, can be taken as equivalent to Croce’s ‘intuition’ “only at the peril of great distortion” [Sclafani 1976: 358]. I shall examine that these points (and related ones) in the remainder of the section and in the next one. I shall thus begin by arguing that there is no equivalent to Croce’s notion of “intuition” in Collingwood’s aesthetics; not just because it so happens that Collingwood uses another term for it, but because of a fundamental disagreement between the two philosophers. Accordingly, I must first do a bit of explaining.

The key chapters of Croce’s *Aesthetics* is the first ones, where “aesthetic facts” are “frankly identified” with “intuitions” or “intuitive knowledge” [Croce 1922: 12]. The book begins with the following claims:

Knowledge has two forms: it is either *intuitive* knowledge or *logical* knowledge; knowledge obtained through the *imagination* or knowledge obtained through the *intellect*; knowledge of the *individual* or knowledge of the *universal*; of *individual things* or of the *relations* between them: it is, in fact, productive of *images* or of *concepts*. [Croce 1922: 1]

According to such definitions, “intuitive knowledge” is merely “knowledge of the individual” and never of the universal, it is the product of “imagination”, it is “productive of images”. Although his distinction resembles very much Kant’s account of the “two fundamental sources” of knowledge (“receptivity for impressions” and “spontaneity in the production of concepts” [Kant 1929: 92]), Croce did not agree with his famous claim that “Thought without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind” [Kant 1929: 93]. For Croce believed that intuitive knowledge “does not need to borrow the eyes of others, for she has excellent eyes of her own”

⁶ For a complement to the list of authors quoted here, see [Ridley 1997: 272 n. 5].

[Croce 1922: 2]. If concepts there are “mingled in” in intuitions, “they have been concepts, but have now become simple elements of intuition” [Croce 1922: 2].

A further characteristic of Croce’s notion of intuition is that it is not to be confused with perception:

Certainly perception is intuition: the perception of the room in which I am writing, of the ink-bottle and paper that are before me, of the pen I am using, of the objects that I touch and make use of as instruments of my person, which, if it write, therefore exists; —these are all intuitions. But the image that is now passing through my brain of a me writing in another room, in another town, with different paper, pen and ink, is also an intuition. This means that the distinction between reality and non-reality is extraneous, secondary, to the true nature of intuition. If we imagine a human mind having intuitions for the first time, it would seem that it could have intuitions of actual reality only, that is to say, that it could have perceptions of nothing but the real. But since knowledge of reality is based upon the distinction between real images and unreal images, and since this distinction does not at the first moment exist, these intuitions would in truth not perceptions, but pure intuitions... Intuition is the undifferentiated unity of the perception of the real and of the simple image of the possible. In our intuitions we do not oppose ourselves as empirical beings to external reality, but we simply objectify our impressions, whatever they be. [Croce 1922: 3-4]

The distinction between reality and non-reality is “extraneous, secondary to the true nature of intuition” [Croce 1922: 3]. This means that intuition does not necessarily require that the external object be independent from a perceiving agent. Therefore, intuition by no means “apprehends” actual reality. Perception needs intuition in order for one to perceive an external object, but intuition does not need perceptual reality. In true idealist fashion, Croce thus claims that “we simply objectify our impressions, whatever they be” [Croce 1922: 4].

Furthermore, intuition is said to be a form. But Croce does not accept Kant’s claim at the very beginning of the section on “Transcendental Aesthetic” of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, that space and time are the pure forms of intuition [Kant 1929: 65-66]. According to the Italian,

We have intuitions without space and time: the colour of a sky, the colour of a feeling, a cry of pain and an effort of will, objectified in consciousness: these are intuitions which we possess, and with their making space and time have nothing to do. [Croce 1922: 4]

He goes on to argue that space and time are “intellectual constructions of great complexity”, for nobody is thinking of place when one looks at a drawing or a view, or of time when one listens to a story or a piece of music [Croce 1922: 5].

Moreover, Croce identifies intuition, understood now as form, with expression:

[...] intuition or representation is distinguished as *form* from what is felt and suffered, from the flux or wave of sensation, or from psychic matter; and this form, this taking possession, is expression. To intuite is to express; and nothing else (nothing more, but nothing less) than *to express*. [Croce 1922: 11]

This is a rather confusing claim to which I shall come back. Let me simply note for the moment that Croce considers that aesthetic facts do not consist of a junction between form and content but rather of form (or intuition) alone:

Does the aesthetic fact consist of content alone, or of form alone, or of both together? [...] We must, that is to say, reject both the thesis that makes the aesthetic fact to consist of the content alone (that is, the simple impressions), and the thesis which makes it to consist of a junction between form and content, that is, of impressions plus expressions. In the aesthetic fact, expressive activity is not added to the fact of the impressions, but these latter are formed and elaborated by it. The impressions reappear as it were in expression, like water put into a filter, which reappears the same and yet different on the other side. The aesthetic fact, therefore, is form, and nothing but form. [Croce 1922: 15-16]

Two further points must be made absolutely clear about Croce’s notion of intuition: that intuitions are non-linguistic and that Croce distinguishes “expression” from the “practical activity of externalization”, so that “expression” itself remains “internal expression”. The first point is clearly seen from this remark:

Intuitive activity *possesses intuitions to the extent that it expresses them*. Should this proposition sound paradoxical, that is partly because, as a general rule, a too restricted meaning is given to the word “expression”. It is generally restricted to what are called verbal expressions alone. But there exists also non-verbal expressions, such as those of line, colour and sound, and to all of these must be extended our affirmation, which embraces therefore every sort of manifestation of the man, as orator, musician, painter or anything else. [Croce 1922: 8]

The identification of intuition and expression is confusing, since “expression” is usually understood as “outward” or “public expression”. This is not so, however, for Croce, for whom intuition is literally “*internal expression*” (Croce’s own italics) [Croce 1922: 116]. And when Croce writes that “intuitive activity *possesses intuitions to the extent that it expresses them*” [Croce 1922: 8], he really only means some internal process, remaining “in the head”, so to speak. Indeed, according to Croce,

[...] we do not externalize and fix all the many expressions and intuitions which we form in our spirit; we do not declare our every thought in a loud voice, or write it down, or draw, or paint, or expose it to the public. We *select* from the crowd of intuitions which are formed or at least sketched within us; and the selection is ruled by the criteria of the economic disposition and of its moral direction. Therefore, when we have fixed an intuition, we have still to decide whether or no we should communicate it to others, and to whom, and when and how; all which deliberations come equally under the utilitarian and ethical criterion. [Croce 1922: 116-117]

In order to be externalized, an intuition has to be selected by the practical activities of Spirit, i.e., “economic disposition of life and of its moral direction”, and

If by art be understood the externalization of art, then utility and morality have a perfect right to enter into it; that is to say, the right to be master in one’s own house. [Croce 1922: 116]

But discussion of this “selection” does not belong to “pure Aesthetic” [Croce 1922: 117]. Be this as it may, it is important here to realize that Croce is in fact arguing for art as a *totally subjective activity*. I shall argue in a moment that there is no room for such a conception in Collingwood’s philosophy.

It should be clear by now that according to Croce’s conceptions, expression “is not communication” and “may be confined to ourselves” as Carritt would put it [Carritt 1932: 90-91]. This creates a problem, when one thinks about how an audience could understand an artist’s aesthetic experience. According to Croce, activity of expression (genius) and activity which judges it (taste) are exactly the same procedure. Croce discusses here the example of A, who tries

to expresses his own intuition—he feels beauty when he forms the sought-for expression and feels ugliness when he does not succeed in forming it—and of B who tries to understand A's expression. According to Croce, this happens as follows:

[...] he *must of necessity place himself at A's point of view*, and go through the whole process again, with the help of the physical sign supplied to him by A. If A has seen clearly, then B (who has placed himself at A's point of view) will also see clearly and will see this expression as beautiful. If A has not seen clearly, then B also will not see clearly, and will find the expression more or less ugly, *just as A did*. It may be observed that we have not taken into consideration two other cases: that of A having a clear and B an obscure vision; and that of A having an obscure and B a clear vision. Strictly speaking, these two cases are *impossible*. [Croce 1922: 119]

So the individual B necessarily succeeds in understanding A's expression as it is internally completed and externally communicated. But Croce's justification is found lacking. Commenting on this, Carritt argues:

[A] once had an emotion which he expressed to himself internally by a poem, and this was the complete work of art. He then externalised or communicated it to [B] who subsequently had an emotion which he expressed internally in an aesthetic experience of his own, and Croce argues or rather assumes that the experiences of the two men were, or might have been, closely similar. But it is hard to see why. For on Croce's view nothing physical such as inked paper, coloured canvas or air-vibration intervenes. Apart from thought-reading there is no reason to suppose that [B]'s experience was in any way connected with that of [A]. [Carritt 1953: 456-7]

Indeed, Croce has simply not given us any reason to suppose that B's experience is in any way connected with A's. We touch here the sceptical problem that I wish to put at the centre of my reading of Collingwood. If it is the case that, first, the artist forms the image-in-her-head, secondly, she externalizes it through some medium, and that thirdly the audience gets access to the image-in-the-head-of-the-artist through the externalized version, and since any public verifiability relies on the externalized version, one can never be sure that the image-in-the-head-of-the-artist and the image-in-the-head-of-the-audience are the same. There are two ways to react to this form of scepticism. One way is implicitly to accept it and argue that there is no need, in

order to evaluate or to interpret a work of art, to refer to the image-in-the-head-of-the-artist, i.e., the “intention”, etc. The other way is to throw out the whole rather “Lockean”⁷ picture set forth by Croce, from which one concludes readily to scepticism, by arguing against some underlying assumption. I take it that this is what Collingwood was *explicitly* doing.

First of all, it should be clear that Collingwood was aware of Croce’s predicament and of the danger of scepticism. He painted exactly the same picture:

The aesthetic experience in itself, we are assuming, is in both cases a purely inward experience, taking place wholly in the mind of the person who enjoys it. But this inward experience is supposed to stand in a double relation to something outward or bodily. (a) For the artist, the inward experience may be externalized or converted into a perceptible object; though there is no intrinsic reason why it should be. (b) For the audience, there is a converse process: the outward experience comes first, and this is converted into that inward experience which alone is aesthetic. [...] if aesthetic experience in the artist is something wholly independent of such outward things, but in the audience is something dependent upon them and derived in contemplation of them, how is it an experience of the same kind in the two cases, and how is there any communication? [PA: 301-302]

Collingwood’s own thesis is, as we have seen from a passage quoted in the introduction to this Chapter [PA: 150], that the experience of the work of art by the audience is that of something which is *identical* with what the artist put in it. Collingwood puts the point in a rather obscure way:

[...] the picture, when seen by some one else or by the painter himself subsequently, produces in him (we need not ask how) sensuous-emotional or psychical experiences which, when raised from impressions to ideas by the activity of the spectator’s consciousness, are transmuted into a total imaginative experience *identical* with that of the painter. [PA: 308] (My italics)

I shall explain some of the jargon, e.g., “total imaginative experience”, involved here, in the next section. I should for the moment look to insist on the fact that Collingwood for the *identity* of

⁷ I have chosen the adjective “Lockean” because of the origin of the idea that intentions are unobservable mental states in Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chap. XXXI, § 30, where “willing” is described as “being a very simple act, whosoever desires to understand what it is, will better find it by reflecting on

aesthetic experiences. This is quite parallel to the identity of thoughts in re-enactment, in the case of the historical agent. I should now look at some of Collingwood's arguments devised to undermine the "Lockean" picture from which one derives sceptical conclusions.

On that score, one should first notice that, as early as *Speculum Mentis*, Collingwood rejected the idea that one could separate the fixing (or internal expression) of an intuition as a moment which is distinct from its externalization:

The credit of recognizing the identity of this attitude [the attitude of suspension whether or not the object in question is real or not] with art belongs primarily to Croce. But all these philosophers fall into the error of isolating this attitude and regarding it as a self-contained phase of experience, from which the other phases—notably the attitude of assertion and denial—must be reached by some kind of transition. And this transition is never successfully described. It is in fact an impossible transition. Once the mind has succeeded in attaining a condition in which it neither asserts nor denies but only represents objects to itself intuitively or imaginatively, there is no reason why it should ever pass out of this condition. The ability to assert or deny is an ability which it could never acquire. [SM: 76]

Collingwood could not entertain the idea of having an "intuition" *in vacuo*. It is non-sense and therefore "the problem of how it is to escape from its vacuum is an unreal problem and insoluble because it is unreal" [SM: 77]. This is already the undermining of an essential aspect of the overall picture from which the sceptical conclusion is reached. But there is more: Collingwood did not share the idea that there could be a truly "internal" expression, because, as we saw in Chapter, he did not draw the line between the inner and the outer where the Cartesian usually draws it. That Collingwood is completely at odds with Croce on this point can be seen in two steps. First, Collingwood did not believe, as we just saw, that there could be a pre-formed intuition or emotion, as he would rather say, prior to externalization: according to him, an artist finds out what emotion she has only *after* she has successfully expressed it:

his own mind, and observing what it does when it wills, than by any variety of articulated sounds whatsoever" [Locke 1959: vol. 1, 331].

The artist proper is a person who, grappling with the problem of expressing a certain emotion, says, 'I want to get this clear'. [PA: 114]

This would not differ from Croce's conception if expression were still conceived by Collingwood as internal. But —this is the second step— expression was for him, as opposed to Croce, linguistic therefore public through and through. On both scores, textual evidence in Collingwood is as clear as it can be.

First, there is the denial of the possibility of an emotion independent of its expression:

[T]he expression of emotion is not, as it were, a dress made to fit an emotion already existing, but is an activity without which the experience of that emotion cannot exist. [PA: 244]⁸

According to Collingwood, expression of emotion is the knowledge of one's own emotion, a knowledge which is not there to begin with: the activity of expressing it begins when one does not know exactly what one's emotion is. The activity of expressing an emotion is thus the activity of exploring it (alternatively, as Collingwood's artist put it in the quotation above: 'I want to get this clear'):

At first, he is conscious of having an emotion, but not conscious of what this emotion is. All he is conscious of is a perturbation or excitement, which he feels going on within him, but of whose nature he is ignorant. While in this state, all he can say about his emotion is: 'I feel... I don't know what I feel.' From this helpless and oppressed condition he extricates himself by doing something which we call expressing himself. [PA: 109]

Until a man has expressed his emotion, he does not yet know what emotion it is. The act of expressing it is therefore an exploration of his own emotions. He is trying to find out what these emotions are. There is certainly here a directed process: an effort, that is, directed upon a certain end; but the end is not something foreseen and preconceived, to which appropriate means can be thought out in the light of our knowledge of its special character. Expression is an activity of which there can be no technique. [PA: 111]

⁸ See also [PA: 117] on the "aesthetic emotion" as "not pre-existing to the expression of it".

In other words, the aesthetic activity is the “activity by which we become conscious of our own emotions” [PA: 292]. It is not an activity by which we merely externalize an already formed internal experience:

The painted picture is not produced by a further activity upon which [the artist] embarks, when his aesthetic activity has already arrived at completion, in order to achieve by its means a non-aesthetic end. Nor is it produced by an activity anterior to the aesthetic, as means towards the achievement of aesthetic experience. *It is produced by an activity which is somehow or other bound up with the development of that experience itself.* [...] Only a person who paints well can see well; and conversely [...] only a person who sees well can paint well. *There is no question of ‘externalizing’ an inward experience which is complete in itself and by itself.* There are two experiences, an inward or imaginative one called seeing and an outward or bodily one called painting, which in the painter’s life are inseparable, and form one single indivisible experience [...] [PA: 304-305] (My italics)

In Ridley’s words, Collingwood refuses to “double up” artistic experiences into “the emotion plus the expression of it” [Ridley 1997: 269]. However, as I pointed out, this would not significantly vary from Croce’s position, since the Italian also identified intuition with expression. Didn’t Collingwood write sentences such as these:

[...] a work of art may be completely created when it has been created as a thing whose only place is in the artist’s mind. [PA: 130]

The actual making of the tune is something that goes on in [the artist’s] head, and nowhere else. [PA: 134]

If an engineer has decided how to build a bridge, but has not made any drawing or specifications for it on paper, and has not discussed his plan with any one or taken any steps towards carrying it out, we are in the habit of saying that the bridge exists only in his mind, or (we also say) in his head. [PA: 131]

Or, the even more damning:

[...] the music, the work of art, is not the collection of noises, it is the tune in the composer’s head. The noise made by the performers, and heard by the audience, are not the music at all; they are only means by which the audience, if they listen intelligently (not otherwise), can reconstruct for themselves the imaginary tune that existed in the composer’s head. [PA: 139]

If 'work of art' means work of art proper, a piece of music is not something audible, but something which may exist solely in the musician's head. [PA: 151].

The danger here is to read such remarks out of their context, having in mind not what Collingwood says within that context but Croce's views. An appropriate understanding of their context has been provided recently by Aaron Ridley [Ridley 1997] and I shall not rehearse his arguments. I should like simply further to point out that, as we have just seen, *contrary to Croce, Collingwood did not distinguish "expression" from "externalization"*.

So the expression "to be in the artist's head" takes another meaning in the above quotations. It will be granted that the difference is on the surface subtle, it is nevertheless crucial. Two things need to be said. First of all, one should notice that, in the case of music, which is after all the case mentioned by Collingwood in the above passages, the idea that the composer could compose a tune merely "in his head" is far from being nonsense: wasn't Mozart reported to have composed whole symphonies "in his head" before writing them down? So, although the idea does not transfer easily to other arts such as painting,⁹ what Collingwood said could be have been false. The problem is that this ordinary sense of being "in the head" seems can be seen in a light that renders it philosophically innocuous. This is my second point. If I were correct in Chapter 2, when I claimed that Collingwood does not draw the distinction between the 'inner' and the 'outer' where the Cartesian draws it but more "inwards", so to speak, then it becomes clear that the symphony in Mozart's head, being already expressed, is *already in the domain of the 'outer'*. He may have kept a symphony for himself but the latter was already expressed, therefore (in principle) publicly accessible. This is exactly what Collingwood meant when he refused to

⁹ S. K. Wertz believes that "Collingwood is perhaps mistaken when he includes painting as an instance of imaginative creation" because, in the case of music, "one can carry a tune in one's head" but "one cannot paint a painting in one's head" [Wertz 1995: 150]. However, Wertz calls our attention to Collingwood's writing "you [are]

distinguish between “expression” and “externalization”. It does not matter whether or not the tune is actually sung or that it stayed in one’s head [PA: 139], whatever its status is, it is already public by nature. Donagan lays this down quite clearly:

[...] the act of imagining something is simply the linguistic act of bringing it to consciousness. Neither the object brought to consciousness, nor the linguistic utterance by which it is brought, need be ‘in the head’. Utterances made in the head are in no way more privileged than utterances made aloud. [LPC: 116]

Collingwood himself was as plain as one could be:

The aesthetic activity is the activity of speaking. Speech is speech only so far as it is both spoken and heard. A man may, no doubt, speak to himself and be his own hearer; but what he says to himself is in principle capable of being said to anyone sharing his language. [...] This is not inconsistent with the doctrine, stated elsewhere in this book, that the aesthetic experience or aesthetic activity is one which goes on in the artist’s mind. [PA: 317]

As I have already claimed, Collingwood often writes remarks that just look as if they were lifted from Croce but to which he gives an altogether different twist. It is therefore easy to misread his as just holding Croce’s views when in fact he is saying something completely different. The following passage, whose gist is opposite to Croce’s, that “there is no question of ‘externalizing’ an inward experience which is complete in itself and by itself” [PA: 304], is a very good example of this. This passage begins with the words of an imaginary painter, whose opinion is clearly held Collingwood:

‘One paints a thing in order to see it. People who don’t paint, naturally, won’t believe that; it would be too humiliating to themselves. They like to fancy that everybody, or at least everybody of refinement and taste like themselves, sees just as much as an artist sees, and that the artist only differs in having the technical accomplishment of painting what he sees. But that is nonsense ...’ [PA: 303]

The resemblance with this already-quoted passage from Croce’s *Aesthetics* is simply striking:

painting it because the experience itself only develops and defines itself in your mind *as you paint*” [PA 303], [Wertz 1995: 147].

People think that all of us ordinary men imagine and intuit countries, figures and scenes like painters, and bodies like sculptors; save that painters and sculptors know how to paint and carve such images, while we bear them unexpressed in our souls. They believe that any one could have imagined a Madonna of Raphael; but that Raphael was Raphael owing to his technical ability in putting the Madonna upon canvas. Nothing can be more false than this view. [Croce 122: 9]

But Collingwood's painter continues his speech with the following spin:

... You see something in your subject, of course, before you begin to paint it [...]; and that, no doubt, is what induces you to begin painting; but only a person with experience of painting, and of painting well, can realize how little that is, compared with what you come to see in it as your painting progresses. If you paint badly, of course, that doesn't happen. Your own daub comes between you and the subject, and you can only see the mess you are making. But a good painter—any good painter will tell you the same—paints things because *until he has painted them he doesn't know what they are like.*' [PA: 303-304] (My italics)

In other words, Collingwood draws the opposite conclusion from what looks as the same premises as Croce's. And this is because he did not distinguish between "expression" and "externalization" and for him the process of expressing is inseparable for the process of externalization. (Again, this will be explained in the next section.)

I should make here a very brief digression about practice. One should notice from the passages quoted immediately above that Collingwood reasons from a practitioner's point of view: only someone who has tried and paint a subject can write or understand these remarks. Collingwood refers from time to time to specific works of art, e.g., the landscapes of Cézanne and [PA: 144-146], musical pieces by Beethoven, whom he accuses of "ranting" [PA: 123]—an accusation also landed on Thomas Hardy [PA: 123]—, or poems by T. S. Eliot [PA: 310-311 & 333-335]. He also comments on performing arts, e.g., when he applauds the ideas of Rupert Doone [PA: 329-330] or when criticizes George Bernard Shaw's stage-directions in his introductions for being an "intolerable deal of verbiage" [PA: 327]). Although he does all this, he does not reason from examples and counter-examples like a philosopher who has never practiced any art but only speaks from the point of view of, e.g., someone visiting a museum or listening to

a concert. This is true to Collingwood's own view, stated in the preface, that philosophy of art should have "practical consequences bearing on the way in which we ought to approach the practice of art (whether as artists or as audience)" [PA: vii], and to his more general view that a philosopher should only speak about what he or she has first-hand knowledge. On the first score, one should notice that Collingwood argues, for example, for what was then a new, revolutionary approach to arts of performance: the involvement of the audience as "participants" in the work of artistic creation [PA: 329-330]—a idea which is quite in line with his view of the work of art as a collaborative work—, and that he argues at length in the book against "artistic individualism" (this will be discussed in section 3); on the second score, one must not forget that Collingwood was an accomplished draughtsman and pianist. Collingwood had certainly more knowledge of the arts than most of us and criticism based on apparent lack of references to specific examples in his discussion are truly devoid of merit.

The second step involves what Collingwood himself calls a "general theory of imagination and language" [PA: 305] of the sort I have tried to expound in the previous chapters. How this factors in the case of the work of art, I shall give the rough outline now and will give details in the next section and in the beginning of section 3.

Broadly sketched, Collingwood's manoeuvre consist of, first, recognizing that art is language and, secondly, that what had been argued about language in the second part of the book holds *mutatis mutandis*. Of course, if language is here understood in the natural but narrow sense of ordinary language, e.g., English or Japanese, then what Collingwood would have to say about art would be limited in scope. So Collingwood defines language in a broader fashion, as we shall see, in order to include all "bodily gestures"; he will then claim accordingly that dance is "the mother of all languages" [PA: 244, 246]. Moreover, he will claim that no art is truly limited to

one of the senses and therefore that “art proper” is “a total activity which the person enjoying it apprehends, or is conscious of, by the use of his imagination” [PA: 151]. This is the “total imaginative experience”, which is claimed by Collingwood to be identical to that of the artist. (This further claim has to be refined and argued for below.)

The issue is more complex than it looks at first blush. I argued in Chapter 2 that, in *The New Leviathan*, Collingwood shed the remnants of associationist psychology in his theory in favour of a more pronounced linguistic philosophy. Therefore, conclusions about understanding in the case of work of art reached in *The Principles of Art*, although never revised by Collingwood, should be taken *cum grano salis*. The “total imaginative experience” of the artist and the audience ought not to be understood in *psychologistic* manner as private, mental events or states. It is not possible fully to argue this delicate point here. But it should be clear in what follows that the resolution of the sceptical problem raised by the “Lockean” picture, presented earlier in this section, squares perfectly with the later developments in *The New Leviathan*, since the whole point of recognizing the experiences of the artist and the audience as being *identical* is that Collingwood’s starting point is not two private experiences, those of the artist and of her audience, whose similarity becomes problematic, but the work of art *itself* as being *inseparable* from the “total imaginative experience” of the artist as she created it. Art being language and thus public in nature, the work of art being a public artefact, there is precious little room for the sort of subjectivism on which scepticism thrives.

But Collingwood is embroiled in issues concerning the “total imaginative experience”. One should recall here the remarks listed above to the effect that:

If ‘work of art’ means work of art proper, a piece of music is not something audible, but something which may exist solely in the musician’s head. [PA: 151].

I have tried and argue that, despite these, Collingwood did not hold the “ideal theory” that Croce so obviously held. Now the whole point here is that it is precisely the “total imaginative experience” which is “in the head”, from which it follows that “the painted picture is not the work of art in the proper sense of that phrase” [PA: 305]. This seems to run counter to the claim, amply demonstrated in this section, that Collingwood did not distinguish between “expression” and “externalization”. But Collingwood was unrepentant and did not wish to give away the idea that the work of art “proper” is “in the head”:

No reader, I hope, has been inattentive enough to imagine that [...] this doctrine has been forgotten or denied. [PA: 305]

This remark certainly provides more grist to the mill of his critics; Collingwood seems to have painted himself into a corner. But the whole gist of Collingwood’s moves here was, as I have shown, to avoid the “Lockean” picture and its concomitant scepticism. So he could not have meant by “being in the head” what Croce meant.

Those interested in defending a “Collingwoodian” philosophy of art would soon move to the more linguistic theory of *The New Leviathan* and cull out some of his analyses in *The Principles of Art*. But my task here is to interpret Collingwood and I must try and conclusively show that he did not propound a mere variant of Croce’s philosophy.

Collingwood’s way out resides in his associating the thesis that to express is to externalize at the same time, i.e., that there is no ready-made emotion independent of externalization, with a thesis typical of associationist psychology, namely that “every idea is an impression which the work of consciousness converts into an idea” [PA: 306]. From this, Collingwood distinguishes

[...] between what transmutes (consciousness), what is transmuted (sensation), and what it is transmuted into (imagination). [PA: 307]¹⁰

¹⁰ See also [PA: 147-148].

With these distinctions kept in mind, Collingwood is able to save his thesis that the work of art is “in the head”, by simply pointing out that, on the one hand, *the activity of painting is the necessary basis from which consciousness generates the aesthetic experience* and, on the other hand, that *every part of this activity inseparably comes to existence in the painter’s consciousness*:

The transmuted or sensuous element in the aesthetic experience is the so-called outward element: in the case under examination, the artist’s psycho-physical activity of painting; his visual sensation of the colours and shapes of his subject, his felt gestures as he manipulates his brush, the seen shapes of paint patches that these gestures leave on his canvass; in short, the total sensuous (or rather, sensuous-emotional) experience of a man at work before his easel. Unless this sensuous experience were actually present, there would be nothing out of which consciousness could generate the aesthetic experience which is ‘externalized’ or ‘recorded’ or ‘expressed’ by the painted picture. But this sensuous experience, although it is actually present, is never present by itself. Every element in it comes into existence under the eyes of the painter’s consciousness [...] [PA: 307].

(One should notice here that Collingwood says here of the “aesthetic experience” that it is “‘externalized’ or ‘recorded’ or ‘expressed’ by the painted picture”: this shows that he indeed did not distinguish between “expression” and “externalization” and, furthermore, the use of scare quotes indicates how distrustful he is of such manners of speaking, which makes perfectly good sense when one sees that he did not believe that there is something prior, complete and independent which is to be “externalized”.)

To understand properly Collingwood’s way out, one must indeed go back to his “theory of imagination and language”, as I shall argue in details in the next sections. For the moment, I hope that it is clear that Collingwood’s theses, however unpalatable they may appear in their associationist garb, have precious little in common with those of Croce, with which they cannot be associated, only to be then summarily dismissed.

§ 2. Artistic Imagination

In this section, I shall look at the application made by Collingwood of his “theory of imagination and language”, that I already presented in Chapter 2, section 2, to the case of art. There are three different level of consciousness in *The Principles of Art*: the psychical level, imagination, and intellect. Art has to do primarily to the passage from the psychical level to the level of imagination. This passage is described in this book in terms taken out of the old British associationist psychology; indeed, we saw in Chapter 2, section 2, Collingwood tied his conception of “imagination” with Hume’s distinction between impressions and ideas [PA: 203, 211, 306]:

In the flux of sensations, one pattern of total sensory field is being replaced by another. Attention now focuses itself on one element in that field: for example this scarlet patch. [...] By thus adjusting our attention we do not make our organs of sense work in a different way; we do not lift any *sensa*, as such, out of their native flux; [...] What we have done is no doubt very little; but that little is very important, we have liberated ourselves for a moment from the flux of sensation and kept something before us long enough to get a fair sight of it. *At the same time we have converted it from impression to idea.* [PA: 210] (My italics)

There must, [...] be a form of experience other than sensation, but closely related to it: so closely as to be easily mistaken for it, but different in that the colours, sounds, and so on which in this experience we ‘perceive’ are retained in some way or other before the mind, anticipated, recalled, although these same colours and sounds, in their capacity as *sensa*, have ceased to be seen and heard. This other form of experience is what we ordinarily call imagination; [...] [PA: 202]

Here, “imagination” means, as Donagan puts it, “the act of raising something preconscious into consciousness” [LPC: 116]. I shall call this sense of the word “imagination”, sense A. According to Collingwood, the aesthetic experience is an “imaginative experience” of that sort:

Every imaginative experience is a sensuous experience raised to the imaginative level by an act of consciousness; or, every imaginative experience is a sensuous experience together with consciousness of the same. Now the aesthetic experience is an imaginative experience. It is wholly and entirely imaginative; it contains no elements that are not imaginative, and the only power which can generate it is the power of the experient’s consciousness. But it is not generated out of nothing. Being an imaginative experience, it presupposes a corresponding sensuous experience;

where to say that it presupposes this does not mean that it arises subsequently to this, but that it is generated by the act which converts this into it [PA: 306-307]

But, as a controversy between T. Mischel and J. Bailey in the pages of the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* made clear a long time ago, Collingwood equivocates between two senses of the word “imagination”¹¹. As pointed out by Donagan, at times Collingwood uses the terms ‘to imagine’ or ‘imagination’ to mean “the act of forming images” [LPC: 116]. This is obviously the meaning at work in, e.g., the passages where Collingwood discussed the case of the engineer who forms in his mind the plan of a bridge [PA: 131-135]. As Sclafani points out, in such passages, “‘imaginary’ clearly means something like ‘in the form of a mental image’, or ‘of the nature of an image or representation’” [Sclafani 1976: 354]. This sense, which I shall call sense B, differs from sense A, above. It has been used as a basis for idealist interpretations of Collingwood by a number of commentators.¹² To consider this meaning as the ‘official meaning’ in *The Principles of Art* is a typical move for believers in the notion of a “Croce-Collingwood” theory.

The following passage, already quoted in part, lends credence to this approach:

(2) If ‘work of art’ means work of art proper, a piece of music is not something audible, but something which may exist solely in the musician’s head. (3) To some extent it must exist solely in the musician’s head (including, of course, the audience as well as the composer under that name), for his imagination is always supplementing, correcting, and expurgating what he actually hears. (4) The music which he actually enjoys as a work of art is thus never sensuously or ‘actually’ heard at all. It is something imagined. [PA: 151]

Here “imagined” is contrasted with “actually heard”. It is implied that what is imagined is something ‘unreal’ as opposed to what is ‘really perceived’. This is pretty much in accordance with ordinary usage, as Collingwood himself pointed out [PA: 131]. But, as Sclafani has also

¹¹ See [Mischel 1961] & [Bailey 1963], also [LPC: 116] and [Sclafani 1976: 354-355].

¹² For example, [Mothersill 1984: 141], [Sharpe 1983: 95], [Armstrong 1983: 139], [MacDonald 1960: 215], [Blocker 1972: 531], [Turner 1958: 277], [Donnell 1975: 236], [Dickie 1997: 66-67] and so on. See also the discussion in [Hausman 1998: 391-393], [Dilworth 1998: 393-396], [Ridley 1998a: 396-398].

pointed out [Sclafani 1976: 354], *Collingwood rejected the picture of meaning implicit in sense B* (this is the picture which I called “Lockean” in the previous section), in his lengthy discussion of the discussion between sensation and imagination in Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Berkeley, and others [PA: 172-194]. At any rate *there are passages where this sense B is simply implausible*. These are the many passages, such as this one, where Collingwood talks about the “imaginative activity” or “imaginative experience” [Sclafani 1976: 354]:

The aesthetic experience, or artistic activity, is the experience of expressing one’s emotions, and that which expresses them is the total imaginative activity called indifferently language or art. This is art proper. [PA: 275]

In such passages, applying sense B would result in reading Collingwood as claiming in a circular fashion that the imaginative experience an experience of something imaginary, i.e., something “in the head”.

Sclafani could have simply quoted the following remark:

Imagination is indifferent to the distinction between the real and the unreal. [PA: 136]¹³

Incidentally, to this sentence Collingwood appended a footnote where one reads:

The reader understands, I hope, that everything I say in Book I is avowedly provisional, and that my theory of art is not stated until Book III. [PA: 136n.]

The reader should notice that the remarks cited by believers in the notion of a “Croce-Collingwood” theory are almost all taken from Book I (up to page 153) and that my interpretation relies heavily on passages from the beginning of Book III (from page 273 onwards)...

At any rate, as Sclafani wrote:

In general, by ‘imaginative’ Collingwood means ‘having to do with conscious mental activity’, where ‘conscious’ is used in its ordinary sense of ‘aware’. The

¹³ This is a frequent claim: “the distinction between reality and unreality is a distinction which the aesthetic consciousness does not make” [Collingwood 1927: 231-232]; “The imaginary is not the opposite of the real, but the indifferent identity of the real and its opposite” [OPA: 54].

activity of expressing one's emotions, then, is the activity of becoming conscious or aware of one's thoughts, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, etc. [Sclafani 1976: 355]

This is what I meant by sense A; there is a tradition of use of the word "imagination" in that sense that harks back not to the British empiricists, but to Addison and Vico in the case of aesthetics, as Collingwood himself points out [PA: 138n.]. One should note that it is thus not the ordinary meaning that Collingwood has in my mind when he equates in this passage "art proper", with the "imaginative activity". As Sclafani further pointed out [Sclafani 1976: 355], this "imaginative experience" was equated by Collingwood with *language* [PA: 247, 275], which is public and not with some psychological process. I shall come back to language in section 3. For the moment, I should conclude, with Donagan and Sclafani, that the proper sense of "imagination" in *The Principles of Art* is sense A and that Collingwood erred because he equivocated with sense B, which must be rejected. To paraphrase Aaron Ridley, Collingwood did not see the "imaginative experience" as the experience of something imaginary, "in the head", but as "a way of experiencing something real" such as music [Ridley 1997: 265].

It is not superfluous to point out here how misleading George Dickie's recent presentation, in *Introduction to Aesthetics. An analytic Approach* [Dickie 1997], of Collingwood can be. Citing Donagan, Dickie recognized that Collingwood confused two different senses –my senses A and B— of "imagination". But Dickie basically takes the opposite tack and thinks that sense B must have been the correct sense of "imagination" according to Collingwood and that it is sense A must be rejected. He even claims that sense A is "redundant":

Collingwood is correct when he concludes that a work of art *may* be imaginary in the [sense B]; for example, a poet might create a poem by saying some words to himself, and the poem would be only [...] "in the head." Let it be assumed that Collingwood is also right in thinking that *all* works of art are imaginary in the second sense, namely that they are the result of bringing something into consciousness [sense A]. Nothing about bringing something into consciousness requires that the thing so brought is necessarily "in the head" only. For example, when an artist paints on a canvas, he brings something, say, the representation of

a woman, into consciousness, but the representation is a public object and not in the head only. The second sense [sense A] of “to imagine” appears to be identical with what Collingwood means by “to express”, so that to say that works of art are expressions *and* imaginary in the second sense [sense A] is redundant. [Dickie 1997: 66]

From this conclusion, Dickie further argues that Collingwood “denies that such public objects as statues, paintings, and the like are works of art” [Dickie 1997: 67]. There is no refutation in Dickie’s text of the above arguments, which show the erroneousness of the attribution of sense B to Collingwood.

A few more points need to be made concerning the notion of “imagination”, which also work against readings such as Dickie’s. First, the idea of “being in the head” implies the possibility of fancy, while it is clear from a number of the above-quoted passages that Collingwood *never* claimed that there could be a work of art without a sensuous-emotional element to bring to consciousness. As a matter of fact, it should be plain from the end of last section that Collingwood considers the existence of a sensuous-emotional element as a *necessary condition* for having an aesthetic, imaginative experience. (One should note here the parallel with the case of historical imagination discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.)

As Gordon Graham puts it, imagination is “distinguished from mere fancy or whimsy” and is rather “a deliberative act of mind” [Graham 2000: 53]. Collingwood also makes plain that imagination is not to be confused with “make-believe” [PA: 135f.], which presupposes it: make-believe is “imagination acting under the censorship of desire; where desire means [...] the desire that the situation imagined were real” [PA: 137]. It thus involves the distinction between ‘real’ and ‘unreal’. (To which, it as already been pointed out, imagination is said to be “indifferent” [PA: 136].) The confusion of imagination and make-believe is at the source of the confusion between art proper and “amusement art” [PA: 138]. And amusement art is but a kind of craft. We reach here the distinction between art and craft, with which Collingwood is preoccupied in the first

chapters of *The Principles of Art*.¹⁴ All this shows how wrong it would be to identify “imagination” in art with having (unreal) images in the head, i.e., with “make-believe”. It would lead one exactly to what Collingwood believed to be “sham” art [PA: 136]. It also clear from this that Collingwood clearly rejected the possibility that imagination is capricious mental flattering.

Secondly, one should notice that “imagination”, understood correctly as “a way of experiencing something real” [Ridley 1997: 265], is not passive but active. As Peter Lewis puts it, “appreciation of art requires active engagement with the work, involving acts of imagination and intellect through which a member of the audience recreates in his own mind the emotion which the work expresses” [Lewis 1995: 212]. In his masterful interpretation, Aaron Ridley proposes to see Collingwood as holding “the relation between noises and music to be a necessary relation”, so that it becomes “a conceptual truth that no one who does not hear the noises can possibly reconstruct the music” [Ridley 1997: 265].¹⁵ What Collingwood means is clarified by his own example of listening to a person’s lecture on a scientific subject:

We hear the sound of his voice; but what he is doing is not simply to make noises, but to develop a scientific thesis. The noises are meant to assist us in achieving what he assumes to be our purpose in coming to hear him lecture, that is, thinking this same scientific thesis for ourselves. The lecture, therefore, is not a collection of noises made by the lecturer with his organs of speech; it is a collection of scientific thoughts related to those noises in such a way that a person who not only hears but thinks as well becomes able to think these thoughts for himself. We may call this the communication of thought by means of speech, if we like; but if we do, we must think of communication not as an ‘imparting’ of thought by the speaker to the hearer, the speaker somehow planting his thought in the hearer’s receptive mind, but as a ‘reproduction’ of the speaker’s thought by the hearer, in virtue of his own active thinking. [PA: 140]

¹⁴ Although the distinction between art and craft is problematic for a lot of commentators, e.g., [Fethe 1977], [Ingram 1978], [Duran 1978] and [Mounce 1991] it is not my contention to discuss it in this thesis. I should merely refer the reader to [Ridley 1998b: 12-17] for a particularly apt defense of it. Mention should also be made of [Janaway 1992], which shows that Plato’s views on the distinction between art as craft are in fact closer to Collingwood’s than he believed.

¹⁵ Ridley presents this interpretation as “charitable reading” of Collingwood; however, it seems to me to be quite obvious that this *is* what Collingwood actually means.

When one understands a scientific lecture, one does not hear the sound of the lecturer's voice in a passive manner: if one could understand this way, a monkey or a cat would be able to understand the lecture as well. Collingwood here states the obvious fact that the content to be understood is not the same thing as the noise. However, the content, i.e., the thoughts, and the noise of the lecturer's voice are not independent entities. They are an inseparable whole. One naturally converts a mere series of noises into the meaningful scientific address "in one's head". This work is called by Collingwood "imagination". This is exactly what was presented in Chapter 2, section 2, as work of consciousness or attention. Thus, in the case of the above example, to listen to the lecture is "to pay attention to the theses the lecturer propounds, to re-create in our own minds the thoughts in his" [Bailey 1963: 376]. The act of listening in the previous quotation is completely different from hearing passively his speech as noise. It requires an *active* labour of thinking [Ridley 1997: 264], [Graham 2000: 35]. Therefore, the lecture is

[...] something which we have to reconstruct in our own minds, and by our own efforts; something which remains for ever inaccessible to a person who cannot or will not make efforts of the right kind, however completely he hears the sounds that fill the room in which he is sitting. [PA: 141]

In this passage, Collingwood uses the word "reconstruct"; according to my interpretation, *he could as well have used the word "re-enact"*. One should also notice that, once more, Collingwood makes his ideas plain by reasoning from analogy with the case of understanding in language. This is further proof that he was propounding a unified, general theory of understanding.

In this "reconstruction", imagination works silently, so to speak, by supplying and correcting:

The corrections which imagination must carry out, in order that we should be able to listen to an entire orchestra, beggar description. When we listen to a speaker or singer, imagination is constantly supplying articulate sounds which actually our

ears do not catch. In looking at a drawing in pen or pencil, we take a series of roughly parallel lines for the tint of a shadow. And so on. [PA: 143]

Furthermore, “imagination works negatively” [PA: 143] and we “disimagine”:

We disimagine, if I may use the word, a great deal which we actually see and hear. The street noises at a concert, the noises made by our breathing and shuffling neighbours, and even some of the noises made by the performers, are thus shut out of the picture unless by their loudness or in some other way they are too obtrusive to be ignored. [PA: 143]

(It is hard to see how cases of “disimagination” such as these can be accounted for if one follows Dickie and retains only sense B.)

The above suggests to Collingwood that a work of art is divisible in two parts:

(1) There is a specialized sensuous experience, an experience of seeing or hearing as the case may be. (2) There is also a non-specialized imaginative experience, involving not only elements homogeneous, after their imaginary fashion, with those which make up the specialized sensuous experience, but others heterogeneous with them. [PA: 147-148]

This active role of imagination is not meant to turn appreciation of art into a subjective activity. As is so often the case, Collingwood is preoccupied —not to say: obsessed— with “realism”, from which he always demarcates his views. Ironically enough, in his days, the very few realist who wrote about aesthetics, Samuel Alexander and E. F. Carritt, held a subjectivist view; which is an ancestor of the emotivism that logical positivists such as A. J. Ayer also adopted in the late 1930s [Ayer 1952: chap. VI], which, in turn, brought about the near disappearance of the topic in the English-speaking world. Citing Alexander and Carritt, Collingwood characterized the realist position as the claim that by contact with the works of art we are stimulated to “certain free activities of our own” but we then “impute” a value to the works of art which “actually belongs not to them but to us” [PA: 149].¹⁶

¹⁶ The views here attributed to Alexander are found in the first chapter of *Beauty and other Forms of Value*, in particular in [Alexander 1933: 25-26]. Now Alexander’s notion of “imputation” differs slightly from my

Before stating Collingwood's position, I should like to point out that this subjectivist position seems to derive from the "Lockean" picture presented in the previous section. In this picture, we have three elements: the image-in-the-head-of-the-artist, its (contingent) externalization in a physical object, and the image-in-the-head-of-the-audience, formed by contact with the physical object. This picture naturally brings about scepticism, since there is no guarantee that the image-in-the-head-of-the-audience actually corresponds to the image-in-the-head-of-the-artist. (And any case of misinterpretation —there is no lack of them—, seem to lend support to this scepticism.) One may react by rejecting the picture, as I claimed Collingwood did, hence his "objectivism", or accepting it and coat it with some philosophical explanation. The subjectivism espoused by the realists is of the latter kind: it is granted at the outset that the image-in-the-head-of-the-audience is not the same as the image-in-the-head-of-the-artist, it is some "free activity of our own"; what is merely added to this is the claim that the image-in-the-head-of-the-audience, stimulated as it is by contact with the physical object, is then "imputed" to the object. This "imputation" is thus implicitly recognized as (potentially) *groundless*.

presentation: Alexander is interested in the process of art creation and hardly talks about interpretation. Alexander claims that, e.g. when a sculptor sculpting a bust, the subject causes some "constructive" excitement or impulse in the mind of the artist, who then works the consequences of it by "mixing his mind with materials" in the following way: "He makes his bust live by importing into the dead clay the life which he sees in the model or subject. With his hand he imputes life into the clay" [Alexander 1933: 25]. Alexander further likens this to ordinary perception, where the perceiver has a "conation" of something physical but goes through a "mental process of enlargement" by which he supplements this. However, "the object so brought before the mind forms part of the whole perceived external object because the conation to which it corresponds is linked with the conations evoked by the presented external thing" [Alexander 1933: 26]. In other words, this process of "imputation" implies, in the case of the interpretation of the work of art, that the interpreter fuses together a perception of the physical object and some other imputed element that comes from his own mind, but which is still said to be physical: "The observer interprets what he sees. But what he adds to what he sees is of the same order as what he sees, is physical and not mental" [Alexander 1933: 26]. To this puzzling view, I should add that Alexander merely points out that, "as Mr. Croce made clear, appreciation of beautiful art is to repeat the creation of it" [Alexander 1933: 29], and therefore does not address the sceptical challenge that I made central to my interpretation of Collingwood.

Obviously, Collingwood (or anyone, for that matter, who approaches the arts from a practitioner's point of view) could not accept this. To quote again a key passage, he presented his view as the antithesis of the "realist" one:

If the artist paints his picture in such a way that we, when we look at it using our imagination, find ourselves enjoying an [...] experience [...] like that which he enjoyed when painting it, there is not much sense in saying that we bring this experience with us to the picture and do not find it there. The artist, if we told him that, would laugh at us and assure us that what we believed ourselves to have read into the picture was just what he put there. [PA: 150]

It is indeed ironical that Collingwood opposes the realists here, since it is he who is a realist, or, more to the point, an objectivist, and them who are anti-realist or subjectivist.¹⁷ This is clearly seen from these passages, where Collingwood characterizes, in the first quotation, the realist position, and then denies it, in the second passage:

This attempt [...] depends on distinguishing what we find in the work of art, its actual sensuous qualities, as put there by the artist, from something else which we do not strictly find in it, but rather import into it from our own stores of experience and powers of imagination. The first is conceived as objective, really belonging to the work of art: the second as subjective, belonging not to it but to activities which go on in us when we contemplate it. [PA: 148-149]

[...] the two parts of the experience are not contrasted in the way [the realists] fancied them to be. There is no justification for saying that the sensuous part of it is something we find and the imaginative part something we bring, or that the sensuous part is objectively 'there' in the 'work of art', the imaginative part subjective, a mode of consciousness as distinct from a quality of a thing. Certainly we find the colours there in the painting; but we find the colours there in the painting because we are actively using our eyes, and have eyes of such a kind as to see what the painter wanted us to see, which a colour-blind person could not have done. We bring our powers of vision with us, and find what they reveal. Similarly, we bring our imaginative powers with us, and find what they reveal: namely, an imaginative experience of total activity which we find in the picture because the painter had put it there. [PA: 150-151]

¹⁷ This statement must be qualified, since Alexander also defended a form of objectivity. See the first footnote to this Chapter. But it seems that Alexander based his defence of the objectivity of beauty (not art) on the simple fact that the object which is said to be beautiful is physical. This hardly compares with Collingwood's defence of the objectivity of the emotion expressed in the work of art.

One should note that Collingwood's "objectivism" does not rely on the claim that we "passively" find in the picture what is there; this would be a surreptitious reliance on the realist epistemology of Cook Wilson, Prichard, etc. As Collingwood says here "we find the colours there in the painting because we are actively using our eyes". We find it because we are "actively" engaged in interpreting the work of art, the same way, as we saw, we play an active role in understanding a scientific lecture. The way Collingwood put it may look dated, his arguments may contain blemishes, but the message is actual; as a matter of fact it has almost become a mantra of contemporary aesthetics.

The above reference to an "imaginative experience of total activity" or "total imaginative experience" must now be explained. The word "total" must not be misleading the reader into believing that Collingwood is here referring to some obscure psychological process. The idea of a 'total imaginative activity' already comes from the fact that imagination supplies, corrects, eliminates, etc. It also supplements the data of one sense with those of another. For example, in Greek tragedy, comedians wear masks so one cannot perceive their facial expression, so in order to know that they are sad or happy, we must use other means, such as perception of their tone of voice [PA: 142]. These are the "heterogeneous" elements, alluded to above, that the imaginative experience brings to the "specialized sensuous experience".

Collingwood's notion of "total imaginative experience" may look at first blush strange, to say the least. It should be noted, however, that it is closely linked with the aesthetics theories of his times. Indeed, the section on "The total imaginative experience" opens up with a description of Cézanne's manner of painting, with the intent to show that he was right, because "painting can never be a visual art" because a man "paints with his hands, not with his eyes" [PA: 144]:

[Cézanne's] landscapes have lost almost every trace of visuality. Trees never looked like that; that is how they feel to a man who encounters them with his eyes

shut, blundering against them blindly. A bridge is no longer a pattern of colour [...] it is a perplexing mixture of projections and recessions, over and round which we find ourselves feeling our way as one can imagine an infant feeling its way, when it has barely begun to crawl, among the nursery furniture. And over the landscape broods the obsession of Mont Saint-Victoire, never looked at, but always felt, as a child feels the table over the back of his head. [PA: 144]

Admittedly, Cézanne was not a representative of the *avant-garde* in the late 1930s. But in ‘Form and Content in Art’, one finds him admiring what looks like (it is hard to say) a cubist painting:

I would rather see women painted with their faces all corners than with the exaggerated softness and fluffiness that are still the conventional marks of a female portrait. [Collingwood 1964: 222-223]

At any rate, the point of Collingwood’s mention of Cézanne is that he exemplifies a theory that was fostered by the greatest art historian and critic of that era, Bernard Berenson, in his famous studies of Italian Renaissance painters, which is that painting is not merely visual, it also stimulates our sense of touch:¹⁸

The forgotten truth about painting which was rediscovered by what may be called the Cézanne-Berenson approach to it was that the spectator’s experience on looking at a picture is not a specifically visual experience at all. What he experiences does not consist of what he sees. It does not even consist of this as modified, supplemented, and expurgated by the work of the visual imagination. It does belong to sight alone, it belongs also (and on some occasions even more essentially) to touch [...] what we get from looking at a picture is not merely the experience of seeing [...] it is also, and in Mr. Berenson’s opinion more importantly, the imaginary experience of certain complicated muscular movement” [PA: 147]

¹⁸ In that section, Collingwood also refers to the books by the artist Vernon Blake. Of Blake, Collingwood retained the idea of the “superstition” of the plane of the picture: “hold your pencil vertical to the paper, said he; don’t stroke the paper, dig into it; think of it as if it were the surface of a slab of clay in which you were to cut a relief, and of your pencil as a knife. Then you will find that you can draw something which is not a mere pattern on paper, but a solid thing lying inside or behind the paper” [PA: 145]. Collingwood is probably alluding to Blake’s *Relation in Art*, where similar ideas are expressed. Indeed, according to Blake, “the surface of the paper should not exist for us” and “we must feel as though we were carving the figure out of a soft block of clay or butter, cutting it out with a knife”, this “knife-like use” of the pencil being obtained by holding it in a vertical position [Blake 1925: 202]. This vertical position, we learn from another book, is an old, much valuable, Chinese technique [Blake 1927: 51].

This indeed an idea Berenson introduced in his study of the Florentine painters, which opens with some remarks about the essence of art:

[...] painting is an art which aims at giving an abiding impression of artistic reality with only two dimensions. The painter must, therefore, do consciously what we all do unconsciously, –construct his third dimension. And he can accomplish his task only as we accomplish ours, by giving tactile values to retinal impressions. His first business, therefore, is to rouse the tactile sense, for I must have the illusion of being able to touch a figure, I must have the illusion of varying muscular sensation inside my palm and fingers corresponding to the various projections of this figure, before I shall take it for granted as real, and let it affect me lastingly. It follows that the essential in the art of painting [...] is somehow to stimulate our consciousness of tactile values, so that the picture shall have at least as much power as the object represented, to appeal to our tactile imagination. [Berenson 1906: 4-5]

Thumbing through Berenson's four studies,¹⁹ one finds numerous comments about the stimulation of the "tactile imagination"; he finds in particular Giotto and Masaccio to be great masters of it. For example, of Masaccio's magnificent frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel, in the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine, Berenson wrote:

Dust-bitten and ruined though [Masaccio's] Brancacci Chapel frescoes now are, I never see them without the strongest stimulation of my tactile consciousness. I feel that I could touch every figure, that it would yield a definite resistance to my touch, that I should have to expend thus much effort to displace it, that I could walk around it. [Berenson 1906: 29; 1952: 50]

Collingwood's comment on Berenson is rather to the point:

When Mr. Berenson speaks of tactile values, he is not thinking of things like the texture of fur and cloth, the cool roughness of bark, the smoothness or grittiness of a stone, and other qualities which things exhibit to our sensitive finger-tips. As his own statements abundantly show, he is thinking, or thinking in the main, of distance and space and mass: not of touch sensations, but of motor sensations such as we experience by using our muscles and moving our limbs. But these are not actual motor sensations, they are imaginary motor sensations. In order to enjoy them when looking at a Masaccio we need not walk straight through the picture, or even stride about the gallery; what we are doing is to imagine ourselves as moving in these ways. [PA: 147]

¹⁹ Later on reprinted together under one cover in [Berenson 1952].

Indeed, Berenson himself writes, for example, of a painting by Pollaiuolo that “we imagine ourselves imitating all the movements” [Berenson 1906: 55; 1952: 61].

I quoted at length Collingwood’s discussion of Cézanne and Berenson because it infuses meaning to what he meant by the “total imaginative experience”, in the particular case of painting. It has mostly to do with the fact that imagination brings in heterogeneous elements, i.e., the sense of touch, in the visual perception of a painting. This is clearly expressed in a later passage from Book III:

[W]hen the painter talks of seeing he is not referring to mere visual sensation. He does not think that one’s eyes become sharper through the exercise of painting. Seeing, in his vocabulary, refers not to sensation but to awareness. It means noticing what you see. And further: this act of awareness, as he is talking about it, includes the noticing of much that is not visual. It includes an awareness of ‘tactile values’ or the solid shapes of things, their relative distances, and other spatial facts which could be sensuously apprehended only through muscular motion. It includes, too, an awareness of things like warmth and coolness, stillness and noise. In other words, it is [...] a total imaginative experience. [PA: 304]

In a sense, all this Cézanne-Berenson theory is unproblematic. As Bailey put it, “the imaginary motor gestures I create in studying a Masaccio are just as much the legitimate concern of imagination as is, for example, the idea that though I can see but three sides of a matchbox I conclude that there is a fourth” [Bailey 1963: 377]. It should be clear at once that it has *nothing to do with the psychological notion of “empathy”*. To see this, one merely has to contrast the above passages with, e.g., the following remarks by one of the great theoreticians of *Einfühlung*, Theodor Lipps:

In aesthetic imitation I become progressively less aware of muscular tensions or of sense-feelings in general the more I surrender in contemplation to the aesthetic object. All such preoccupations disappear entirely from my consciousness. I am completely and wholly carried away from this sphere of my experience. [...] Empathy means, not a sensation in one’s body, but feeling something, namely oneself, into the aesthetic object. [...] empathy is of the same nature [...] in the contemplation of architectural forms. In viewing a large hall I feel an inner “expansion”, my heart “expands”; I have this peculiar sense of what is happening

within me. Connected with it are muscle-tensions, perhaps those involved in the expansion of the chest. To be sure, they do not exist for my consciousness, so long as my attention is directed to the spacious hall. [...] As a matter of truth, so far as I am concerned the sensations of my own bodily state are entirely absent in aesthetic contemplation. [Lipps 1960: 380-381]

The “total imaginative experience” is neither a re-living (in the sense of Dilthey’s *Nacherleben*). It surely does not mean that one goes through a re-enactment of the movements and feelings —if one means those at the psychical level, this is excluded by Collingwood— of the artist as he creates the work of art. Collingwood did not construe the “total imaginative experience” as a psychological process; as a passage already quoted made it plain, he actually defined “art proper” as “the total imaginative activity called indifferently language or art” [PA: 275]. To this, I must now turn.

§ 3. Language and Community

As I said already a few times, in *The Principles of Art* Collingwood equates art and language, i.e., with controlled bodily gestures, thus allowing for an extension of the theory of meaning to the case of art. It should be clear by now that this equation, and the reliance on a “general theory of imagination and language” [PA: 305], are crucial for his resolution of the sceptical problem linked with the “Lockean” picture. Moreover, it should also be clear that it is central to an interpretation of his philosophy which is diametrically opposed to the notion of a “Croce-Collingwood” theory. On the other hand, one should recall from Chapter 2, sections 2 and 3, that Collingwood’s “general theory of imagination and language” is defective and that he moved to a more pronounced and more satisfactory linguistic theory in *The New Leviathan*; his last views are still defective to some extent, as we have seen, following Donagan, in Chapter 2, section 3. But the gist of this discussion is that the move from *The Principles of Art* to *The New Leviathan* and

to a fully linguistic theory is a natural one that does not force a reconsideration of other parts of his philosophy. It looks more like a *post factum* adjustment to an underlying theory, inherited from his elders, as a result of advances within the philosophy of history and the philosophy of art, in the late 1930s. I shall therefore not focus in the section on the defective character of Collingwood's "general theory of imagination and language"; it has been dealt with already in Chapter 2. In the first part of this section, I wish simply to explain what Collingwood meant when he equated art and language and to draw out some of the implications of this claim. After this, I should have laid out enough background elements of Collingwood's aesthetic theory so that in the second part I should make a brief incursion in his philosophy of art in order to show how it fits in. I shall be preoccupied with showing that the objectivity argued for in the aesthetics is at the basis of the central claim of the philosophy of art, namely that art is the struggle against the corruption of consciousness and that this struggle *is* the social role of art. I shall also emphasize the anti-individualistic nature of Collingwood's philosophy of art: according to him, artistic creation is a collaborative work which includes the audience as well. This will echo to the remarks made in the introduction to this Chapter at the same time as it will, I hope, put the last nail in the coffin of the notion that there is such a thing as a "Croce-Collingwood" theory.

In the flux of sensations, patterns of "total sensory fields" replace one another. These patterns are made of complexes of *sensa* and their associated emotional charge, that are referred to by Collingwood as a "psychical emotions" (as opposed to "emotions of consciousness", such as shame, anger, etc. that arise through consciousness of the self [PA; 231f.]). These psychical emotions have as counterparts some physiological changes that betray one's emotions to a skilled observer [PA: 230]. But such changes are uncontrolled and they are not what Collingwood calls

an “expression” of the emotion,²⁰ although, as in the case of panic in a crowd, something gets communicated. Such reactions occur “independently of consciousness” [PA: 228-9]. But through awareness these can be brought to the level of consciousness (alternatively called “imagination”), where such emotions are said to be “dominated” [PA: 207, 235f., 291]. In such cases,

[...] the bodily acts which express these emotions, instead of being simply automatisms of our psycho-physical organism, are experienced in our new self-consciousness as activities belonging to ourselves, and controlled in the same sense as the emotions they express. [PA: 235]

Such *controlled* bodily gestures, which express emotions, are what Collingwood calls “language”:

Bodily actions expressing certain emotions, in so far as they come under our control and are conceived by us, in our awareness of controlling them, as our way of expressing these emotions, are language. [PA: 235]

This, of course, is not what we normally expect as a definition of language. Collingwood is aware of this and he adds:

The word ‘language’ is here used not in its narrow and etymologically proper sense to denote activities of our vocal organs, but in a wider sense in which it includes any activity of any organ which is expressive in the same way in which speech is expressive. In this wide sense, language is simply bodily expression of emotion, dominated by thought in its primitive form as consciousness. [PA: 235]²¹

Ordinary languages as we know them are just a “highly specialized form of language” and speech is not primarily a system of sounds, but “essentially it is a system of gestures made with larynx, and the cavities of the mouth and nose” having the peculiarity that “each gesture produces a

²⁰ Nor is, incidentally, the description of an emotion the expression of an emotion [PA: 111f.].

²¹ As I have already mentioned in Chapter 2, section 3, Collingwood keeps this definition in *The New Leviathan*: “By ‘language’ I mean not only speech, that is, language consisting of movements in the mouth-cavity producing sounds; I mean that chiefly, because that is the most highly developed kind of language men possess: but I also mean any system of bodily movements, not necessarily vocal, whereby the men who make them *mean* or *signify* anything” [NL: 6.1].

characteristic sound” [PA: 243].²² In general, “every kind of language in this way a specialized form of bodily gesture” [PA: 243-244]. This leads Collingwood to the claim that “dance”, being closer to the “original language of total bodily gesture”, is “the mother of all languages” [PA: 244, 246].

This “original language of total bodily gesture” is a key concept:

This ‘original’ language of total bodily gesture is thus the one and only real language, which everybody who is in any way expressing himself is using all the time. What we call speech and the other kinds of language are only parts of it which have undergone specialized development; in this specialized development they never come altogether detached from the parent organism. [PA: 247]

Thus the “original language of total bodily gesture” is “the motor side of our total imaginative experience” [PA: 247], which is, in turn, “art proper”. This is how Collingwood comes to identify art with language and the various forms of art with languages that have evolved from the “original language of total bodily gesture”.

So “language is simply bodily expression of emotion”. But “expression” means raising to the level of consciousness. The relationship between emotions and language is thus the following:

To whatever level of experience an emotion may belong, it cannot be felt without being expressed. There are no unexpressed emotions. At the psychical level this is easy to see; a psychical emotion, if felt at all, is psychically expressed by an automatic reaction of the animal that feels it. [...] It is not all emotions that can be expressed in language, but only emotions of consciousness or psychical emotions raised to the level of consciousness; and the same consciousness which generates these emotions or converts them from impressions into ideas *generates also and simultaneously their appropriate linguistic expression*. [PA: 238] (My italics)

²² Collingwood also introduces a distinction between “language in its primitive form” and “language in its intellectualized form”: “Taking first the broad distinction between sensation and thought, the emotional charges upon sense-experience, felt as they are at a purely psychical level, are psychically expressed by automatic reactions. The emotional charges upon thought-experiences are expressed by the controlled activity of language. Taking next the distinction within thought of consciousness and intellect, the emotions of consciousness are expressed by language in its primitive and original form; but intellect has its emotions too, and these must have an appropriate expression, which must be language in its intellectualized form” [PA: 266-7]. But this distinction is of no consequence in what follows and we can leave it aside.

There are thus “no unexpressed emotions” and the raising of the emotion to the level of consciousness is nothing but the simultaneous linguistic expression of it. The thought is repeated elsewhere:

[...] the expression of emotion is not, as it were, a dress made to fit an emotion already existing but is *an activity without which the experience of that emotion cannot exist. Take away the language, and you take away what it expressed*; there is nothing left but crude feeling at the merely psychic level. [PA: 244] (My italics)

Once more, it is hard to see how this could fit the “Croce-Collingwood” theory.

Collingwood’s argument now rests on his extending some conclusions about one part, ordinary language, to the whole set of languages of art. I have already discussed some points of Collingwood’s philosophy of language throughout Chapter 2. Here, I should like to say a few words, and provide ample textual evidence, about one specific point, namely the fact that Collingwood’s philosophy of language is devised to explain that the re-centring, or interchangeability of the points of view between the I and Thou, which is necessary for re-enactment, comes naturally to anyone who masters a language, because these are but the points of view of the speaker and the hearer, which we simultaneously assume when we speak.

First, Collingwood points out that self-consciousness emerges along with the consciousness of others and this a discovery is the discovery of the self as a speaker and a hearer:

Consciousness does not begin as a mere self-consciousness, [...] and then proceed by some process [...] to construct or infer other persons. Each one of us is a finite being, surrounded by others of the same kind; and the consciousness of our own existence is also the consciousness of the existence of these others. [...] the child’s discovery of itself as a person is also its discovery of itself as a member of a world of persons. [...] The discovery of myself as a person is the discovery that I can speak, and am thus a persona or speaker; in speaking, I am both speaker and hearer; and since the discovery of myself as a person is also the discovery of other persons around me, it is the discovery of speakers and hearers other than myself. Thus, from the first, the experience of speech contains in itself in principle the experiences of speaking to others and of hearing others speak to me. [PA: 248-9]

Understanding takes place as the result of a re-centring of the hearer as the speaker:

The expression [of emotion] is speech, and the speaker is his own first hearer. As hearing himself speak he is conscious of himself as possessor of the idea which he hears himself expressing. [...] we describe [...] our situation as hearers of what we ourselves say. The person to whom speech is addressed is already familiar with this double situation. [...] The hearer [...] conscious that he is being addressed by another person like himself [...], *takes what he hears exactly as if it were speech of his own*: he speaks to himself with the words that he hears addressed to him, and thus constructs in himself the idea which those words express. At the same time, being conscious of the speaker as a person other than himself, he attributes that idea to this other person. Understanding what some one says to you is thus attributing to him the idea which his words arouse in yourself; and this implies *treating them as words of your own*. [PA: 249-250] (My italics)

The hearer, as he understands language, understands the speaker in the same way he understands himself, at the same time, he attributes the idea which he understands to the speaker. This is of course a controversial view, badly put; I shall not defend it here, but should merely point out that it has been recently revived by authors such as Jane Heal, Simon Blackburn and the simulation theorists in psychology (some references will be given in the Conclusion). As Blackburn put it:

[...] here is no irremovable first-person privilege in the theory of understanding. It takes 'historical' thinking to understand myself just as much as it does to understand you: in my thinking I am both speaker and hearer. [...] Hearing my words is relevantly like hearing yours. [...] What I do is to 'recentre' my situation as yours, or change my 'egocentric map' and think about the world as it appears from that point of view. [Blackburn 1986: 190-191]

Collingwood's stance is now truly "linguistic":

The relation between speaker and hearer, as two distinct persons, is one which, because of its very familiarity, is easily misunderstood. We are apt to think of it as one in which the speaker 'communicates' his emotions to the hearer. But emotions cannot be shared like food or drink, or handed over like old clothes. [...] independently of language neither he nor I nor any third person can compare his emotions with mine, so as to find out whether they are like or unlike. If we speak of such comparison, we speak of something that is done by the use of language; *so that the comparison must be defined in terms of speaking and hearing, not speaking and hearing in terms of such comparison*. [PA: 249] (My italics)

Of course, although the “Lockean” picture is gone, none of this is a guarantee that understanding always succeed. Collingwood was perfectly aware of this:

The reader may object that if what is here maintained were true there could never be any absolute assurance, either for the hearer or for the speaker, that the one had understood the other. That is so; but in fact there is no such assurance. *The only assurance we possess is an empirical and relative assurance*, becoming progressively stronger as conversation proceeds, and based on the fact that neither party seems to the other to be talking nonsense. The question whether they understand each other *solvitur interloquendo*. If they understand each other well enough to go on talking, they understand each other as well as they need; and there is no better kind of understanding which they can regret not having attained. [PA: 250-251] (My italics)

That Collingwood meant to extend his views on language to art, through their identification, is clear from these three passages; the first one containing an intriguing philosophical anthropology, along with an allusion to the corruption of consciousness, to be discussed below:

The aesthetic activity is the activity of speaking. Speech is speech only so far as it is both spoken and heard. A man may, no doubt, speak to himself and be his own hearer; but what he says to himself is in principle capable of being said to anyone sharing his language. As a finite being, man becomes aware of himself as a person only so far as he finds himself standing in relation to others of whom he simultaneously becomes aware as persons. And there is no point in his life at which a man has finished becoming aware of himself as a person. On every occasion [...] he must find others whom he can recognize as persons [...], or he cannot as a finite being assure himself that this new phase of personality is genuinely in his possession. [...] If he has a new emotion, he must express it to others, in order that, finding them able to share it, he may be sure his consciousness of it is not corrupt. [PA: 317]

If some one says ‘Twice two is four’ in the hearing of some one incapable of carrying out the simplest arithmetical operation, he will be understood by himself, but not by his hearer. The hearer can understand only if he can add two and two in his own mind. Whether he could do it before he heard the speaker say those words makes no difference. *What is here said of expressing thoughts is equally true of expressing emotions*. If a poet expresses, for example, a certain kind of fear, the only hearers who can understand him are those who are capable of experiencing that kind of fear themselves. Hence, when some one reads and understands a poem he is not merely understanding the poet’s expression of his [own] emotions, he is expressing emotions of his own in the poet’s words, which have thus become his own words. As Coleridge put it, we know a man for a poet by the fact that he makes us poets. We know that he is expressing his emotions by the fact that he is enabling us to express ours. [PA: 118] (My italics.)

As we saw in Chapter 3, section 2, understanding someone's utterance of 'Twice two is four' is re-enacting the same thought. In this passage, Collingwood is saying to us that "what is [...] said of expressing thoughts is equally true of expressing emotions", therefore that one could legitimately speak of the re-enactment of emotions.

One obvious question to ask here is this: since re-enactment is meant to be conceptual and since interpretation in art is no more psychological a process than re-enactment, how could we be said to re-enact emotions in the full sense of the term? Isn't it impossible to re-enact emotions? An appropriate answer to this worry is difficult to frame in terms of the "general theory" of *The Principles of Art*. At least, one thing is clear: if the idea is that the work of art is meant to provoke a given emotion in the audience, then it is not art but amusement art, magic, craft. So this sort of case is excluded by Collingwood and this shows that he could not have meant a re-enactment in a full psychological sense of the term. If one adopts as I did in Chapters 3 and 4 a "conceptual" reading of the notion of re-enactment, then one must agree that Collingwood was not arguing for a re-enactment of emotions in any full sense of the word. Is there a thinner notion available? I think that one could profitably make use here of Gordon Graham's distinction between "being an expression of" and "being expressive of" [Graham 2000: 37]. According to Graham, for example, when someone in pain makes a grimace or suddenly cries, this is an (involuntary) expression of that person's pain. When later on she describes this pain as "climbing to a crescendo" before she cried, this is "expressive of the pain". His point is thus that art can be expressive of emotion without being an expression of emotion [Graham 2000: 37-8]. Using the distinction introduces no distortion in Collingwood's text, unless, once more, one has in mind a more fully psychological notion of re-enactment:

If now we say that the work is not *an expression of* but rather is *expressive of* the emotion, appreciating would consist in being brought to a heightened awareness

of that emotion. Being brought to a heightened awareness of an emotion does not imply undergoing any element of that emotion. For example I may to date be unaware of the intensity of your jealousy until one day you hit upon an especially expressive word or gesture. Then I appreciate your jealousy, but I do not share any of it. The expressiveness of your gesture can make me aware of your emotional state without engendering any emotion whatever in me. It is equally possible of course that my being made aware of your feelings gives rise to an emotional response on my part, but any such emotion has only a causal connection with yours; my having the emotion is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of being made aware how you feel. Conversely your gesture may arouse an emotion in me (fear, perhaps), and yet I remain unaware of your true emotional state. [Graham 2000: 39]

I think that Graham is right to add here that “Collingwood would probably not deny this” [Graham 2000: 39] and that in this way one can overcome some of the weaknesses attached to the framing of the issues in the old language of associationist psychology and British idealism [Graham 2000: 40-41]. As I said at the outset, I shall not, however, discuss these intricate matters.

I should like now to draw out some further implications from Collingwood’s theory, which concern what one could call his “hermeneutics”. First of all, one may now look again at his answer to the fundamental question raised by the “Lockean” picture: is it possible to ascertain that the artist and the audience have the same “experience”, in other words, is it possible for the audience to capture the artist’s intention? I have already quoted Collingwood’s answer at the end of the first section of this Chapter:

[...] the picture, when seen by some one else or by the painter himself subsequently, produces in him (we need not ask how) sensuous-emotional or psychical experiences which, when raised from impressions to ideas by the activity of the spectator’s consciousness, are transmuted into a total imaginative experience *identical* with that of the painter. [PA: 308]

But, as Collingwood points out, even if we are not to agree with the underlying “Lockean” picture and to present another solution: how are we to know?

How is any one to know that the imaginative experience which the spectator, by the work of his consciousness, makes out of the sensations he receives from a

painting 'repeats' or is 'identical' with, the experience which the artist had in painting it? [PA: 309]

Collingwood's answers to go back to what he had said about language and repeat the claim (at [PA: 251], quoted above) that there is no "absolute" assurance, only empirical assurance:

[...] there is no possibility of an absolute assurance; the only assurance we can have 'is an empirical and relative assurance, becoming progressively stronger as conversation proceeds, and based on the fact that neither party seems to the other to be talking nonsense'. The same answer holds good here. We can never absolutely know that the imaginative experience we obtain from a work of art is identical with that of the artist. In proportion as the artist is a great one, we can be pretty certain that we have only caught his meaning partially and imperfectly. But the same applies to any case in which we hear what a man says or read what he writes. And a partial and imperfect understanding is not the same thing as a complete failure to understand. [PA: 309]

One reason for this lack of "absolute assurance" is already found in Collingwood's own theory, the failure in communication could be explained by the artist's insincere attitude towards his own emotion:

Misunderstanding is not necessarily the hearer's fault; it may be the speaker's. This will be the case if through corruption in his own consciousness the idea which he expresses is a falsified one; certain elements, which are in fact essential to the expressed idea, being disowned. [PA: 251]

As Donagan put it:

Nobody has absolute assurance that he knows either his own mind or those of others. If his own consciousness is corrupt, he will falsify his own thoughts and emotions even to himself. [LPC: 121]

In other words, there might be no "absolute" assurance, but this is no equivalent to having no assurance at all, and partial assurance is what it is: assurance. Herein lies objectivity. This is perhaps the insight in Collingwood's "hermeneutics" which is the hardest to grasp. The underlying idea is simply that most of the thinking on this issue is fallacious. It seems indeed as if the current prejudice (matters have hardly changed since his days on that score) relies an implicit false dilemma: either there is objectivity on account that there is 'the' meaning or intention to be

captured or there is no such thing, therefore there is no objectivity. In other words, either strict positivism is true in these matters or we are engaged on a slippery slope at the bottom of which lies some sort of continental hermeneutics *à la* Derrida.

I have tried and argued in Chapters 3 and 4 that in the case of history Collingwood's position amounts to something like this: first, whenever we have successful re-enactment (the empirical conditions under which we can recognize what a "successful" re-enactment is are not a relevant issue here), there is something objective which is grasped, namely the thought of the historical agent (in other words, his intention). Secondly, there are natural limits to successful re-enactment, namely lack of evidence, etc. but these limits, if they force us to recognize, as Collingwood does, that the process of historical understanding is an open, do not in the least put into doubt the very possibility of successful re-enactment and thus the validity of some such deductions. In other words, there is no reasonable sense of "doubt" under which one could doubt, for example, the intentions of the nazis leaders behind the *Endlösung der Judenfrage* as evidenced by, say, the 'Hossbach memorandum'. Some "deductions" are as certain and objective as anything can be.

Now the same seems to hold in the case of art. The natural limits of interpretation are recognized by Collingwood when he writes that "in proportion that the artist is a great one, we can be pretty certain that we can have only caught his meaning partially and imperfectly". His discussion of Eliot's *Sweeney among the Nightingales* [Eliot 1974: 59-60] is meant to give support to this idea [PA: 310-311]. But there is no dilemma here too. There may be no such thing as 'the' meaning or intention, but "partial and imperfect understanding is not the same thing as a complete failure to understand", and partial understanding is still understanding of something; as Collingwood wrote, each phase of understanding is "complete in itself":

The imaginative experience contained in a work of art is not a close whole. There is no sense in putting the dilemma that a man either understands it (that is, has made that entire experience his own) or does not. Understanding it is always a complex business, consisting of many phases, each complete in itself but each leading on to the next. A determined and intelligent audience will penetrate into this complex far enough, if the work of art is a good one, to get something of value; but it need not on that account think it has extracted 'the' meaning of the work, for there is no such thing. [PA: 311]

To this, Collingwood adds something that should be quoted to all those who still have difficulties appreciating how close Collingwood nevertheless stands *vis-à-vis* the hermeneutical tradition of Protestant theology, to which the work of Gadamer belongs:

The doctrine of a plurality of meanings, expounded for the case of holy scripture by St. Thomas Aquinas, is in principle perfectly sound: as he states it, the only trouble is that it does not go far enough. In some shape or other, it is true of all language. [PA: 311]

One can also engage Collingwood's text from the point of view of the analytical tradition—this is my second point—, where a recent revival of these issues has led to a rich and complex discussion,²³ surrounding the so-called "intentionalism", which contrasts with the now rather dry well of the continental tradition, where there is little in the way of critical engagement with the *maîtres*, e.g., Gadamer or Derrida, but, instead, much shallow repetition. Collingwood's work is here still very actual. I already mentioned that it is possible to reply, from Collingwood's standpoint, to the classical arguments levelled by Wimsatt and Beardsley against intentionalism, in a paper that stands at the origin of the analytical debates [Wimsatt & Beardsley 1995]. This has been done in particular by Donagan [LPC: 119f.]. I also pointed out that Collingwood's theory of re-enactment still exerts influence today, in particular in the work of Michael Baxandall [Baxandall 1985]. I should now add that, furthermore, Jerrold Levinson has started (along with others such as Arthur Danto) a revival of historicism by defending in papers such as 'Defining

Art Historically' [Levinson 1990: 3-25] a revised form of intentionalism, known as "hypothetical intentionalism", which is very close to Collingwood's. (Alas, Levinson seems not to be aware of this. He seems to agree with the "Croce-Collingwood" interpretation [Levinson 1990: 256].) I cannot contribute to this debate here, since this would involve an assessment of Collingwood's views which is outside the scope of this thesis. I venture to make a few points.

First, I should make plain that it is a mistake to describe Collingwood as an unsophisticated form of "intentionalist" of the sort criticized by Wimsatt and Beardsley [Wimsatt & Beardsley 1995]. When Collingwood speaks of the "expression of emotion", he does not mean the artist's *intention*. As Ronald Hepburn put it, the two expressions do not have an "identical logic" since Collingwood makes room for the idea that "an artist may intend, but fail, to express his emotions, and he may express what he did not intend to express" [Hepburn 1963: 259]. Indeed, it is possible for an artist unsuccessfully to attempt at becoming conscious of an emotion through the production of a work of art. (The resulting work of art is what Collingwood calls "bad art" [PA: 282].) To see this, however, one needs to clarify a few points about the corruption of consciousness, to which I shall turn in a moment.

At any rate, as S. K. Wertz pointed out, because Collingwood rejected the "Lockean" picture and could not have been an "intentionalist":

Collingwood should not be interpreted as [...] an intentionalist, if by "intentionalist" we mean someone who holds these intentions to be private, unobservable mental states [...] and sufficient to raise something into arthood. [...] This Lockean (or if you prefer Cartesian) understanding of mental states is not what Collingwood takes intentions or purposes to be. Intentions or purposes by themselves are not sufficient for something to be a work of art. [Wertz 1995: 144-145].

²³ Best exemplified by the work of Jerrold Levinson. See, e.g., the papers collected in [Levinson 1990] and [Levinson 1996].

Secondly, Collingwood's definition of the work of art as being jointly created by the artist (along with the performers in the case of the arts of performance) and the audience (about which more in the second part of this section) should provide the basis for a form of intentionalism that allows for a limited array of possible interpretations, involving not just the side of the artist (and, including here the possibility of various changes brought about by the active role of the performers) but also taking into account the role of the audience; it would thus avoid some pitfalls of the early versions of intentionalism.

One typical argument levelled against the historicist aspect of early versions of intentionalism is the possibility of interpretations based on conceptual tools not available to the author and audiences at the time of the creation of the work of art [Gaut 1993: 603]. For example, according to Michael Baxandall's claim, the concept of pictorial "composition" was invented by Alberti in 1453 [Baxandall 1972: 135]: it could not have been used by artists and audience alike prior to that date. The same goes, apparently, for conceptual tools taken from Marxism or psychoanalysis. In reply to this, one may find grounds for two remarks in Collingwood's text. First, as we have just seen, Collingwood makes room for open-endedness in the process of interpretation. Secondly, he would not, however, recognize some of the above examples as valid forms of counter-example. This is what he had to say about psychoanalytical interpretations:

It would be a waste of time to criticize these theories. The question about them is not whether they are good or bad, considered as examples of theorizing; but whether the problem which they are meant to solve is one that calls for theorizing in order to solve it. A person who cannot find his spectacles on the table may invent any number of theories to account for their absence. But these theories, however ingenious and sublime, are premature if the spectacles should happen to be on his nose. Theories professing to explain how works of art are constructed by means of hypotheses like these are based on recollecting that the spectacles are not on the table, and overlooking the fact that they are on the nose. [PA: 127]

These remarks are obviously of a tentative nature and do not constitute for a moment a fully argued case. I hope at least to be pointing in the right direction, for future work.

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I should like to spend the remainder of this section looking at another dimension of Collingwood's philosophy of art, namely the set of issues surrounding the claim that "Art is the community's medicine for the worst disease of the mind, the corruption of consciousness" [PA: 336]. In the Introduction to this Chapter, I have presented this as the most engaging and most fundamental claim of Collingwood's philosophy of art. I shall not study it in details, nor shall I try and defend it. I should merely point out how it dovetails nicely with what has been said so far.

To introduce the topic, I can do no better than to quote from the concluding paragraph of *The Principles of Art*:

[Art] must be prophetic. The artist must prophesy not in the sense that he foretells things to come, but in the sense that he tells his audience, at risk of their displeasure, the secrets of their own hearts. His business as an artist is to speak out, to make a clean breast. But what he has to utter is not, as the individualistic theory of art would have us think, his own secrets. As spokesman of his community, the secrets he must utter are theirs. The reason why they need him is that no community altogether knows its own heart; and by failing in this knowledge a community deceives itself on the one subject concerning which ignorance means death. For the evils which come from that ignorance the poet as prophet suggests no remedy, because he has already given one. The remedy is the poem itself. Art is the community's medicine for the worst disease of mind, the corruption of consciousness. [PA: 336]

This passage is the heart of Collingwood's philosophy of art. Exactly what is meant in it will become clear when I shall analyse Collingwood's own analysis of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. But before, I must explain a few things about the connection between art and the "corruption of consciousness".

This notion appears in Book II of *The Principles of Art*, within the "theory of imagination and language", and it was introduced in Chapter 2, section 2. In a nutshell, according to Collingwood, the psychic level is composed of *sensa* that "never come uncharged with emotion"

[PA: 163]. It is our “sensuous-emotional nature, as feeling creatures” and it forms a level of experience below the level of thought, for which it has the character of a “foundation” [PA: 163]. As we saw in Chapter 2, section 2 and in this very Chapter, in “awareness” (or “consciousness”) data from this psychic level is raised to the level of thought, in a process which is described by Collingwood in *The Principles of Art* in terms reminiscent of Hume, as the passage from impressions to ideas, and later, in *The New Leviathan*, in more linguistic terms. In both cases, the idea is simple enough: I become “aware” of some sensuous-emotional components of the psychic level, as I “ignore” others. In awareness, I am said to “dominate” my feelings [PA: 207]:

If a given feeling is thus recognized, it is converted from impression into idea, and thus dominated or domesticated by consciousness. [PA: 217]

But to ignore is not the same thing as to suppress or to disown:

A true consciousness is the confession to ourselves of our feelings; a false consciousness would be disowning them, i.e., thinking about one of them ‘That feeling is not mine’. [PA: 216]

This confession or process of recognition “may be attempted but prove a failure”, it may take place abortively [PA: 217]. It is in such cases that consciousness becomes corrupted:

First, we direct our attention towards a certain feeling, or become conscious of it. Then we take fright at what we have recognized: not because the feeling, as an impression, is an alarming impression, but because the idea into which we are converting it proves an alarming idea. We cannot see our way to dominate it, and shrink from persevering in the attempt. We therefore give it up, and turn our attention to something less intimidating. [PA: 217]

Collingwood calls this “corruption” of consciousness because “consciousness permits itself to be bribed or corrupted in the discharge of its function” [PA: 217]. The refusal to admit to oneself that one has an emotion is the commonest of phenomena, if not a very healthy affair. As Collingwood would say, it has “disastrous effect” [PA: 219]. It is difficult to think of a more beautiful literary illustration of this than Benjamin Constant’s *Adolphe* [Constant 1964], where the hero, Adolphe, does not want to admit to himself that he does not love a woman, Ellenore,

that he has seduced: not only his actions do not render him happy, he also ultimately provokes her death. These adverse effects are not just at the personal level. Collingwood believed that corruption of consciousness is at the root of social evils:

Unless consciousness does its work successfully, the facts which it offers to intellect, the only things upon which intellect can build its fabric of thought, are false from the beginning. A truthful consciousness gives intellect a firm foundation upon which to build; a corrupt consciousness forces intellect to build on a quicksand. The falsehoods which an untruthful consciousness imposes on the intellect are falsehoods which intellect can never correct for itself. In so far as consciousness is corrupted, the very wells of truth are poisoned. Intellect can build nothing firm. Moral ideals are castles in the air. Political and economic systems are mere cobwebs. Even common sanity and bodily health are no longer secure. But corruption of consciousness is the same thing as bad art. [PA: 284-285]

I shall come back to this point when analysing Collingwood on Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

For the moment, I should point out that Collingwood consciously derives his ideas here from Spinoza:

The same lesson was taught long ago by Spinoza, who has expounded better than any other man the conception of the truthful consciousness and its importance as a foundation for a healthy mental life. The problem of ethics, for him, is the question how man, being ridden by feelings, can so muster them that his life, from being a continuous *passio*, an undergoing of things, can become a conscious *actio*, or doing of things. The answer he gives is a curiously simple one. [...] As soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of a passion, it ceases to be a passion. [PA: 219]

The reference here is to *Ethics*, Part V, prop. III:

Prop. III.— *An affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it. Demonstr.* An affect which is a passion is a confused idea [...] If, therefore, we form a clear and distinct idea of this affect, the idea will not be distinguished —except by reason— from this affect, in so far as this affect is related to the mind alone [...] and therefore [...] the affect will cease to be a passion. [Spinoza 1930: 255]

One's task, therefore, is to form a clear and distinct idea of one's emotions. This is exactly what the artist is doing:

The artist proper is a person who, grappling with the problem of expressing a certain emotion, says, 'I want to get this clear'. [PA: 114]

The “essence” of art is that of

[...] an activity by which we become conscious of our own emotions. [PA: 292]

It now becomes clear that art is a struggle against the corruption of consciousness:

Corruption of consciousness is not a recondite sin or a remote calamity which overcomes only an unfortunate or accursed few; it is a constant experience in the life of every artist, and his life is a constant and, on the whole, a successful warfare against it. [PA: 284]

We are now in a position better to understand the last words of the book: art is a “medecine for the worst disease of mind, the corruption of consciousness” [PA: 336]. Since Collingwood believed that the content which is shared linguistically or artistically is common, i.e., my emotions as I express them are also yours when you understand me, then the role played by art in the mental life of individuals is *ipso facto* a social role. This is why art is the *community's* medecine.

This makes it look as if artists are a particular, privileged caste but Collingwood, who never showed any sign of having been infected by the elitism of Nietzsche or Renan, also claimed that his theory was not devised in order to magnify the role of those whom we call artists, because he saw the fight against “corruption of consciousness” actually to be a matter for all of us. Indeed, this much follows from his own definitions. As was explained in the first part of this section, becoming aware of one's emotions is the same as expressing them, through gestures and speech. Obviously, there are emotions that, in order to be raised to the level of awareness, do not request a titanic struggle. Everyone of us does it every day and in that sense we are all artists:

Just as the life of a community depends for its very existence on honest dealing between man and man, the guardianship of this honesty being vested in any one class or section, but in all and sundry, so the effort towards expression of emotions, the effort to overcome corruption of consciousness, is an effort that has to be made not by specialists only but by every one who uses language, whenever he uses it. *Every utterance and every gesture that each one of us makes is a work of art.* It is important to each one of us that in making them, however much he deceives others, he should not deceive himself. If he deceives himself in this

matter he has sown in himself a seed which, unless he roots it up again, may grow into any kind of wickedness, any kind of mental disease, any kind of stupidity and folly and insanity. Bad art, the corrupt consciousness, is the true *radix malorum*. [PA: 285] (My italics.)

There is therefore no essential difference between the artist and his audience; the artist differs only in being the one who takes the initiative:

There is no distinction of kind between artist and audience [...] the poet's difference from his audience lies in the fact that, though both do exactly the same thing, namely express this particular emotion in these particular words, the poet is a man who can solve for himself the problem of expressing it, whereas the audience can express it only when the poet has shown them how. The poet is not singular either in his having that emotion or in his power of expressing it; he is singular in his ability to take the initiative in expressing what all feel, and all can express. [PA: 119]

“There is no distinction of kind between artist and audience” [PA: 119]: one can appreciate here how deeply anti-romantic Collingwood's philosophy of art is. It is true, on the one hand, that something of the romantic conception survives in it, since the artist's task could be described in terms of sincerity: emotions have to be sincere. This is akin to the romantic conception. On the other hand, Collingwood himself was openly critical of romanticism in ‘Form and Content in Art’ [Collingwood 1966: 211-232], and the only reference to it, *en passant*, in *The Principles of Art* is to qualify a mistaken idea of Ruskin [PA: 46]. In that book, there is simply no room for a conception of the artist as the ‘genius’, although Collingwood certainly distinguishes between the more or less talented artists, e.g., at [PA: 309]. He disparaged the cult of the ‘genius’ [PA: 312] and criticized thoroughly the view that

[...] artists can or should form a special order or caste, marked off by special genius or special training from the rest of the community. [PA: 119]

Moreover, Collingwood's conception is thoroughly anti-individualistic: he condemned artistic individualism as “nonsense” [PA: 316] and a “delusion” [PA: 324], while he requested that we “get rid of the conception of artistic ownership” [PA: 326] and suggested that in order to do so

we should ignore the law of copyright until it becomes dead letter and that artists “plagiarize each other’s work like men” [PA: 326]. It is tempting to describe it as truly “socialist” or “communist” but “communitarian” is perhaps a better word. (The epithet “socialist” may not be so far off the mark, since Collingwood himself cites John Ruskin and William Morris as having insisted that there be, in arts such as architecture, a genuine collaboration between the artist and the executors [PA: 326-327].) It is worth quoting Collingwood on “artistic individualism” because it fits in with his objectivism in art, as unraveled so far in this Chapter, on the one hand, and, on the other, with his view on the social role of art, to which I shall come in a moment. To begin with, Collingwood recognizes that, as a finite human being, the artist is first and foremost member of a community, linguistic or otherwise, and that her debt to it is primordial:

But a man, in his art as in everything else, is a finite being. Everything that he does is done in relation to others like himself. As artist, he is a speaker; but a man speaks as he has been taught; he speaks the tongue in which he was born. The musician did not invent his scale or his instruments; even if he invents a new scale or a new instrument he is only modifying what he has learnt from others. The painter did not invent the idea of painting pictures or the pigments and brushes with which he paints them. Even the most precocious poet hears and reads poetry before he writes it. Moreover, just as every artist stands in relation to other artists from whom he has acquired his art, so he stands in relation to some audience to whom he addresses it. The child learning his mother tongue, as we have seen, learns simultaneously to be a speaker and to be a listener; he listens to others speaking, and speaks to others listening. *It is the same with artists.* They become poets or painters or musicians not by some process of development from within, as they grow beards; but by living in a society where these languages are current. Like other speakers, they speak to those who understand. [PA: 316-317] (My italics)

Secondly, Collingwood goes farther than any other philosopher in defining art in a non-individualistic way :

[The artistic activity] is a corporate activity belonging not to any one human being but to a community. It is performed not only by the man whom we individualistically call the artist, but partly by all the other artists of whom we speak as ‘influencing’ him, where we really mean collaborating with him. It is performed not only by this corporate body of artists, but (in the case of arts of performance) by executants, who are not merely acting under the artist’s orders,

but are collaborating with him to produce the finished work. And even now the activity of artistic creation is not complete; for that, there must be an audience, whose function is therefore not a merely receptive one but collaborative too. The artist (although under the spell of individualistic prejudice he may try to deny it) stands thus in collaborative relations with an entire community; not an ideal community of all human beings as such, but the actual community of fellow artists from whom he borrows, executants whom he employs, and audience to whom he speaks. [PA: 324]

This passage is packed with unconventional, fascinating views that cannot be elaborated on or argued for within the context of this thesis. I should merely point out that none of this would make any sense if Collingwood actually held something like the “ideal theory”. Moreover, it is important also to realize that, in his hands, expression theory has lost the strong individualistic flavour that it had acquired, perhaps as a result of the popularity of romanticism, in the nineteenth century.

This anti-individualism allows Collingwood to give advice for the “practice of art”, in accordance with his remarks in the preface [PA: vii]. The ‘Conclusion’ to *The Principles of Art* contains a number of recommendations, in light of the “present situation” [PA: 325]. I shall not go into much details but some idea of it should reinforce the idea that Collingwood wrote *The Principles of Art* very much from the point of view of a practitioner, as well as, again, the idea that Collingwood did not hold the “ideal theory”, under which what follows would be frivolous nonsense. Collingwood’s advice includes the above-mentioned call for a boycott of the law of copyright and for mutual plagiarism; mention should also be made of his suggestion for the arts of performance that

We must face the fact that every performer is of necessity a co-author, and develop its implications. [PA: 328]

Collingwood also asked that the artist involves himself in public affairs:

[...] as the expression of emotion and addressed to a public, [art] requires of the artist that he should participate in his public’s emotions, and therefore in the activities with which these emotions are bound up. [PA: 332]

Finally, he issues a call for a reform of “the relation between the artist, or rather the collaborative unit of artist and performers, and the audience” [PA: 329], which takes, *inter alia*, the form of an encouragement to the new approach of the Group Theatre (where the audience is treated as participants) and of the request, in literature, that one chooses important subject-matters, because

[...] the subject-matter is the point at which the audience’s collaboration can fertilize the writer’s work. [PA: 332]

I should also point out another form of advice, not advertized as such but which runs through the book:

If what he wishes to do is to express his emotions intelligibly, he has to express them in such a way as to be intelligible to himself; his audience is then in the position of persons who overhear him doing this. [PA: 111]

In so far as the artist feels himself as one with his audience, this will involve no condescension on his part; it will mean that he takes it as his business to express not his own private emotions, irrespectively of whether any one else feels them or not, but the emotions he shares with his audience. Instead of conceiving himself as a mystagogue, leading his audience as far as it can follow along in the dark and difficult paths of his own mind, he will conceive himself as his audience’s spokesman, saying for it the things it wants to say but cannot say unaided. Instead of setting up for the great man who (as Hegel said) imposes on the world the task of understanding him, he will be a humbler person, imposing upon himself the task of understanding his world, and thus enabling it to understand itself. [PA: 312]

Such remarks would have repercussions on the practice of art. It is not that Collingwood condemns works of art that are difficult to understand. He writes with admiration, for example, about T. S. Eliot’s *Sweeney Among the Nightingales* [Eliot 1974: 59-60] while confessing having taken years to understand its meaning [PA: 310-311]. As he said:

In proportion as the artist is a great one, we can be pretty certain that we have only caught his meaning partially and imperfectly. [PA: 309]

Simply that the artist should not forget that it is “not ‘I feel’, but ‘we feel’” [PA: 315].

Collingwood’s communitarian view of the work of art has its foundation in his aesthetic theory: it is because the artist expresses a *linguistic* content that it is in principle shareable by all

who can understand her, like any other linguistic content. What is understood is the emotion that the speaker has clarified through the production of the work of art (which could involve the hearer too, as we just saw). The emotion thus understood is shared in the sense that it becomes the hearer's emotion too. To quote again a key passage:

If a poet expresses, for example, a certain kind of fear, the only hearers who can understand him are those who are capable of experiencing that kind of fear themselves. Hence, when some one reads and understands a poem he is not merely understanding the poet's expression of his [own] emotions, he is expressing emotions of his own in the poet's words, which have thus become his own words. As Coleridge put it, we know a man for a poet by the fact that he makes us poets. We know that he is expressing his emotions by the fact that he is enabling us to express ours. [PA: 118]

Collingwood's discussion of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is exactly along those lines.

Collingwood sees this poem as a perfect example of what poetry, as art proper, should be:

To readers who want not amusement or magic, but poetry, and who want to know what poetry can be, if it is to be neither of these things, *The Waste Land* supplies an answer. And by reflecting on it we can perhaps detect one more characteristic which art must have, if it is to forgo both entertainment-value and magical value, and draw a subject-matter from its audience themselves. [PA: 335-336]

What is the subject-matter to be drawn "from its audience themselves"? What is the secret of our own heart that the poem reveals? I cannot get into too much details here, but a brief explanation will show, by way of example, what Collingwood's philosophy of art amounts to when applied to a specific work of art.

Collingwood introduces the poem, which he describes as being about "the decay of our civilization", with these remarks:

There is no question here of expressing private emotions; the picture to be painted is not the picture of any individual, or any individual shadow, however lengthened into spurious history by morning or evening sun; it is the picture of a whole world of men, shadows themselves, flowing over London Bridge in the winter fog of

that Limbo which involves those who, because they never lived, are equally hateful to God and to his enemies. [PA: 334]²⁴

After a brief description of the poems that compose *The Waste Land*, Collingwood presents its meaning in these words:

The poem depicts a world where the wholesome flowing water of emotion, which alone fertilizes all human activity, has dried up. Passions that once ran so strongly as to threaten the defeat of prudence, the destruction of human individuality, the wreck of men's little ships, are shrunk to nothing. No one gives; no one will risk himself by sympathizing; no one has anything to control. We are imprisoned in ourselves, becalmed in a windless selfishness. The only emotion left to us is fear: fear of emotion itself, fear of death by drowning in it, fear in a handful of dust. [PA: 335]

This is what Collingwood meant by saying that the artist must utter the secrets of the community. The secret is that, like the figures on London Bridge, we are dead because we have become fearful of having emotions, we are "sterilized", to use Collingwood's own expression [PA: 162]. This message, easy enough to grasp, has social and political significance. Collingwood also believed that

[...] an artist with strong political views and feelings will be to that extent better qualified to produce works of art than one without. [PA: 279]

One should note, however, that Collingwood does not confuse the artist with the demagogue. Collingwood had distinguished early in the book between art and craft, and the activity of the demagogue or the politician clearly falls under the concept of craft. So an artist who uses her "art" in order to convert others to her political views may be doing good service to politics, but she is doing something else than producing a work of art, she will stifle it under her political

²⁴ The reference to London Bridge is to the lines of the opening poem, 'The Burial of the Dead', beginning with:
Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many. [Eliot 1974: 64]
 This image recurs throughout the book.

emotions [PA: 279]. Collingwood has a sarcastic comment on “neo-Kiplings” [PA: 335].²⁵ But Eliot’s poem avoids being demagoguery or propaganda, it is not “an exhortation to get up and do something” and “it contains no indictments and no proposals” [PA: 335]. But it talks to us, or rather more specifically, Collingwood would say, to the English in the 1930s, about our having lost our ability to be aroused by emotions.

As I explained in Chapter 1, Collingwood was among those European intellectuals who were deeply shocked by the Munich affair in 1938. The raise of fascism and nazism on the Continent worried him deeply and he had a deep aversion for the policy of “appeasement” that dominated British foreign policy in the late 1930s [Boucher 1989b: 60 & 192]. In the secluded world of Oxford academia, where some of the more prominent “appeasers” were based, he felt that it was his duty to react.²⁶ His reaction led to the publication of *The New Leviathan* and of a number of essays in political philosophy. It is within this context that one can better appreciate Collingwood’s theses about social and political role of art.

In his essay on ‘Fascism and Nazism’ [Collingwood 1989: 187-196], Collingwood argued that liberal democracies had lost their strength because they could not appeal anymore to emotions. According to Collingwood, “the real ground for the ‘liberal’ or ‘democratic’ devotion to freedom was religious love of a God who set an absolute value on every individual human being” [Collingwood 1989: 190] but since Enlightenment they have been hived off from the emotional content of Christianity: “its votaries have for two hundred years progressively purged it of emotional elements” [Collingwood 1989: 192]. As a result “liberalism or democracy may be

²⁵ See, however, the positive remarks on the success of Kipling’s jingoistic poetry in [PA: 70].

²⁶ I need only to recall here the famous remarks at the end of *An Essay on Metaphysics*: “The Fate of European science and European civilization is at stake. The gravity of the peril lies especially in the fact that so few recognize any peril to exist. When Rome was in danger, it was the cackling of the sacred geese that saved the Capitol. I am

wise, but the people who care for it do not care for it passionately enough to make it survive” [Collingwood 1989: 191], at the same time as fascism and nazism “are successful because they have the power of arousing emotion in their support” [Collingwood 1989: 192].

Now the apathy of the majority in liberal democracies such as the United Kingdom, when facing the growing danger of totalitarianism, was a cause of concern to someone like Collingwood. In a sense, his analysis of Eliot’s *The Waste Land* provides us with own diagnosis of that apathy: the modern English have become emotionless; as Collingwood wrote, “no one will risk himself by sympathizing”. If this had been the secret of their own heart in the late 1930s, then to have brought to communal consciousness the emotion which is “fear of emotion itself” was, for Eliot’s poem, fulfilling indeed a profound, significant and timely social role as the indictment of a society that has, *inter alia*, lost its will to fight against a mortal danger, because its individuals have become “sterilized”. This is one reason why Collingwood claimed that:

Art is not a luxury. [PA: 284]

only a professorial goose, consecrated with a cap and gown and fed at a college table; but cackling is my job, and cackle I will” [EM: 343].

Conclusion

R. G. Collingwood's contributions to the philosophy of history and to the philosophy of art are still the subject of much discussion, more than half a century after his death. Although he was much criticized, his influence was far from negligible: apart from the cases mentioned in this thesis, one could mention Isaiah Berlin¹ and Quentin Skinner² in the history of ideas and Michael Baxandall³ in the history of art. One should not forget Peter Winch's *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* [Winch 1958], which argues along lines already drawn by Collingwood, at a time when he was much neglected. Even Collingwood's remarks on causation in *An Essay on Metaphysics* [EM: 285f.] had their influence felt in as important a book as H. L. A. Hart & A. M. Honoré's *Causation in the Law* [Hart & Honoré 1959]. But Collingwood is not part of the 'canonized' philosophers of the twentieth century, such as Husserl, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Quine or Habermas, Gadamer, Austin, Davidson. I believe that his philosophy did not deserve this fate. I simply surmise that it suffered it because it had been incorrectly labelled as a form of "idealism" or "historicism". A small group of commentators have tried in the past fifty years or so to improve our understanding of Collingwood's philosophy and to rid us of the prejudices that block the way to a proper assessment of it. Although from William Dray to Aaron Ridley, some commentators have been individually successful in this endeavour, they have collectively failed to attract the attention of the wider philosophical community to Collingwood's

¹ Berlin recognized his debt to Collingwood late in life in an unpublished interview. See [Marion 1999].

² See [Skinner 1969].

achievements. The present thesis was meant to be only a first step towards such an attempt, by providing the broad strokes of a coherent, comprehensive interpretation of Collingwood's philosophy of mind, history and art. Although there is no space for exhaustive exegetical analyses of all the points touched upon, I hope to have succeeded in presenting Collingwood as having developed, through discussion of two very difficult topics, the understanding or interpretation of the actions of historical agents and of works of art, a comprehensive and coherent theory of 'understanding'. This insight was hard to achieve. There is much work remaining in order to bring this hypothesis to complete fruition. It is hoped that this broad interpretation of Collingwood's philosophy will ultimately allow it to find its place along the spectrum of theories of understanding that have been elaborated in the twentieth century and that are still with us. In the future lies a critical engagement with these. For the moment, I should like merely to conclude this thesis with some very general, tentative and brief remarks that should help situate Collingwood within the general portrait of today's philosophy. The idea of interpretation or understanding has preoccupied both 'analytical' and 'continental' philosophers. Collingwood is himself hard to classify. He certainly was not an 'analytical' philosopher but he could hardly qualify as 'continental'. Yet there are definite points of contact between his ideas and those of representatives of both groups. I should like to highlight very briefly some of these points.

While on the continent the question of interpretation has been studied since Schleiermacher and Dilthey mainly in the context of the discipline of 'hermeneutics', and therefore through the narrow scope of the interpretation of texts, 'analytical' philosophers have mainly approached the problem of interpretation as the problem of explaining action through the assignment of content to people's beliefs and desires. The question of the interpretation of texts has been secondary.

³ See [Baxandall 1985].

Collingwood has developed the principles of his ‘hermeneutics’—for want of a better word—in light of his practise as an historian and an archaeologist and he has therefore focussed on both the critical evaluation of texts and on the explanation of actions. With its practical and empirical origin, as opposed to the theological concerns at the origin of the German tradition, Collingwood’s ‘hermeneutics’ is closer to the theories of the analytical philosophers. But these philosophers have on the whole taken seriously the idea that the explanation of actions should not proceed in ways different from the natural sciences and Collingwood has always rejected that alternative. To echo his own words of *The New Leviathan* [NL: 243-2.45], analytical philosophers have always assumed that man is a part of nature and that therefore the study of man is not different than the study of nature. Although he did not share the religious concerns that are at the origin of the German tradition of hermeneutics, this naturalist stance was never Collingwood’s.

In a nutshell,⁴ the problem of interpretation has been perceived in analytical philosophy as the answer to two related questions: (1) How should we assign intentional states to people? And (2) Are these ascriptions of intentional contents ascriptions of real states or events? The most influential philosopher in that tradition, Quine, answered these questions as follows: to the first question he responded in *Word and Object* [Quine 1960] by a famous thought experiment about ‘radical translation’—how could we provide a translation manual from an unknown language using only behavioural evidence?— that led to the thesis of indeterminacy of translation—behavioural evidence provides the basis for more than one equally good manual. Concerning the second question, analytical philosophers are divided into two camps, namely those who adopt (e.g., R. Chisholm, J. Fodor, D. Lewis) and those who reject Brentano’s thesis

⁴ The following is based on [Engel 1991].

that intentional contents are irreducible to physical states. Quine's argument for the indeterminacy of translation is against the possibility of a reduction to physical states. But Quine did not derive from his argument the conclusion that Brentano's thesis is true but rather that the intentional idioms are the "baselessness" [Quine 1960: 221]. So Quine's answer to (2) is that ascriptions of intentional contents must not be taken at face value; they form rather an "essentially dramatic idiom" [Quine 1960: 219]. They may be indispensable in practice but they cannot be literally true.

Quine's answer to (1) and (2) has been extremely influential. Two points will help us relating it to Collingwood. First, since ascriptions of intentional contents are considered not to be literally true, they do not count as *descriptive* but they could be seen as *prescriptive* or *normative*. Intentional content appears, from the Quinean point of view, not to possess any fixed reality and determinacy prior to interpretation. So reality and determinacy of the intentional contents depend on the way we interpret. This is the so-called "intentional stance", taken by Daniel Dennett. Donald Davidson's method of "radical interpretation" is closely related. In both cases, it is assumed that interpretation is essentially prescriptive or normative and therefore that *normative principles of interpretation* are involved. To these belong the 'principle of charity' [Quine 1960: 59], which is used by Davidson as a principle of logical consistency and as a presumption about the truth of most of our beliefs. According to Davidson, interpretation consists in determining meanings and beliefs without presupposing both, in a manner analogous to decision theory, where subjective probabilities and desirabilities are obtained from preferences. As with decision theory, *idealized norms of rational behaviour* are assumed. This brings me to my second point: another group of philosophers, basing themselves on Richard Grandy's 'principle of humanity' [Grandy 1973: 443] have rejected this appeal to idealized norms of rationality (which is

sometimes referred to as the “theory theory”: in interpretation we are not assuming that people are rational in the sense that their behaviour can be subsumed under rational laws—as with the covering law model—but rather that people are like us and we “put ourselves in their shoes”, so to speak. As Alvin Goldman put it: “We do not use mathematical decision theory (i.e., expected utility theory) to make predictions; rather we consider what *we* should do if we had the relevant beliefs and desires” [Goldman 1989: 168-169]. It is to this broadly defined sphere that belongs Simulation Theory in contemporary psychology.⁵ Simulation theorists and philosophers that believe in it have pointed out the obvious connections with both Dilthey’s *Verstehen* and Collingwood’s “re-enactment”.⁶

It is true that Collingwood shares with the post-Quinean approach its anti-reductionism⁷ and its holism (as with Davidson, understanding is an essentially holistic, non-atomic enterprise). But Collingwood is a realist about “re-enactment”, one succeeds in thinking the same thought as that of the historical agent. In other words, in answer to (2), above, Collingwood would say that the ascriptions of intentional contents are *real*. This would not sit well with followers of Quine. Furthermore, Collingwood would certainly approve the idea that interpretation does not involve idealized norms of rationality—this much was already evident in Dray’s opposition to Hempel’s use of the covering-law model in history. In Chapter 3, section 2, I hinted at the fact that Collingwood would not need ‘principles of action’ of the sort framed by Dray. Those resemble very strangely the generalizations that would be used in so-called ‘folk psychology’, which is nothing else but a variant of the ‘theory theory’ which makes uses of idealized norms instead.

⁵ See [Gordon 1986], [Heal 1986] and [Goldman 1989] as early papers on the topic.

⁶ See the papers mentioned in the previous footnote but also [Blackburn 1992], [Blackburn 2000], [Stueber 2002] and some of the papers included in [Kögler & Stueber 2000].

⁷ Alan Donagan seemed to have forgotten this when he argued against Collingwood in the last pages of his book [LPC: 294f.].

Collingwood would not adhere to folk psychology either. As a matter of fact, he would probably not agree to any of this because his approach is simply not naturalist.

Therefore, although his theory of understanding is in large part realized in current Simulation Theory, there are two strong points of disagreement. To begin with, Collingwood would reject any naturalist approach, not just the ‘theory theory’ or the ‘folk theory’ but probably also the explanatory sketches of Simulation Theory. Secondly, Collingwood’s doctrine of the objectivity of thoughts means that interpretation is not just an “essentially dramatic idiom”; as Blackburn already pointed out, “It must be an absolute, nonnegotiable presupposition of any inquiry into mind that its subject matter is real” [Blackburn 2000: 283]. These two points should be investigated as a useful point of departure for a critical engagement with the analytical tradition.

The objectivity of thought is also a feature that demarcates Collingwood’s from some of the hermeneutical theories developed on the continent. Paul Ricoeur’s brief discussion of Collingwood in *The Reality of the Historical Past* [Ricoeur 1984b: 5-14] and the brief mentions in *Time and Narrative* [Ricoeur 1984a] do not provide a basis for discussion. It is hard to see, at any rate, points of contact with Ricoeur’s fundamental dialectic of the Same, Other, and Analogue, in virtue of which he dismisses Collingwood’s theory of re-enactment as “unilateral” [Ricoeur 1984a: 25]. There is even less room for any critical engagement with the radical hermeneutics of Derrida, who denies any reality “*hors texte*”. I have pointed out briefly, in Chapter 3, section 3, how it would be mistaken to see Collingwood as a precursor here, as Hayden White did in *Tropics of Discourse* [White 1978]. So the main interlocutor remains Gadamer.

I have already discussed some of Gadamer’s more punctual objections to Collingwood, in Chapter 4, section 1, and I have pointed out six parallels between Gadamer’s hermeneutics and

Collingwood's theory of "re-enactment" in Chapter 4, section 2. These parallels are so striking that they justify that one speaks of Collingwood's 'hermeneutics'. Nevertheless, there are divergences which should form the basis for a critical engagement. The thesis of objectivity of thought and the claim to re-enactment of the same thought constitute fundamental points of disagreement. As Gadamer pointed out in his discussion of Collingwood:

[...] the sense of a text in general reaches far beyond what its author originally intended. The task of understanding is concerned above all with the meaning of the text. [Gadamer 1999: 372]⁸

I am not clear about the arguments supporting such claims, which appear to be of a metaphysical nature —by this I mean mainly his reliance on Heidegger's metaphysics at key points to demarcate his own hermeneutics from traditional versions of it (Schleiermacher, Dilthey). Collingwood certainly does not share them and belongs to the camp of those who believe in, to use the analytical jargon, the ascription of intentional contents is the only way to provide a satisfactory theory of the interpretation of actions (as this seems to be what people do). His strong objectivism provides arguments in support of this contention that cannot be rejected, on pain of circularity, by merely repeating that one cannot retrieve the original intention. Furthermore, it is not clear if Gadamer is not implicitly relying, in his rejection of the possibility of retrieving the original intention on sceptical arguments that are themselves based on a covert use of the 'copy theory' which was so thoroughly criticized by Collingwood, as I have shown in Chapter 3, section 2.

A second point must be raised in closing. Gadamer writes that

A reconstructed question can never stand within its original horizon: for the historical horizon that circumscribed the reconstruction is not a truly

⁸ The idea that understanding is concerned "above all with the meaning of the text" also betrays the theological origins of Gadamer's approach. Collingwood's theory of re-enactment does not have such a narrow focus, it is here closer to the analytical theories (the 'intentional stance' and Simulation Theory).

comprehensive one. It is, rather, included within the horizon that embraces us as the questioners who have been encountered by the traditionary word. [Gadamer 1999: 374]

With comments such as this, Gadamer embraces the very relativism that Collingwood wanted to avoid in his own understanding of what it means to stand within a tradition. Like the others that I have alluded to, I have not entered in this debate. My task has been merely to begin a reconstruction of the philosophy of Collingwood which would lead us to a point where one could raise such questions. The result of the ensuing debates ultimately does not matter: what really counts in our assessment of any philosopher is that he has allowed us to raise such important questions.

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—Abbreviations are used for some works by or about Collingwood;
see the list of 'Abbreviations' before the table of content—

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